

**CABINET – 28 OCTOBER 2025****LEICESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL MUSEUM POLICY REVISION
AND ACCREDITATION****REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF ADULTS AND COMMUNITIES****PART A****Purpose of the Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to present the revised Museum Access Policy 2025-2030 and Collections Development Policy 2025-2030 and ask the Cabinet to approve the policies. The policies are attached as Appendices A and B respectively to this report.
2. The report also informs the Cabinet on the Museum Accreditation returns which have been submitted to Arts Council England (ACE).

Recommendations

3. It is recommended that:
 - a) The Museum Access Policy 2025-2030 and Collections Development Policy 2025-2030 be approved.
 - b) Subject to Cabinet approval, the Museum Access Policy 2025-2030 and Collections Development Policy 2025-2030, be submitted to Arts Council England, as per accreditation guidelines.

Reasons for Recommendations

4. The current Museum Access and Collections Development policies expire in November 2025. The policies are a key requirement of the UK Museum Accreditation Standard.
5. The UK Museum Accreditation Scheme is administered by Arts Council England. The scheme encompasses the nationally agreed standards for UK museums. The standards ensure all museums are sustainable, focused and trusted and inspire the confidence of the public, funding organisations and governing bodies.

Timetable for Decisions (including Scrutiny)

6. The Adults and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the draft policies at its meeting on 1 September 2025. The Committee's comments are set out in paragraph 53 of this report.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

7. Accreditation supports the 'Great Communities' outcome in the County Council's Strategic Plan 2022-2026; "helping to ensure that cultural and historical heritage and the natural environment are enjoyed and conserved".
8. The policies were previously reviewed in 2021 and approved by the Cabinet on 19 November 2021.

Resource Implications

9. There are no additional financial resource implications to deliver this work.
10. The Director of Corporate Resources and the Director of Law and Governance have been consulted on the contents of this report.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

11. This report will be circulated to all members of the County Council.

Officers to Contact

Jon Wilson, Director of Adults and Communities
Adults and Communities Department
Tel: 0116 305 7454 Email: jon.wilson@leics.gov.uk

Inderjit Lahel, Assistant Director of Strategic Commissioning
Adults and Communities Department
Tel: 0116 305 7379 Email: inderjit.lahel@leics.gov.uk

Franne Wills, Head of Service, Communities and Wellbeing
Adults and Communities Department
Tel: 0116 305 0692 Email: franne.wills@leics.gov.uk

PART B

Background

12. The County Council has five accredited museum sites. These are Bosworth Battlefield Heritage Centre, the 1620s House and Garden at Donington-le-Heath, Charnwood Museum (in partnership with Charnwood Borough Council), Harborough Museum (in partnership with Harborough District Council) and Melton Carnegie Museum.
13. The Access Policy sets out the County Council's Museum Service commitments to create a culture where people of all backgrounds and experiences feel appreciated and valued, providing access for everyone in terms of its sites, programming and collections.
14. The Collections Development Policy sets out the vision and purpose for the County Council's Museum Service and how it will deliver against these through its collections, acquisitions, disposals, and collections care.
15. These two policies form the basis of the Collections Development Framework, which also contains procedural guidance and action plans used by the Museum Service to guide its activity, ensure consistency, transparency, effective use of resources and adherence to museum ethics.

The Accreditation Standard

16. Accreditation normally lasts for five years and museums are required to maintain the standard throughout that period. Should a museum experience a significant change during the accreditation period, the terms and conditions of the standard require the organisation to notify ACE, so they can carry out a significant change review which could result in a change to the museums' accreditation status.
17. The Accreditation Standard links directly to 'Spectrum', the UK Collections Management standard, and the Museum Association 'Code of Ethics'.
18. Spectrum gives advice on the practices museums follow to manage their collections. There are nine primary procedures and a UK museum has to demonstrate it meets all nine as part of the Accreditation Scheme. They cover daily activities such as moving objects around and updating locations records and occasional activities, like updating insurance cover.
19. The Code of Ethics for Museums sets out the key ethical principles and supporting actions museums should take to ensure an ethical approach to their work. All museums are bound by national laws and international conventions relevant to museums and the code of ethics supports this legal framework and sets a standard for museums. The standard is made up of three principles which apply to museums and those that work in and with them, are summarised in the paragraphs below:

- a) Public engagement and public benefit:
 - Actively engage and work in partnership with existing audiences and reach out to new and diverse audiences.
 - Treat everyone equally, with honesty and respect.
 - Provide and generate accurate information for and with the public.
 - Support freedom of speech and debate.
 - Use collections for the public benefit – for learning, inspiration and enjoyment.
 - b) Stewardship of collections:
 - Maintain and develop collections for current and future generations.
 - Acquire, care for exhibition and loan collections with transparency and competency in order to generate knowledge and engage the public with collections.
 - Treat museum collections as cultural, scientific or historic assets, not financial assets.
 - c) Individual and institutional integrity:
 - Act in the public interest in all areas of work.
 - Uphold the highest level of institutional integrity and personal conduct at all times.
 - Build respectful and transparent relationship with partners. organisations, governing bodies, staff and volunteers to ensure public trust in the museum's activities.
20. Gaining the standard is an endorsement that a museum is professionally run, sustainable and trustworthy. It also provides access to certain funding streams, including National Portfolio Organisation funding from ACE, which the County Council's museums and libraries currently receive.
21. The Accreditation Scheme is administered by ACE and award decisions are made by an Accreditation Panel. The possible decision outcomes are: Full accreditation (current status); Provisional accreditation; Remove accreditation; or Exclude from accreditation, due to deliberate non-compliance.
22. The Accreditation Standard is split into three sections and museums are required to have appropriate plans and policies in place. Below is a summary of each section:
- a) Section 1 – Organisational Health - A clear statement of purpose; appropriate constitution; satisfactory structure for governance and management of the museum; forward plan/business plan; financial sustainability; secure occupancy of all premises containing collections; risk assessment of security arrangements; a clear emergency plan.
 - b) Section 2 – Managing Collections - A description of collections held; scope, size and status of individual collections; an approved Collections Development Policy; an approved documentation policy; evidence the museum follows Spectrum documentation procedures; an approved

Collections Care and Conservation Policy; a Collections Care and Conservation Plan.

- c) Section 3 – Users and their Experiences - An approved Access Policy, which covers methods used to interpret collections and provide public access to collections, buildings and information; an Access Plan; evidence of non-users and the methods by which data is gathered; evidence that user feedback informs the development of the museum; a plan for developing a range of users; evidence of stimulating learning and discovery activities; evidence of effective marketing and promotion.

Museum Access Policy

- 23. The purpose of the Access Policy, attached as Appendix A, as set out in Section 3 (paragraphs 3.1-3.3), “is to state the commitment to increasing access to services and resources by identifying ways to provide an accessible, engaging, innovative, sustainable, relevant and responsive service of the highest quality”.
- 24. The service vision statement adopted in 2024: “Create space to spark imagination, celebrate communities and enhance wellbeing” (Section 1, paragraph 1.2) has been included.
- 25. The Policy scope (Section 2, paragraphs 2.1-2.6) covers museum venues, collections, learning programmes and resources, visitor services and communications.
- 26. Section 4 of the Policy recognises there are many barriers to access and makes a commitment to maximise access and uphold the statutory requirements.
- 27. The Policy defines eight key barriers to access, these being: Attitudinal, Cultural, Economic, Geographic, Cognitive, Physical, Sensory and Technological (paragraph 4.1). The term ‘Cognitive’ has replaced the term ‘Intellectual’ used in the 2021–2025 version of the Policy.
- 28. Section 6 (paragraphs 6.1-6.17) includes policy statements for each of the eight key barriers which set out how the service will seek to minimise or eliminate their impact. Many of these actions reflect ongoing activity, for example, under Economic Access, “Bosworth Battlefield and 1620s House and Garden at Donington-le-Heath take part in Heritage Open Days each year with free access”. Some are pieces of work under development, or not yet achieved at all museum venues. For example, under Sensory Access: “provide quieter spaces with less sensory engagement for those who need it”.
- 29. The statement on technical access, paragraph 6.16, has been expanded to include Artificial Intelligence, following feedback from the Departmental Equalities Group. The statement now recognises “...tools which use artificial intelligence (AI) are providing new ways for us to interpret our sites and collections, tell our stories and engage with our audiences.” and commitment to

being "...transparent about when AI is used to support interpretation and work in line with the County Council's AI policy".

30. Section 7 references the key policies, legislation and guidance the services uses to inform and support best practice delivery in this area.
31. The current Policy expires in November 2025 and the revised Policy is proposed to run until 2030.

Collections Development Policy

32. The purpose of the Collections Development Policy, attached as Appendix B, is to set out how the County Council's museums will collect, care for and make accessible the collections it holds.
33. In order for users of the service, and potential donors and depositors to have a better understanding of the collections, the variety of natural and human activities are grouped into themes. The collections are stored, cared for, managed and retrieved by type under the following thematic approaches to the life of the County.
34. Below is a brief overview of each collection theme. A more detailed description of each theme is provided in Section 3 of the Policy under 'An Overview of Current Collections'.

Natural Life

35. The collections, primarily of specimens and information, reflect the landscape, flora and fauna of the county. They demonstrate the changing natural environment of Leicestershire and its place in the rest of the world over time, comprising two main groups of botany and zoology.

Archaeology

36. The collections provide evidence of human activity in what is now Leicestershire. They cover all periods of time from the prehistoric to the modern, some half a million years. Collections include both finds and documentary archives from excavations, fieldwalking, metal detecting and chance finds across the County.

Home and Family Life

37. The collections reflect domestic life now and in the past. Alongside changes in domestic and personal technology they record important aspects of family life including rites of passage, family structures and entertainment. Objects include games, toys, sporting equipment and the ephemera and objects related to things like festivals and special occasions, shopping and holidays all fall within this collection.

Working Life

38. Collections reflect local trades and industries, partly through tools and equipment, focussing on the work of traditional craftspeople, such as the blacksmith, wheelwright, farmer and food producers. They also reflect the commercial life of the County's market towns in the 19th and 20th centuries.
39. More recent collecting has concentrated on local businesses, mainly small and innovative concerns producing a unique local product, through the acquisition of finished products, ephemera and images.
40. Collections include larger manufacturing industries of the 19th and 20th centuries and reflect the growth and decline of the industrial era and focus on engineering, transport and travel, coal mining and other extractive industries.

Cultural Life

41. Collections reflect the cultural interests of the people of Leicestershire and its centres of skills development for the creative industries. The collections form two main parts: the art collection and the fashion collection.
42. The art collection consists of sculpture, works on paper and easel paintings which reflect the artist's record of the changing landscape and built environment of the County; portraits of local people and their working and social lives and traditional pursuits particularly in the field of country sports.
43. The fashion collection reflects fashionable and occupational dress of adult men and women from the middle of the 18th century to the present day.
44. Leicestershire is a predominantly rural county with specialist centres of manufacturing, trade, learning, innovation and cultural and sporting activity. Each museum site reflects the particular nature of the area and the communities they serve. This is also reflected in the focus of collecting through these sites.
45. Section 4 of the Policy 'Themes and Priorities for Future Collecting' details priorities for future collecting and any types of collection that will not be accepted. Collections are primarily acquired through gift/donation. In exceptional circumstances, and when external funding can be secured, items may be purchased, for example, archaeological objects that become available for acquisition through the procedures laid down in the Treasure Act 1996.
46. The Policy ensures that the Museum Service operates in accordance with all relevant legislation, in particular the provisions of UNESCO 1970 Convention on the Protection of Cultural Property (paragraph 8.6); UK laws concerning the treatment of biological and geological material (paragraph 10.1); The Treasure Act 1996 (paragraph 11.2); and the statement of principles in relation to "Spoilation of Works of Art", 1999 (paragraph 13.1).

47. The Policy outlines how the service reviews its collections (Section 5) both on an ongoing basis and a project basis. In the event these reviews recommend rationalisation, the policy sets how the museum seeks approval to dispose of individual objects, groups of objects or large collections and ensures disposal is undertaken in accordance with approved standards and best practice.
48. The current Policy expires in November 2025 and revised Policy is proposed to run until 2030.

Consultation

49. Officers from Charnwood Borough Council and Harborough District Council have been consulted on the revised policies and are supportive.
50. A co-creation workshop was held with Museum Service volunteers, participants and staff on 22 May 2025 as part of the review of the Collections Development Policy. The key comments from the workshop related to where the focus for proactive contemporary collection should be and the themes of Home and Family Life, Cultural Life and Working Life were identified.
51. In addition, the workshop made recommendations as to how this might be achieved. For Family Life they wished to see Leicestershire's contemporary family life reflected in the collections, including domestic and personal technology, popular culture, toys and games. For Cultural Life, they wished to see local people and communities and those who make significant contribution to life in Leicestershire with a series of commissioned portraits (photographic and other media). For Working Life, they wished this to reflect local service, manufacturing and distribution economies including local technological and creative industries.
52. These conclusions are reflected in the revised Policy and will form part of the Collections Development Plan, which is under development.

Comments of the Adults and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

53. The Adults and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the draft policies at its meeting on 1 September 2025 and its comments and officer responses are summarised below.
54. Members queried if storage issues could affect museum accreditation. Officers confirmed archival storage challenges but clarified these were separate from museum accreditation. Improvements over four years have mitigated risks.
55. Concerns were raised about the volume and condition of stored items. Members requested details on the reserve collection policy, income generation from loans, acquisition and disposal processes. Officers explained loans followed a detailed collections development framework and were mainly to accredited museums, with no recent damage incidents reported. Officers undertook to share the loans policy with Members.

56. Acquisitions were reviewed by curatorial staff and approved by the Collections and Learning Manager. Disposals followed legal and policy guidelines, with routine cases handled by the Director of Adults and Communities and controversial disposals escalated to Members for consideration.
57. Members noted much of the collection was in storage and were concerned they were rarely seen and potentially incurred high storage costs. Officers confirmed that it was common for museums to have 5–8% of collections on display at any one time and explained that retaining stored items allowed flexibility for future needs and highlighted the collection's cultural value. Access was provided via five public sites, researcher visits, partnerships with educational institutions, and digital access through the museum collections website.
58. Officers advised that the policy included regular reviews to identify items for disposal, prioritising public rehoming. Most items were donated and cared for long-term, with disposal only considered when items no longer had a purpose. Officers welcomed discussion on improving access.
59. A recent book on Market Harborough used photographs from the museum collection, demonstrating its public value.
60. Virtual museums were noted as a valuable tool to enhance public access and complement physical exhibitions.
61. It was agreed that site visits would be arranged for Members of the Committee to better understand the stored collection and the challenges faced.

2025 Accreditation Returns

62. In December 2024, the County Council's five accredited museums received notification from ACE to submit accreditation returns for each museum by 1 August 2025. These returns have been acknowledged by ACE and a decision is expected within six months.
63. If the above museums have their accreditation status renewed, accreditation is expected to last until 2030, unless there are any significant changes that require reassessment before this date.
64. The service has responded to a series of questions via an online portal and submitted the following additional documentation and evidence to support the application:
 - a) The Collections Development Policy: 2021-2025 and Access Policy: 2021-2025 were submitted as part of the return. If the revised policies are approved by the Cabinet they will replace the versions submitted.
 - b) Published corporate information was provided including the County's Council's Constitution, Statement of Accounts, and Adults and Communities Strategy 2025-2029.

- c) Local plans and procedures included: Staff structure charts; Collections Management Framework; forward plans for each museum site; security assessments for all museum sites; marketing and communications plan; Targeted Audience Engagement Plan 2022–2027; Creative Learning Services Museum Learning Offer and Plan.

Conclusion

65. The Museum Service Access Policy and Collections Development Policy have been reviewed and updated within the review period and required guidance. Adoption of these plans will support the County Council to continue to provide a robust and efficient Museum Service and meet the accreditation standard.

Equality Implications

66. An Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed for the Access Policy and was reviewed by the Adults and Communities Departmental Equalities Group. No areas of concern have been identified, but based on the feedback, paragraph 5.8 has been updated to include a reference to the Service's audience data strategy, which ensures equalities data is used to inform decision making and a statement on the use of AI included in paragraph 6.16.
67. There are no equalities issues in relation to the Collections Development Policy.

Human Rights Implications

68. There are no human rights implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

Partnership Working and Associated Issues

69. Charnwood Museum is delivered in partnership with Charnwood Borough Council and Borough Council officers with operational responsibility for the museum have provided relevant information in support of the return for Charnwood Museum.
70. Harborough Museum is delivered in partnership with Harborough District Council and the Market Harborough Historical Society. Harborough District Council officers have contributed to the return for Harborough Museum.

Background Papers

Leicestershire County Council Strategic Plan 2022-2026

<https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/field/pdf/faq/2022/4/12/Appendix-B-LCC-Strategic-Plan-2022-26.pdf>

Report to Adults and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee: 8 March 2021 – Museum Accreditation – Review of Last Period of Submission (2015-19) and Preparations for Next Submission (2022-2026)

<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=1040&MId=6461&Ver=4>

Report to the Cabinet: 19 November 2021 – Updated Policies for Leicestershire County Council’s Museum Service

<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=135&MId=6448&Ver=4>

Report to the Adults and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee: 1 September 2025 – Leicestershire County Council Museum Policy Revision and Accreditation

<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=1040&MId=7854&Ver=4>

Accreditation Scheme Standard

https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Accreditation_Standard_Nov2018_0.pdf

Spectrum Collections Management Standard

<https://collectionstrust.org.uk/spectrum/>

Appendices

Appendix A - Museum Access Policy 2025-2030

Appendix B - Collections Development Policy 2025-2030

This page is intentionally left blank