

CABINET

13 April 2011

WINCHESTER MUSEUMS RESERVE COLLECTIONS

REPORT OF ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (ECONOMIC PROSPERITY)

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RECENT REFERENCES:

[CAB2129 - Winchester Museums: Opportunities for Partnership Working, March 2011](#)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Members will have noted in CAB 2129 (*Winchester Museums: Opportunities for Partnership Working*) in March this year that Winchester Museums Service has made an important contribution over the years to the District's reputation as a cultural centre. The major excavations programme between the 1960s and 80s led to the creation of a very special archive, now in the care of the City Council. However, it has also contributed to a growing legacy of cost, in terms of the overheads associated with the storage and care of the collections. Mounting concern over the sustainability of these costs, coupled with changes within the museum sector at a national and local level, have prompted a range of discussions with Winchester Museums staff, colleagues from other local authorities and external stakeholders. This paper is the second of two (the other being CAB2129) designed to address the issues facing the museums. It sets out options for rationalising the Council's approach to collections management. Members are asked to consider this report and approve the proposals put forward by officers in section three, in preparation for the revision of the Collecting and Collections Management Policy this summer and to underpin immediate action by officers in addressing the difficulties.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That Cabinet approves:

- 1) the proposals for collections rationalisation set out in section 3 of this report, which will inform the revision of the Council's Collecting and Collections Management Policy, to be returned to Members for adoption in June this year.
- 2) expenditure of up to £9,000 from the risk management budget to pay for valuations of the ethnography, art and civic silver collections as set at out in paragraphs 3.3a and 3.5b of this report.
- 3) the proposal to increase the charge per box for archaeological deposits handed over the City Council by developers and their agents from £16 to £25 with immediate effect (paragraph 3.5a refers)..

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DETAIL:

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Members will be aware that officers have been considering the future of the museums service, with a paper on partnership opportunities presented for Cabinet consideration in March 2011. This reflected an ongoing commitment to service redesign, with the aim of providing a strong service for local residents and visitors whilst reducing costs. (See [CAB2129 - Winchester Museums: Opportunities for Partnership Working](#)).
- 1.2 One of the biggest challenges for the service, in terms of managing costs at a time when budgets continue to be stretched, are the overheads associated with the storage and care of the collections.
- 1.3 Moreover, the Council's intention to develop the depot site at Bar End requires officers to relocate one of two large collections stores. It makes good sense to consider options to rationalise the reserves held at Bar End – and indeed at the Council's other unit, known as F2 – in order to keep to a minimum the need for new space but also to ensure that any future growth of the collections can be accommodated.
- 1.4 The paper sets out the background to the current situation, and proposes a package of measures designed to support the rationalisation process.

2 Background – Collecting and Collections Policy

- 2.1 In addition to the many objects on display throughout the year at the City Museum and Westgate, the Council's museums service cares for well over a million artifacts held in reserve collections. Efforts are made to open the stores to visitors, and to exhibit objects from the reserves through a range of initiatives. Indeed, last month's *Archaeology* exhibition at City Space drew an audience of 4,061 visitors over four weeks, including nearly 1,000 children.
- 2.2 Objects in the stores are the subject of regular academic interest, and individual items or collections can be the subject of many months of study which translates into important publications. Efforts are also made to place key objects on the Council's [on-line collections website](#),

but Members are naturally keen to see the reserves accessed first and foremost by the local residents for whom they are kept, and who pay for their upkeep.

- 2.3 Council Administrations in recent years have expressed a growing concern about the cost of storage for the reserve collections, numbering well over one million items. The reserves present challenges in terms of the sheer space required for racking and for effective stewardship under a diminishing staff team, as well as the building overheads. The collections, in approximate order of importance, are listed below with an indication of their size and location:

Collection	Approx size of collection	Display location (if any)	Reserve location
Archaeology	1 million objects	City Museum	F2 & Bar End archaeology store
Local history	9,000 objects	City Museum & Westgate	F2 store
Photographic material	45,000 images	All sites	Historic Environment Centre & F2 store
Topographical art and portraits	1,723 pictures	Guildhall; Abbey House; City Space (temporary exhibitions)	F2 store
Civic items, including the civic silver and weights and measures	130 items	Westgate; Guildhall display cases	Guildhall vaults
Numismatics	7,626 objects	City Museum & Westgate	F2 store
Ethnography, no longer actively collected	285 objects		F2 store
Foreign archaeology, no longer actively collected	440 objects	Occasional City Space exhibitions (Egyptology for example)	F2 store; Bar End archaeology store

- 2.4 In March 2006, Members allocated some Local Authority Business Growth Incentive (LABGI) funds to enable officers to progress work on an initial programme of rationalisation and dispersal ([CAB 1243](#), 22 March 2006). Later that year, Members approved the transfer of the Council's geology collection (over 5,000 objects) to Hampshire County Council ([CAB 1323](#), October 2009 refers). The same report asked for

authorisation to discuss a transfer of the photographic collection to the then Hampshire Record Office, although it later transpired that the costs (one-off and ongoing) for doing this would be exactly the same as for removing the collection from the Historic Resources Centre to the Historic Environment Centre at Winchester Guildhall and caring for it in-house. Moreover, the transfer would have meant reduced accessibility for staff (who routinely use the photographs for exhibitions and enquiries) and for customers. The proposal was therefore not pursued.

- 2.5 The most extensive collection by far is archaeology, which grew at a rapid pace during the 60s, 70s and 80s with the extensive programme overseen by Prof Martin Biddle and then assumed by the Council's own excavations unit. The unit was not then part of the museums service, which had no control over what was retained from excavations and subsequently passed to it for storage, although in practice there is little in the store which is not thought to be 'data rich' in archaeological terms. In fact, the collection as a whole provides the most comprehensive overview of the character and development of any European city. This is reflected in the series of prestigious publications being produced by Prof Biddle and by the Council's own staff in partnership with English Heritage and others.
- 2.6 Prevailing methodologies dictated that much material was retained for later, post-excavation processing, though rarely was money available to undertake such processing. The LABGI allocation referred to in paragraph 2.4 above funded the first real programme of professional analysis and recording of more than 1,000 boxes of tile samples, many bags of soil samples and 20 tanks of wood stored in tanks of water. All of this material was disposed of, once the recording had been completed by specialists. Some further, similar work was carried out with a small grant from the regional Museum Development Service last year.
- 2.7 Disposals of archaeological material have thus far been made from the Council's 1972-2004 archive: reviews of the Biddle archive (1961-1971), and of the, smaller, pre-Biddle archive are also required. The Winchester Excavations Committee, which oversees work on the Biddle archive, is currently considering issues of ownership: traditionally, however, the City Council has stored and cared for the archive - which amounts to 35% of the Council's current capacity for boxed storage of archaeology - and also paid for any disposal work. Funding for such work is no longer easily available, although there are potentially opportunities ahead through the Core Museum initiative outlined in the March Cabinet report referred to in para 1.1 above.
- 2.8 Whilst archaeological work is now carried out for developers by commercial contractors, the Council still acts as a repository for archaeological archives deriving from the City and District, and the assumption has always been that it will continue in this role. The

collection therefore continues to grow: another 500 boxes plus paper archive are shortly to be passed to the Council from Oxford Archaeology, arising from their excavations between 2000 and 2005. It is estimated that this deposit will fill up any spare capacity in the F2 store. Unlike the deposits arising from the earlier excavations, the museum service's Archive Deposition Standard now ensures that all of the post-excavation processing has been completed and disposals made by the contractor before collections are transferred to the Council. This means that there is little or no opportunity for further rationalisation once the deposit is accessioned. However, this also means that there is no opportunity for new backlogs to build up in the stores.

- 2.9 The local history collection, much of which has been held at Fort Brockhurst in Gosport in recent years, also includes larger items such as architectural features. Some of this has never been accessioned into the collections. As indicated in the budget report for Cabinet last month ([CAB2125](#), February 2011) officers are now aiming to vacate this store by the end of June 2011 at the latest, through a combination of disposal, dispersal and re-use of non-accessioned objects, or transfer back to the Winchester stores. Following analysis and recording work which has taken place in recent weeks, it is likely that more than 90% of the stone held at Fort Brockhurst will now be re-used in building projects (eg the former Historic Resources Centre at Hyde) in the near future. These sorts of re-uses are highly appropriate, and far better than storing objects in the inaccessible location of Fort Brockhurst.
- 2.10 When individual opportunities arise for sympathetic dispersal or transfer of possession, officers have progressed these: for example, Members approved the transfer of ownership of a model of the HMS Constance to the National Maritime Museum at Greenwich in 2009 ([CAB1882](#), September 2009 refers). Although the model was worth around £65,000, it was 2m long, 0.71m wide and 1.4m high and presented the Council with a challenge for storage: it is now on permanent display in Greenwich.
- 2.11 The Collecting and Collections Management Policy adopted by the Council (last revised in 2005) states:
[The museums service] will take into account limitations on collecting imposed by such factors as inadequate staffing, storage and care of collection arrangements.
In practice, however, it has been difficult to refuse objects or archives where they fit with the wider collecting policy. It is equally difficult to resist objects which enjoy a degree of popular interest (eg Ron Purse's pram) or gifts made on civic occasions (eg twinning exchanges), although the historical value of such items can be questionable.
- 2.12 With the redevelopment of the depot site at Bar End a priority, with the letting of the new waste management contract, a budget has already

been approved by Members (CAB2072 (exempt), October 2010 refers) to support the rehousing of the reserve collections from the current Bar End archaeological store. This is likely to require a replacement area of 450sq m. There is further work which can be commissioned in terms of analysis and disposal work (outlined in section three below) but the options for disposing of objects which genuinely form part of the story of Winchester are restricted. The collecting policy says of disposal:

“By definition, the museum has a long-term purpose and should possess (or intend to acquire) permanent collections in relation to its stated objectives. The governing body accepts the principle that, except for sound curatorial reasons, there is a strong presumption against the disposal of any items in the museum’s collection.”

3 Options for Rationalising the Collections

3.1 The importance of a museum collection is the totality of it. A broad cross section of objects, spanning history and themes, is more important than any one object or box of finds. Whilst the curatorial team is very keen to rationalise the collection - which is part of professional good practice and has only been restricted by a lack of time and money over the years - the staff have attempted to identify options which preserve the integrity of the collections whilst recognising likely future capacity to care for them.

3.2 Recent events at Southampton City Council have shown the strength of local and museums sector feeling about disposals, which can be regarded as ‘selling off the family silver’ – even if there is a clear rationale presented. It is evident, however, the Council must take steps to manage this ever-increasing financial burden. There are three potential fronts on which to act:

- a) reducing the existing reserves;
- b) reducing the incoming flow of deposits;
- c) increasing income to contribute to storage and stewardship costs.

3.3 ***Reducing existing reserves:*** options include:

- a) dispersal of the ethnography collection: it is not likely that this collection would have a high financial value. However, officers propose that it be professionally valued. Depending on the results of that valuation, items could then either
 - i) be transferred to a museum which actively collects such material and is able to make best use of it in terms of display and interpretation (eg Pitt Rivers in Oxford, British Museum); or
 - ii) (items of higher worth) sold in order to reinvest in the care of the other collections.

The cost of a valuation would be in the order of £3,000. Under the terms of the Collecting Policy, Members would need to sanction any disposal through a Cabinet decision. A paper would be returned to Members for consideration following the evaluation work. At the very least, it would be good practice for insurance purposes to have an updated valuation figure for this collection.

- b) disposal of ceramic building materials. Preliminary costings for the analysis and disposal of 2,500 boxes, approximately nine months' work, are in the region of £45,000 to £57,000. Other avenues are being explored to see if this figure can be reduced, for example by directly employing an archaeologist on a short term or freelance basis or through negotiation. This would be a cost arising from the removal from the Bar End store, and it is therefore proposed that it should be considered as part of the wider project cost for the depot site. A final figure will therefore be returned to Members with the next depot project report.
- c) commissioning an external review of the whole collection, with recommendations on further options for dispersal and rationalisation. This would take into account the planned joint working with other Hampshire authorities, once Members had made an in principle decision to proceed with the partnership plans outlined in [CAB2129 - Winchester Museums: Opportunities for Partnership Working, March 2011](#). The review would seek to reduce duplication and emphasize synergies where they exist. The potential cost of such a commission would be £25,000. This would form part of the start-up costs for the museums project, and officers would incorporate it into the relevant figures, to be returned to Members at a later date.
- d) following through the actions from the above review, which would potentially involve additional cost to employ temporary specialists and/or project staff where the skills/time no longer exist within the museums service.

3.4 ***Reducing the incoming flow of deposits***: options include:

- a) refusing to accept any more archives resulting from excavation and fieldwork in the city and district. Some museums (Cambridgeshire, Kent, Northamptonshire and Sheffield among others) are already taking this approach. This would limit further storage requirements. The disadvantages would be that the existing collection would, over time, diminish in importance. A key principle of any such move should, in stewardship terms, be that site archives are kept where the site itself has been destroyed. It does not matter which body keeps the archives, as long as it's publicly accessible and properly looked after, but there may be local discontent if deposits are passed to other archives or collectors. The Federation of Archaeological Managers and Employers (FAME) has warned of

diminishing opportunities for storing excavation archives, although there is growing national acceptance that it is time to look more carefully at whether keeping everything that is found is really sustainable. It is not proposed that the Council adopts this policy at the present time.

- b) accepting only the most significant (ie complete, rare, high quality) deposits for the 'live' collections by further refining our approach to collecting through stricter acquisition guidelines for staff. Such collections would include topographical art, which has a real value in terms of recording visually the history of the District and in terms of appeal to local residents, but which can suffer from a lack of budgetary provision for conservation. New guidelines would also apply to the photographic collection, which is also well used in exhibitions and the subject of regular enquiries, but often brings bulk donations which are problematic in terms of staff time for cataloguing. Officers would now be more selective, accepting only the 'gems' from bigger collections to minimise work but preserve a useful record. It is proposed that the Collecting and Collections Management Policy be revised to reflect this approach..

3.5 ***Increasing income:*** there are three options proposed here:

- a) a one-off 'dowry' is payable to the Council for archaeological deposits, which – in theory - helps defray the cost of the long-term storage of the archive. The charge is currently £16 per box and the total generated was £1,000 in 2009/10 and nothing in 2010/11, although known deposits for 2011/12 will generate a rather higher figure. However, the reality is that these charges are unlikely ever to provide the level of guaranteed income needed to pay for the storage overheads but they make a contribution to essential repairs and conservation work, as well as improvements to the Historic Environment Record which is extensively consulted by local developers. A recent comparison suggests that £25 per box would be more in line with other museum services, and officers propose to introduce the new charges with immediate effect.
- b) officers propose that the art collection is valued, and that consideration is given to Members of the sale of less relevant pieces (eg those that do not align with the Collecting Policy or add no clear value to the collection) in order to fund the much-needed conservation of others. This need has been highlighted by the re-hanging of pictures at the refurbished Guildhall. Because of lack of funds, the collection has not been properly valued for over a decade which in itself presents a problem for insurance purposes. A full valuation would cost in the order of £3,000. It is also proposed - but for good practice purposes, rather than with a view to disposal, given the limited size of the collection - that the civic silver collection be valued, at a similar cost.

c) gaining Designated Status for the collections would provide access to national challenge funding, which could support work on the collections in future. A bid for Designation was made last year and turned down by the national panel, but the feedback suggested that a different approach might yield a different result at a second attempt. There is no cost – other than officer time – for such a submission, but officers would suggest that the involvement of an external consultant as a ‘critical friend’ would give the best chance of success. Three or four days of consultant input (at an estimated cost of £2,000) would be appropriate, given the size of the submission. This could be found from within existing budgets.

3.6 Members are asked to consider these options, which are summarised with appropriate recommendations in the table below.

Para	Option	Cost	Funding option	Recommendation
3.3 a	Valuation of ethnography collection	£3,000	Risk management budget	Implement - officers to proceed, with a further report on dispersal proposal to be returned to Cabinet in due course
3.3 b	Disposal of ceramic building materials	Up to £57k	Growth required	Officers to seek alternative costings and Members to reconsider as part of future report on Bar End project.
3.3 c	External collections review	£25k	Growth required	Members to consider as part of start-up cost for integrated museum project, if approved in principal in July 2011.
3.3 d	Recommended actions following above	N/k	Growth required	Possible growth bid for 12/13 and 13/14 budget cycles.
3.4 a	Refusing to accept any further archaeological deposits	No cost	No cost, but no immediate cash or labour saving either	<i>Not recommended - review option once other dispersal action has been completed.</i>
3.4 b	Introduce stricter guidelines for contributions to the collections	No cost	No cost, some reduction of pressure on curatorial team	Implement – officers to revise Collecting Policy and return for Cabinet adoption in June 2011.
3.5 a	Increase ‘dowry’ charge for archaeological deposits to £25 per box	No cost	Increased income to pay for minor repairs and conservation	Implement – increase in fees proposed above
3.5 b	Valuation of art and civic silver collections	£6,000	Risk management budget	Implement - officers to proceed, with a further report on disposal options

				relating to art collection only to be returned to Cabinet in due course.
3.5 c	Reapply for Designated Status, with support of a consultant	Max £2k	To be found from within existing budgets	Implement – Member approval not necessary.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

4 SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY AND CHANGE PLANS (RELEVANCE TO):

- 4.1 The work of the museums service has made a major contribution to the reputation of Winchester as a cultural centre over the decades. The archaeology collection in particular is of international significance. As has been routinely mentioned in previous reports, the work of the Winchester Excavations Committee has been regarded as so important that it was named in a feature in *The Times* of 1 January 2000 as one of the top ten archaeological projects of world importance in the 20th century.
- 4.2 The Sustainable Community Strategy's economic prosperity outcome includes the theme of 'exploiting Winchester's cultural strengths, heritage and historic environment...to stimulate a modern and creative approach to business'. The museums and the reserve collections embody the District's special historic qualities, which in turn attract entrepreneurs, visitors and students to Winchester.
- 4.3 Finding the most efficient way to house and manage the reserve collections is also important in terms of delivering the corporate 'efficient and effective Council' outcome.

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 5.1 Some financial resources are already approved for the rehousing of the reserve collection held at the Bar End archaeological store as part of the wider Bar End redevelopment project. These are shown as £100k removal and fit out budget, plus £44k per annum rental budget (£22k in 2011/12) in the revenue budget approved in February ([CAB2125](#)). Earlier reports on the Bard End project give further detail: see CAB2027, July 2010, and CAB2072, October 2010, both exempt.
- 5.2 There is an additional cost associated with the three insurance valuations for the art, civic silver and ethnography collections proposed in section 3 of this report. These are expected to total around £9,000, to be found from the risk management budget.

- 6.4 No growth is required at this stage, although other proposals in section 3 will require additional funding and this will be identified in relevant future reports relating to the Bar End depot project, the possible integrated museum project and so on.

6 RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

- 6.1 The issues and opportunities outlined in this report are designed to manage the increasing risk to the Council of the cost of provision of museum services. Although other districts have had service level agreements (SLA) with Hampshire to provide museum services over the years, Winchester is the only District in the county to own, manage and maintain its own museum service. Because of the scale of its collections this represents a very significant and potentially increasing overhead. Other districts are reducing their SLAs with the County to save costs, but Winchester does not have this option.
- 6.2 There is potential for reputational risk to the Council in not assessing the implications of the moral, ethical and legal responsibilities attached to the stewardship of its extensive collections. This paper is intended to provide a package of pragmatic options for rationalising these collections, which are held on behalf of the people of the Winchester District.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

None

APPENDICES:

Appendix 1: Extract from Winchester Museums Collecting and Collections Management Policy

Appendix 1: Extract from Winchester Museums Collecting and Collections Management Policy

1.12 Disposal procedures

- a) By definition, the museum has a long-term purpose and should possess (or intend to acquire) permanent collections in relation to its stated objectives. The governing body accepts the principle that, except for sound curatorial reasons, there is a strong presumption against the disposal of any items in the museum's collection.
- b) The museum will establish that it is legally free to dispose of an item. Any decision to dispose of material from the collections will be taken only after due consideration.
- c) When disposal of a museum object is being considered, the museum will establish if it was acquired with the aid of an external funding organisation. In such cases, any conditions attached to the original grant will be followed. This may include repayment of the original grant.
- d) Decisions to dispose of items will not be made with the principal aim of generating funds.
- e) Any monies received by the museum governing body from the disposal of items will be applied for the benefit of the collections. This normally means the purchase of further acquisitions but in exceptional cases improvements relating to the care of collections may be justifiable. Advice on these cases will be sought from MLA.
- f) 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), will be the responsibility of the governing body of the museum acting on the advice of professional curatorial staff, if any, and not of the curator of the collection acting alone.
- g) Once a decision to dispose of material in the collection has been taken, priority will be given to retaining it within the public domain, unless it is to be destroyed. It will therefore be offered in the first instance, by gift, exchange or sale, directly to other Accredited Museums likely to be interested in its acquisition.
- h) If the material is not acquired by any Accredited Museums to which it was offered directly, then the museum community at large will be advised of the intention to dispose of the material, normally through an announcement in the Museums Association's Museums Journal, and in other professional journals where appropriate.
- i) The announcement will indicate the number and nature of specimens or objects involved, and the basis on which the material will be

transferred to another institution. Preference will be given to expressions of interest from other Accredited Museums. A period of at least two months will be allowed for an interest in acquiring the material to be expressed. At the end of this period, if no expressions of interest have been received, the museum may consider disposing of the material to other interested individuals and organisations.

- j) Full records will be kept of all decisions on disposals and the items involved and proper arrangements made for the preservation and/or transfer, as appropriate, of the documentation relating to the items concerned, including photographic records where practicable in accordance with SPECTRUM Procedure on de-accession and disposal.