



Birmingham Museums Trust Exhibitions Policy 2024-2029

1. Introduction

This Exhibitions Policy outlines Birmingham Museums Trust (BMT)'s approach to its temporary exhibitions programme. It summarises BMT's exhibition aims, priorities, and decision-making process. The policy was approved by BMT's board of trustees on 15th November 2024.

The Exhibitions Programme plays a key role in helping BMT deliver on its vision, guiding principles and aims:

Our Vision: we will boost Birmingham's place in the national story by shining a light on people's stories, collection and creativity. Trust, joy and belonging is what we do.

Our guiding principles: democracy, creativity, representation, cultural diversity, place-making, and climate engagement.

Our Strategic Aims:

1. **Experience** – we aim to create fun, meaningful, involving experiences for the full diversity of our communities and their uses of our collection and services.
2. **Infrastructure** – we aim to place our sites and collections at the heart of Birmingham's communities and ensure inclusive access to all of these, including digital access.
3. **People** – we aim to be a boldly progressive organisation, increasingly rooted in and porous to Birmingham's communities, with the skills and culture to engage with its audiences.
4. **Financial** – we aim to be a sustainable, more independent organisation that provides affordable, surplus-generating paid services and experiences that add value to Birmingham, and will have secured funding to support its priority capital projects

2. Exhibition Aims

Birmingham Museums' exhibitions aim to help us tell different stories about Birmingham and the world; to grow our audiences to reach more, and different people; and to contribute to increasing our financial sustainability.

3. Policy Scope

Birmingham Museums Trust provides temporary exhibitions and changing displays across its different venues and online, with different aims, audiences and selection criteria for each.

This policy relates primarily to our larger temporary exhibitions programme which takes place in the Gas Hall and Waterhall at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery (BMAG), and the Spotlight Gallery at Thinktank. Changing collection displays at BMAG, Thinktank, and the Historic Properties, and exhibitions away from BMT sites either touring to other museums, at community venues or using our outdoor exhibition equipment are not covered by this policy. Information on these display venues and how decisions are made for these is provided in the appendices.

Exhibitions are selected with the aim of achieving an inclusive and balanced programme, informed by knowledge of our audiences and potential audiences; learning from past exhibitions; and exploring a broad range of artistic, historic, and contemporary themes across the years.

BMT's Exhibition Programming priorities for 2024-29 are:

- Showcasing world class content that resonates with BMT's principles of democracy, creativity, representation, cultural diversity, place-making, and climate engagement
- Inspiring hope, social trust, belonging and joy
- Growing existing audiences and developing under-represented audiences
- Making Birmingham's collections accessible to different audiences
- Generating income

4. Venues

BMT's locations for larger temporary exhibitions include:

- The Gas Hall at BMAG, one of the largest museum exhibition spaces in England outside London at around 900m². This is BMT's flagship exhibition space and is used for ticketed exhibitions. Exhibitions may include contemporary or historic art, history, popular culture, and will consist of collections, loans, AV and/or immersive experiences.
- The Waterhall in BMAG is around 400m². This is used for ticketed exhibitions, often at a lower price point than the Gas Hall. Exhibition content will be similar to that of the Gas Hall but on a smaller scale.
- The Spotlight Gallery at Thinktank is 180m². This is used for exhibitions which are included in the Thinktank ticket price. Exhibition content will be related to Thinktank's themes of science, natural science, industry and innovation.

For information on BMT's additional temporary display spaces, please see the appendices.

5. How we decide

Exhibition proposals may be received through open call-outs, be submitted independently, or generated internally. Depending on the location and scale for each proposal, they will be considered in different ways.

Planning and exhibition proposals for the Gas Hall, Waterhall and Spotlight Gallery will be initially taken to the Exhibitions Circle, who are empowered to make decisions for BMT. Depending on the financial value and risk of a proposal, wider 'circles' may need to be consulted for further approval.

Decisions will be made on the basis of:

- Financial viability including income generation, and viability of timescales and resource.
- Relevance to past and planned exhibitions to create a coherent and balanced programme to attract a range of target audiences.
- Ability of the exhibition to deliver on BMT's vision, principles and aims.
- Likely audience for the exhibition, whether offering something new for existing audiences or being likely to reach a new audience.

Planning for smaller temporary exhibitions at Blakesley Hall and Soho House, where the exhibition will be either free-to-access or included in the ticket price, will be made at the Programming Circle.

Decisions will be made on the basis of:

- Viability of timescales and resources

- Ability of the exhibition to deliver on BMT’s principles and aims
- Likely audience for the exhibition
- Suitability to the venue and its aims

Planning for collection displays at BMAG, Thinktank or the Historic Properties, which are either free-to-access or included in the ticket price, but where the display forms part of the main function of the venue, will be made at the Experience Circle.

Planning for exhibitions at non-BMT venues will be made:

- For exhibitions generated by BMT and touring to other venues, decision made at Exhibitions Circle
- For loans to exhibitions at other venues, decision made at Collections Circle
- For outdoor exhibitions using BMT’s outdoor exhibition equipment, decision made at Experience Circle
- For exhibitions at community venues, decision made at Experience Circle.

BMT is committed to democratising its decision-making, both internally and externally. This policy, along with clear guidance on how to submit a proposal for an exhibition or display, will be shared on BMT’s website from 2025. Over 2025-26, we aim to develop processes by which people in the city can contribute to decisions concerning BMT’s exhibitions programme. This will be shaped as part of the Participation Framework and may include:

- Future iterations of the Citizens’ Jury
- Evaluation and consultation within venues
- Targeted partnerships with community groups to co-produce displays

6. Policy Review

This Exhibitions Policy will be published and reviewed from time to time, at least once every five years. The next date for review will be no later than November 2029. This policy supersedes all previous versions. Any changes made before that date will be highlighted in a Change Control log.

7. CHANGE CONTROL

Issue	Date	Author	Comments

Appendix 1 Wider Context: BMT Displays and Other Types of Exhibitions

1.1 Changing Displays at BMT Venues

BMT is committed to regularly changing its collection and non-collection displays across its venues. This includes:

- Displays in the free-to-access galleries at BMAG
- Displays in the free-to-access areas at Blakesley Hall, Soho House, Museum of the Jewellery Quarter and Weoley Castle
- Displays in the ticketed areas at Aston Hall, Blakesley Hall, Sarehole Mill, Soho House, Museum of the Jewellery Quarter and Thinktank

BMT also aims to deliver more displays away from its sites. This may include:

- Touring exhibitions to other museum venues in the UK and internationally
- Object loans to other museums' exhibitions (see Lending Guidelines and Procedures)
- Outdoor displays using BMT's outdoor exhibition equipment
- Collection or non-collection displays in non-museum settings across Birmingham

The criteria, selection method and model for development of each of these settings varies, but any display must:

- Contribute to BMT's overall Vision and Aims
- Be in line with BMT's guiding principles
- Offer something new to existing audiences and/or grow new audiences through content that reflects learning from consultation and engagement.

1.2 Information on BMT Venues' Display Spaces

In addition to the exhibition and display spaces at BMAG and Thinktank, below is a summary of the display spaces at BMT's other venues:

- Aston Hall: has no designated temporary exhibitions space. Small displays may take place in the Hall itself, or be developed through collection redispays and reinterpretation of the Hall, and would be included with the entry price,
- Blakesley Hall: has a small exhibition space primarily for 2D works, within the free-to-access Visitor Centre. Other small displays may take place in the Hall itself or be developed through redispays of the interpretation of the Hall and be included with the entry price or using BMT's outdoor exhibition equipment in the free-to-access garden.
- Soho House: has a small exhibition space within the free-to-access Visitor Centre. Other small displays may take place in the House itself or be developed through redispays of the interpretation of the House and be included with the entry price.
- Sarehole Mill: has no designated exhibition space. Small displays may take place in the Mill itself or be developed through redispays of the interpretation of the Mill and be included with the entry price.
- Weoley Castle: very small displays may take place in the free-to-access Visitor Centre, but this is only open on set days throughout the year and is a low priority.
- Museum of the Jewellery Quarter: has a small free-to-access temporary exhibition space, and collection displays within the ticketed area of the museum.
- Museum Collection Centre: minimal display space in the foyer which will be prioritised for display through community partnerships.

1.3 Information on non-BMT Venue Exhibitions

- Touring exhibitions: BMT works with partner organisations to both host and create touring exhibitions. Loaned-in or -out exhibitions will be agreed in the Exhibitions Circle, further supported by the Collections Circle, and delivered in line with Lending Guidelines and Procedures.
- Loans: BMT is committed to supporting exhibitions at other venues through the loan of collection items. Loans are delivered in line with Lending Guidelines and Procedures.
- Outdoor exhibitions: BMT owns a suite of exhibition equipment suitable for outdoor 2D (reproduction) exhibitions. These will be used for either internally generated exhibitions, or for hire to external partners.
- Community venues: BMT is committed to piloting small displays at non-museum community venues to reach new audiences. These displays will be agreed in line with BMT's Lending Guidelines and Procedures.