

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Delegated Officer Decision – 17 February 2025

Report Title

Rotherham Museums, Arts and Heritage Collection and Object Disposal

Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?

No, but it has been included on the Forward Plan

Assistant Director Approving Submission of the Report

Polly Hamilton, Assistant Director, Culture, Sport & Tourism

Report Author(s)

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Ward(s) Affected

Borough-wide

Report Summary

This report details the Rotherham Museums, Arts and Heritage service request to implement the Collections Management Policy which was approved by Cabinet on 23 January 2023. The service requests permission to reduce the pressure on collection storage by disposing of accessioned objects in the Rotherham Collection, alongside unidentified objects and historic object entries that do not meet the current Collections Management Policy. A decision to dispose of the first phase of collection was approved on 29 November 2024. This report includes objects that were not included as part of the last report due to timescales.

Recommendations

1. The Assistant Director, Culture, Sport and Tourism gives approval for the Collections and Exhibitions Manager to carry out the ethical disposal of objects identified in Appendix 1 and 2. This will be done in accordance with the disposal of museum objects protocol set out in the Museum Association's Code of Ethics, and the Council's Financial Regulations and Procurement Procedure Rules.

List of Appendices Included

- Appendix 1 Rotherham Museum Collection and Historic Entries Disposal List
- Appendix 2 Collection Disposal Risk Assessment
- Appendix 3 Collections Management Policy
- Appendix 4 Part A Initial Equality Screening Assessment Rotherham Collection Disposal
- Appendix 5 Part B Equality Analysis Form Museum Rotherham Collection Disposal
- Appendix 6 Carbon Impact Rotherham Collection Disposal

Background Papers

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel

Name of Committee – [Click here to enter a date.](#)

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Council Approval Required

No

Exempt from the Press and Public

No

1. Background

1.1 In 2019 Rotherham adopted a new Cultural Strategy, the first of its kind in more than decade, with a clear mission to: get more people, more active, creative and outdoors, more often. The strategy has seven 'game-changers' which include spatial and social priorities, transforming the cultural landscape of Rotherham. The Museums, Arts and Heritage service is most clearly rooted in three strands of the strategy and is working towards embedding them into future service planning.

- Vital Neighbourhoods - focusing on ensuring that services, venues and programmes are truly representative of Rotherham's communities and enabling access to high-quality cultural provision locally.
- Passion to Profession – enabling engagement opportunities which build confidence and skills for life and work.
- Children's Capital of Culture – supporting children and young people to develop a programme of events in 2025 and get them excited about their future in Rotherham.

1.2 Rotherham's joint Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2018-2025 sets out four strategic aims which include:

- All children get the best start in life and go on to achieve their potential
- All Rotherham people enjoy the best possible mental health and wellbeing and have a good quality of life
- All Rotherham people live well for longer
- All Rotherham people live in healthy, safe and resilient communities

1.3 Rotherham Museums, Arts and Heritage will support the achievement of these aims through ensuring that the Rotherham Collections, which underpins many of the activities of the Museums, Arts & Heritage Service are well managed, appropriately maintained and accessible to a wider range of communities both in museum and community settings.

1.4 Rotherham Museums, Arts and Heritage mission is to 'Spark imagination, curiosity, and roots through the celebration of Rotherham's people, stories, spaces and collections'. This mission is underpinned by five values: generosity, quality, inclusivity, wonder and resilience. The service is committed to enabling greater community voice and influence within its activities.

1.5 Rotherham Museums, Arts and Heritage cares for and manages three collections: the Rotherham Archives and Local Studies collection, the Rotherham Museum Collection, and the York and Lancaster Regimental Museum Collection. The service is caretaker of the Rotherham York & Lancaster Regimental Collection on behalf of the sole trustee, Rotherham

Metropolitan Borough Council. The focus of the collection disposal will be on the Rotherham Museum Collection.

- 1.6 The Rotherham Collection includes 76,000 objects which tell the story of Rotherham's communities, and the York and Lancaster Regimental Collection includes 3,900 objects and 11,000 photographs.
- 1.7 The Rotherham Museums, Arts & Heritage service also manages Clifton Park Museum and Boston Castle, as well as five heritage sites across the borough which are: Keppel's Column, Catcliffe Glass Cone, Rockingham Waterloo Kiln, Payne Mausoleum and Walker Mausoleum. It is also responsible for the statutory Rotherham Archives and Local Studies service.
- 1.8 The Collections Management Policy for the Rotherham Collection was approved by Cabinet on 23 January 2023 and the York and Lancaster Regimental Collection was approved by Full Council in May 2023. These both also included approval for the delegation to the Assistant Director of Culture, Sport and Tourism in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Social Inclusion for any future changes or new versions of the Collections Management Policy. The Collections Management Policy sets out the process for acquisition and disposal of collections objects. This request to dispose of objects is part of the implementation of the policy. This is included as Appendix 4.
- 1.9 The standards of care for museum collections are clearly set out by the Collections Trust, and carefully monitored and assessed through the Museum Accreditation Scheme.
- 1.10 The Museums Accreditation scheme is the UK industry standard for museums and galleries and ensures museums are managing their collections, engaging with visitors, and are governed appropriately. It is managed as a UK partnership between Arts Council England, the Welsh Government, Museums Galleries Scotland, and the Northern Ireland Museums Council. It is a national benchmark for a well-managed museum, demonstrating professionalism, accountability and gives confidence to donors, partners, and supporters. Being Museums Accredited also opens up opportunities for museums, including funding opportunities, donations and new partnerships.
- 1.11 Full Museums Accreditation lasts for five years and the Museums, Arts & Heritage service was last accredited on 25th February 2016. However, due to backlogs within Arts Council England caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the application process for renewal has been delayed and is expected in 2025. This gives the service time to ensure all policies and procedures are current, fit for purpose and embedded within the service delivery plan in preparation for the next application window.
- 1.12 Collections disposal is an essential part of the collection management process to ensure museums meet their responsibility to future generations, by caring for collections which represent Rotherham's communities.

Collections need to be well managed and sustainable. Responsible, curatorially motivated disposal is ongoing and takes place as part of a museum's long-term collections management policy, in order to increase public benefit derived from museum collections. The last disposals took place in 2019 following the Care of Collections project to resolve outstanding issues following the 2007 flood in which objects from the museum collection were damaged. The service follows the Museum Association Code of Ethics for Museums and collection management standard Spectrum 5.1 on museum collections disposal.

- 1.13 Potential disposals undergo professional assessment by qualified and experienced members of the Collections and Exhibitions Team against the Collections Management policy and are considered at a monthly Acquisition and Disposal review panel, led by the Museums, Arts and Heritage Manager. The panel currently includes members of the Collections and Exhibitions team and Rotherham Archives and Local Studies team. A Community Story Board is in development, with representatives from across the different communities of Rotherham, to draw on a wide range of lived experiences and cultures across the Borough. Once more established, members of the Community Story Board will be invited to attend the panel regularly, be involved in dialogue regarding collection development and inform future collecting priorities.
- 1.14 On 24 November 2024, a decision to dispose of the first phase of collection and handling material was approved by Polly Hamilton – Assistant Director of Culture, Sport and Tourism. This report includes objects that were included as part of the last report due to tight timescales within the Wath basement store move process.

2.0 Key Issues

- 2.1 The service currently aims to rationalise the collections by disposing of duplicate material and items that do not meet the acquisition standards set out in the Collections Management Policy and have no display, educational or research value. The Collections Management Policy identifies the collecting priority to be provenanced material made, used or associated with people, places or activities within Rotherham Metropolitan Borough. The service will also dispose of items that are in an unacceptable condition, where it is economically unjustifiable to conserve them.

2.2 Historical Collection Management Challenges

- 2.2.1 Over the last 20 years, the Collections and Exhibitions team has experienced collection store flood damage, eight store moves, long term staff sickness and leadership changes. The recruitment and retention to the role of Collections and Exhibitions Manager has been challenging and has seen six appointments in the last 10 years. Due to historic collection management practices, the service has a collection entry and processing backlog which was highlighted at the last Museum Accreditation return. Object disposal and properly resourced collections management are needed to address the backlog for the next Museum Accreditation return in

2025 and accreditors will expect to see this issue addressed as per advice and guidance from the previous inspection.

- 2.2.2 A collection entry and processing backlog occurs when objects have not been fully processed when coming into the collection, or collections procedures have not been adhered to. Many museum collections have some backlog and services must have resources allocated to address this and minimise it in the longer term. The service backlog is around 500 historic entry objects, which will be dealt with in phases over the next year. Entry objects are not part of the collection, and previous practice meant they came into the museum before being brought to the Acquisition and Disposal panel for a decision. The object entry form signs over ownership from the owner to the museum but does not guarantee that an object will be accessioned into the collection. If an object does not meet the collection development policy and the decision is taken to not acquire them into the collection, the service is able to ethically dispose of them in an appropriate manner. As some objects have not been processed for over 20 years they have been included as part of the disposal process. Where possible, objects are being returned to the original donors.
- 2.2.3 Due to several store moves and historic collections management practices, there are objects located in Bailey House and Wath Store which cannot currently be matched to any existing documentation. These objects are most likely non-accessioned objects and are referred to as Unidentified Finds (UFs). There are currently around 4000 unidentified finds (UFs) in the museum stores which need processing. Following a thorough and extensive research period, the service may determine that disposal is the most suitable outcome.
- 2.2.4 The service now has a new Collections and Exhibitions team with clear strategic leadership and a robust and achievable Collections Management Plan to address the challenges. The plan prioritises resources to manage the collection more effectively. The Collections and Exhibitions team includes a Collections and Exhibitions Manager (FTE) and two Collections and Exhibitions Officers (FTE). The service now has a Collections Registrar (FTE and funded by Arts Council) to focus on the backlogs and to rectify collections legacy issues, including progressing the disposal of collections objects.
- 2.2.5 To minimise any further backlog of entry objects, the primary procedure for object entry has been improved. Objects will only enter the museum if they have been accepted by the Acquisition and Disposal panel. The service is committed to reducing the backlog and allocating the necessary resources needed to manage the collection.

2.3 Pressures on storage

- 2.3.1 The collection store at the basement of Wath Library has been used by the service for the last thirty years. Due to a Levelling Up grant to demolish the existing library and build a new library complex, the service must vacate the

Wath store by March 2025. The objects stored there are being relocated to a ground floor location at Bailey House which has a smaller footprint than the Wath store basement. In the process of relocation, the service is rationalising the collection where possible to reduce the number of objects that do not meet the Collection Management policy priorities. It is also an opportunity to dispose of objects that are in poor condition and where it is economically unjustifiable to conserve them.

2.3.2 The current store at Bailey House is almost at capacity and presents ongoing storage pressures for the service. A regular process of disposal and rationalisation is necessary to ensure the service can care for the collection it already manages and ensure that the collection is relevant to the communities of Rotherham.

2.4 Disposal process

2.4.1 The Collections Management Policy which was approved by Cabinet on 23 January 2023 sets out the service procedures for disposing of objects in the collection.

2.4.2 The service currently aims to rationalise the collections by disposing of duplicate material and items that do not meet the acquisition standards set out in the Collections Management Policy and have no display, educational or research value. The Collections Management Policy identifies the collecting priority to be provenanced material made, used or associated with people, places or activities within Rotherham Metropolitan Borough. The service will also dispose of items that are in an unacceptable condition, where it is economically unjustifiable to conserve them.

2.4.3 All disposals for accessioned objects have been undertaken with reference to the UK collections Management standard Spectrum 5.1 procedure on disposal. A member of the Collections and Exhibitions team proposes a disposal using the paperwork agreed in the procedure. The form documents the thorough research and rationale, legal ownership, grant purchase, recommendations for disposal, the process, and final outcome. The disposal is presented to the Acquisition and Disposal panel who make recommendations on the outcome.

2.4.4 A decision to dispose of a specimen or object, whether by gift, exchange, sale, or destruction (in the case of an item too badly damaged or deteriorated to be of any use for the purposes of the collections or for reasons of health and safety), is the responsibility of the governing body of the service, held annually, acting on the advice of professional curatorial staff. The final decision is progressed through to the Rotherham Council delegated powers for authorisation.

2.4.5 Priority will be given to keeping the object in the public domain and objects will be offered to other Accredited Museums. It is acceptable to destroy material of low intrinsic significance (duplicate mass-produced articles or common specimens which lack significant provenance) where no alternative method of disposal can be found. Destruction is also an acceptable method

of disposal in cases where an object is in extremely poor condition, has high associated health and safety risks, or is part of an approved destructive testing request identified in an organisation's research policy.

2.4.6 A Disposal Risk Assessment is consulted when proposing an object for disposal. This includes the disposal of non-accessioned objects and unidentified finds (UF), and accessioned objects of uncertain ownership. In these cases, there are additional issues of legal and ethical obligation and public relations management to consider. The Disposal Risk Assessment has been created with guidance from the Collections Trust. It considers the risks associated with disposing of unidentified and uncertain material and mitigates the risk with further control measures. This is included as Appendix 3.

2.5 Objects considered for disposal

2.5.1 The service has identified three categories of objects that require authorisation for disposal. All of these objects have been approved at the Acquisition and Disposal panel and are awaiting authorisation from the Rotherham Council delegated powers.

2.5.2 A detailed spreadsheet records the disposal process and outcome for each item approved for disposal.

- **Accessioned objects**

2.5.3 These objects have mostly been recommended for disposal through the collection store move from Wath and rationalisation at Bailey House store. Following an extensive research period, the service has identified that they either have no Rotherham provenance, no display, educational or research value, or are in an unacceptable condition. The service has also confirmed that Rotherham Museums, Arts and Heritage is the legal title holder and there are no conditions attached to any purchase grant funding.

2.5.4 Some accessioned objects are found to have been accessioned with no paperwork or documentation, and therefore their original provenance and terms of acquisition are unknown. In this case, the risk associated with disposing of accessioned objects of unknown provenance is acknowledged, as set out in the Disposals Risk Assessment.

2.5.5 All of these objects are included in Appendix 1.

- **Unidentified Finds**

2.5.6 These objects have been recommended for disposal as they are not provenanced material made, used or associated with people, places or activities within Rotherham Metropolitan Borough, have no display, educational or research value, or are in an unacceptable condition. These objects do not have any associated documentation or markings to prove that they are accessioned objects. An extensive period of research has

been undertaken by the Collections Registrar to determine if they are an accessioned object, an object entry, or educational handling material, utilising all necessary documentation to do so. This research also includes searching the collection management systems for key description words. If the object is not accessioned and does not meet the Collections Development Policy, it will be recommended for disposal.

2.5.7 A Disposals Risk Assessment is consulted before recommending for disposal to mitigate and reduce the effect of the risk.

2.5.8 All of these objects are included as Appendix 1.

- **Historic Entries**

2.5.9 Historic Entry objects are treated as potential acquisitions and will follow the acquisition procedure. If the Acquisition and Disposal panel agree not to accept the object into the collection, it will be ethically disposed of in accordance with the Collections Management Policy. The donor will be contacted initially, and the object will be offered back to them. In such circumstances that the donor declines or is unreachable, the object will be ethically disposed of by either contacting an Accredited Museum, by recycling, or by destruction.

2.5.10 As many of these historic entries date back twenty years, they are being included in the disposal report.

2.5.11 All of these objects are included as Appendix 1.

3. Options considered and recommended proposal

3.1 Do nothing

3.1.1 The disposals are part of the implementation of the Collections Management Policy approved by Cabinet on 23 January 2023. By doing nothing, the service is not able to fully implement what was set out and agreed in the policy.

3.1.2 The service needs to alleviate storage pressures and maximise the storage opportunities to grow a more relevant and representative collection. Not accepting these recommended disposals will not enable the service to manage the collection effectively.

3.1.3 To 'Do Nothing' would risk the loss of Museums Accreditation as the implementation of the Collections Management policy is required to demonstrate effective collection management. In losing accreditation the service would also potential jeopardise the National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) funding from Arts Council England, having a financial impact of £500,000 over the remaining two years of the funding. It could also impact any further NPO applications to Arts Council.

3.1.4 Since the Wath store must be vacated by mid March 2025, to 'do nothing' also jeopardises the timeline of the Wath regeneration project. The new Bailey House stores do not have the capacity to accommodate all objects being decanted from the Wath store, so additional external storage would have to be found for the objects currently proposed for disposal, significantly delaying the timeline of the regeneration work.

3.2 Adopt the recommended objects for disposal

3.2.1 The recommended disposals respond to and implement the expectations set out in the Collections Management Policy agreed by Cabinet. It also reflects the current mission and values of the Museums, Arts & Heritage service and its commitment to ensuring community voice and influence within its activities.

3.2.2 The recommended disposals will enable the service to retain its Museums Accreditation and fully participate in the Arts Council England NPO Programme. The collection backlog and lack of disposal were highlighted as areas for development for the service in the previous Museum Accreditation, so this will demonstrate that the service has made improvements in this area.

3.2.3 This is the recommended option.

4. Consultation on proposal

4.1 In preparing the objects recommended for disposal, consultation has taken place with the Council's Equalities, Property Services and Climate Change Teams, Collections Trust and Arts Council England. Consultation and benchmarking has also taken place with Museums Development Yorkshire and other local authority museum services across South Yorkshire to ensure that the procedures are followed.

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

5.1 The service will need to vacate Wath store by mid March 2025. The recommended disposals will need to be removed before the project completion date.

5.2 The Head of Creative Programming and Engagement and Museums, Arts & Heritage Manager will have overall accountability for the implementation of the disposal procedures and the supporting Collections Management Plan working closely with the Collections and Exhibitions team within the service.

5.3 Museums Accreditation inspection will take place in July 2025.

6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications (to be written by the relevant Head of Finance and the Head of Procurement on behalf of s151 Officer)

6.1 None of the objects recommended for disposal were purchased or acquired with the aid of external grant funding. Rotherham Museums, Arts and Heritage will not undertake disposal motivated principally by financial reasons. It is not expected that any money will be received from the sale of any objects disposed of; regardless, any monies received would be for the benefit of the collections through the purchase of further acquisitions. All costs associated with the cost of disposal will be contained within approved revenue budgets.

6.2 There are no direct procurement implications associated with the recommendations detailed in this report.

7. Legal Advice and Implications (to be written by Legal Officer on behalf of Assistant Director Legal Services)

7.1 Rotherham Museums, Arts and Heritage have followed the disposal process set out in the Collections Management Policy approved by Cabinet on the 23rd of January 2023. Due consideration has been given to legal ownership and whether items were acquired using Grant Funding.

7.2 There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

8. Human Resources Advice and Implications

8.1 There are no direct Human Resources implications arising from the recommendations contained in this report.

9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

9.1 The Rotherham Collection forms the foundation for the outreach, engagement and learning activities across the Museums, Arts & Heritage service and forms the basis of all exhibitions and associated programmes at Clifton Park Museum. Without the Rotherham Collection and continued collections management these programmes would not offer the same level of high-quality experience which supports education and learning, health and wellbeing, community cohesion and civic pride in museums, schools, care homes and community settings.

9.2 As Rotherham prepares to become the world's first Children's Capital of Culture in 2025, the Museums, Arts and Heritage service is working to ensure that the voice and influence of children and young people is prevalent in its collections and programmes. The service is currently hosting five trainee opportunities across the service including collections management, exhibitions, engagement, archives and marketing.

10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

10.1 An Equalities Impact Screening, Assessment and Action Plan can be found as Appendix 5.

- 10.2 The Museums, Arts & Heritage service has undertaken extensive service transformation over the last five years which has included a number of research activities and pilot programmes with targeted groups to better understand their current levels of participation and engagement, representation within the collection and exhibitions, and barriers that prevent greater levels of engagement. Through these carefully co-produced programmes the service has begun to see a change in its audience profile with more communities from Global Majority backgrounds engaging, as well as a growth in engagement from children and young people.
- 10.3 These programmes have enabled the service to test new models of co-production and co-creation, building greater voice and influence for communities which guide the activities of the service including its management of collections. An example of how the service has co-produced with communities is in relation to language. Through consultation, the service has reviewed language related to equalities and worked with residents to identify preferred terms when referring to “BAME” communities, such as “Global Majority” in order to more accurately represent ethnicity within the work of the service.

11. Implications for CO2 Emissions and Climate Change

- 11.1 A Carbon Impact Assessment can be found at Appendix 6.
- 11.2 The key implication for CO2 Emissions and Climate Change is related to the storage of the collection at Bailey House. Rationalising the collection from Wath Store and moving it to Bailey House, Rotherham will help reduce the CO2 emissions.

12. Implications for Partners

- 12.1. There are no direct implications for partners as the policy relates only to those collections wholly owned by Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council.

13. Risks and Mitigation

- 13.1 Risk: Loss of objects of value / significance
The thorough disposal process reduces the risk of disposing of objects of significance. All disposals for accessioned objects have been undertaken with reference to the UK Collections Management standard Spectrum 5.1 procedure on disposal. Potential disposals undergo professional assessment by qualified and experienced members of the Collections and Exhibitions Team against the Collections Management policy and are considered at a monthly Acquisition and Disposal review panel, led by the Museums, Arts and Heritage Manager. Documentation procedures are in place to ensure ownership is documented for items entering the care of Museums, Arts and Heritage’s care. A period of research is undertaken before any object is considered for disposal to ensure due diligence. The

disposal object and the relevant paperwork list records this process for transparency.

13.2

Risk: Owners returning for objects that have been disposed of
The thorough disposal procedure reduces the risk of disposing of objects that the service does not have legal ownership to dispose of. If an object is accessioned, legal ownership is transferred to Rotherham Museums, Arts and Heritage and owners can not request an object to be returned to them. A Disposal Risk Assessment is consulted when the decision to dispose of an object involves some risk to ensure all procedures are followed. For non-accessioned objects, every effort will be made to return the object to the original donor. However, this is not a legal requirement as the entry form documentation details that the museum is not responsible for objects that are not accessioned and would be entitled to dispose after three months of their original entry to the museum.

13.2

Risk: Accessioned objects damaged due to limited storage and staffing resources

The service has limited storage and collections staffing resources. The closure of Wath store basement has reduced the available storage space even further. The service must ensure the objects entrusted in its care by the people of Rotherham are accessible and preserved for future generations. By disposing of objects that do not meet the Collections Management Policy or beyond repair to be accessible, the service is able to prioritise resources where most needed and manage the collection storage more effectively.

14. **Accountable Officers**

Leanne Buchan, Head of Creative Programming & Engagement
Lisa Howarth, Museums, Arts & Heritage Manager

Approvals obtained on behalf of Statutory Officers: -

| | Named Officer | Date |
|--|----------------------|-----------------------------|
| Chief Executive | Sharon Kemp OBE | Click here to enter a date. |
| Strategic Director of Finance & Customer Services (S.151 Officer) | Judith Badger | Click here to enter a date. |
| Assistant Director of Legal Services (Monitoring Officer) | Phil Horsfield | Click here to enter a date. |

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