Birmingham Museums

Birmingham Museums Trust

Collections Management Framework

Appendix 3.1 Collections Access Policy 2025 – 2030

1. INTRODUCTION

This document provides an overview of Birmingham Museums Trust's (BMT) policy regarding access to the collection and associated collections information for the widest possible audiences regardless of age, background or ability. This Collections Access Policy was agreed by Birmingham Museum Trust's Board of Trustees on 11 July 2025 and by Birmingham City Council on 15 July 2025 and replaces all previous versions. This policy is for the period 15 July 2025 – 31 March 2030.

This Collections Access Policy forms part of the wider Collections Management Framework, which supports BMT to achieve its charity objects (its purpose), vision and strategic aims. These are:

Charity Objects

To advance education by the operation, maintenance, development and promotion of museums, galleries and libraries in Birmingham together with associated facilities and related programmes of outreach and research, fostering knowledge, understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of the arts, history, science and technology by residents and visitors to the City of Birmingham.

Vision

A radical reinvention of the museum as a catalyst of cultural and social change.

Mission

Bring Birmingham out by shining new light on people's stories, collections and creativity.

Strategic Aims

1. **Experience** – to create fun, meaningful, involving experiences for the full diversity of our communities and their uses of our collection and services.

2. **Infrastructure** – to be at the heart of Birmingham's communities, providing inclusive access to the peoples' sites and collections, including digital access

3. **People** – 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** – to be a sustainable, more independent organisation that provides affordable, surplus-generating paid services and experiences that add social and economic value to Birmingham, and will have secured funding to support its priority capital projects

2. COMMITMENT TO PROVIDING ACCESS

BMT is committed to maximising access to the collection and the associated information we hold on it; to make it more accessible, relevant and meaningful to the people of Birmingham, as well as for wider national and international audiences through lending and digital programmes. We will enable access with the resources available to BMT and in balance with the care and management of the collection.

We will make BMT's collections, and its related sites and services, more accessible by recognising and working to remove or reduce barriers to people engaging with us. Barriers may include physical and sensory barriers, intellectual barriers, cultural and attitudinal barriers, or financial barriers, and our audiences may be impacted by one or more of these at any time.

We will work to ensure our sites, where collections are held, are welcoming and engaging to all visitors, staff and volunteers; that our collections and related displays and programmes are representative; and that everyone can feel their stories and lives are valued and included in the museums' work.

3. POLICY AIMS

- To highlight to all visitors, staff and volunteers Birmingham Museums' commitment to public access to the collection and the information we hold on it.
- To outline our understanding of barriers to accessing the collection and the information we hold on it.
- To identify areas of activity to improve access to the collection including:
  - Physical access
  - Digital access
  - Learning and research

  [see section 7]

4. RELATED POLICIES AND LEGISLATION

Birmingham Museums will comply with all relevant legislation relating to this policy, including but not limited to the following:

- Equality Act, 2010
- Disability Discrimination Act, 2005
- Freedom of Information Act, 2000
- Data Protection Act 2018, and the General Data Protection Regulation 2018.

It is informed by the following ethical codes:

- Museum Association Code of Ethics for Museums
- BS EN 17820:2023 Conservation of Cultural Heritage- Specifications for the Management of Moveable Cultural Heritage Collections

It is related to the following BMT policies:

- Access & Inclusion Policy 2024-2029
- Collections Management Framework including Collections Development Policy, Collections Documentation Policy, Collections Care and Conservation Policy and Lending Guidelines and Procedures

5. ACCESS STATEMENT

The Collections Access Policy supports BMT's wider access statement as outlined in its Access and Inclusion Policy 2024-29:

We want everyone who connects with us, physically or digitally, to feel included and to be enabled to enjoy our collections, exhibitions, programmes and venues.

We recognise that there are many barriers that currently prevent people from being able to do so, and which limit access to the full range of BMT's work. We aim to identify, challenge, and reduce these as far as possible through consulting with users, non-users, and specialists to identify barriers to access and inclusion, and put in place plans to mitigate or remove these.

At BMT, ensuring equity of access and inclusion is a part of everyone's role, and we encourage everyone to think about how they can ensure their work will meet the needs of as many people as possible. BMT also has specific working groups whose remit includes an oversight of this work.

6. BARRIERS TO ACCESS

We recognise there are a number of factors that may prevent people from accessing our collection; the information we hold on it; and our venues, products, services and programmes. We will seek to ensure equitable access by addressing the following potential barriers:

Physical – we will provide the best possible access to our sites, making alternative provision where necessary.

Sensory - we will build a wide range of sensory experiences into aspects of all our collections programmes and services.

Intellectual – we will provide a range of experiences and interpretation in response to people's different learning styles.

Cultural – we will welcome and value visitors from differing backgrounds, and actively engage with people to collect and display objects in ways that tell stories about the changing city, its communities and the wider world.

Attitudinal – we will foster mutual respect for people from differing backgrounds, and provide safe spaces where people can come to share experiences and explore new relationships, including at the Museum Collections Centre.

Language – we will work towards providing introductory information on all our sites in languages other than English.

Economic – we will minimise financial barriers to access while ensuring the sustainability of Birmingham Museums.

7. COLLECTIONS ACCESS AND ENGAGEMENT

Collections Access for BMT means people having access to and making use of their civic collection and its associated information, as well as having the opportunity to participate in the care and management of it.

BMT will provide access to the collection through:

Physical Access

- Collection displays and temporary or touring exhibitions

- Publicly accessible collection storage spaces
- Dynamic Collections programme (in-person and offsite at non-museums)
- Research & public enquiries access
- Loans
- Utilising surrogates (replicas)
- In-person volunteering

Digital Access

- Digital access to collections information
- Image request service
- Public enquiries service
- Dynamic Collections (digital volunteering)
- Digital creating, curating and commissioning

Learning and Research Access

These are detailed in the sections below.

7.1 PHYSICAL ACCESS

7.1.1 Collection Displays and Temporary or Touring Exhibitions

BMT will provide physical access to the collection through temporary and long-term collections displays across its nine museum sites, enabling the collection to be displayed in different contexts to tell different stories for different audiences. Public opening times and visitor access information for each museum will be stated on BMT's website as well as for visitors on-site.

BMT will use Interpretation Guidelines, audience consultation, community partnerships, and – for bigger projects - access consultants when planning collection displays to ensure they are physically, sensory and intellectually accessible to wider audiences. A variety of interpretative methods will be used to make collection displays accessible, from fixed and hand-held graphic interpretation and hands-on interactives to guided tours and audio guides.

Temporary and touring exhibitions will afford opportunities to focus on particular topics or issues, to look at the collection in different ways, and to bring in objects and expertise from elsewhere to reach and engage wider audiences within and beyond Birmingham. See BMT's Exhibitions Policy.

7.1.2 Publicly Accessible Collection Storage Spaces

BMT believes collections should always be publicly accessible, even when not in 'curated' public displays. When not on display all collections except 2D Fine Art are stored at the Museum Collections Centre (MCC), a publicly accessible museum providing both collections care and safe storage as well as public access to ensure the use and enjoyment of the collection. The MCC is wheelchair accessible, open to public on a weekly basis for tours, collections volunteering and participation programmes, and by appointment for focused public enquirers and researchers. The MCC also stages large-scale public Open Days twice a year to reach wider audiences across the city.

When not on display all 2D fine art collections are stored at Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery in newly refurbished (2023/24) and more publicly accessible stores, providing facilitated access for pubic enquires, researchers and groups by appointment.

Access to collection items that are culturally sensitive, hazardous to health or subject to legislative requirements, conditions of deposit, significant security, or collection care considerations may be restricted or allow facilitated access only. The competing demands of access and long-term care will be managed in accordance with the outcome of collection care risk assessments.

7.1.3 Dynamic Collections (in-person, onsite and offsite across Birmingham)

BMT's Dynamic Collections programme is a 10 year programme (2022-2032) to establish a democratised, participation-centred model of collections management and access. It aims to create new opportunities for Birmingham citizens to engage with the collections; to deliver BMT's vision of social purpose (helping break down barriers to skills development, learning, health and wellbeing); and to ultimately support BMT in creating a complete publicly accessible collection database. The programme will provide onsite and online opportunities (see 7.2.3) for community groups to regularly take part in collection audit, documentation, research, photography and conservation activities. Workshops and events will be designed to support the specific access needs of each group and/or individual.

The Dynamic Collections programme also aims to take collections out to non-museum community venues where they can be displayed, accessed and enjoyed by wider audiences who are unable or less able to visit one of BMT's museums in-person.

7.1.4 Research and Public Enquiries Access (or merge with 7.1.2)

BMT will provide a monthly collection-in-storage access day for researchers and specific public enquiries by appointment, enabling access to the physical objects, to the collections information including accession registers, object history files and related ephemera. Where resources allow, additional or more regular access to the collection and its information will be supported for researchers of collaborative research projects between BMT and Higher Education Institutions.

Curatorial and Collections staff will further provide consultation and advisory services to wider BMT staff in support of collections, learning, participatory, commercial, redisplays and wider programmes.

7.1.5 Loans

BMT is committed to lending objects from its collection to other galleries, museums and organisations within the UK and internationally, to increase access. We welcome long term loans enabling objects to remain accessible on public display rather than in our stores, and we support loans to local non-museum community partners and venues who might otherwise be less able to visit BMT sites. Lending items is an important way of making our collections more widely available to the public and enables those who are unable to visit the city to enjoy and learn from the collection. See BMT's Lending Guidelines and Procedures.

7.1.6 Utilising Surrogates (replicas)

BMT will sometimes uses surrogates (replicas) of original objects where it supports closer physical, sensory or intellectual access to a unique item that might otherwise be at risk of

damage or less accessible due to its size and nature. BMAG will always clearly communicate if an item is a replica and not an original.

7.1.7 In-person volunteering

Volunteers are at the heart of the work we do and the change we want to see. Volunteers bring skills and knowledge that we otherwise may not have and reach into their own communities. BMT will seek to grow volunteering opportunities for the people of Birmingham to actively participate in the care, management and development of their civic museum collection across our different sites. From collections conserving, auditing, researching, documenting, photographing, deciding on acquisitions, or curating collection displays, BMT remains committed to removing any barriers to local people accessing these volunteering opportunities.

7.2 DIGITAL ACCESS

7.2.1 Digital Access to Collections Information

BMT will provide public digital access to collection information via BMT's website www.birminghammuseums.org.uk and through independent public collection databases supported by BMT, such as www.bbc.co.uk/arts/yourpaintings

BMT will use third party websites where collections are shared for wider online user access enjoyment. These include Youtube, Flikr, Unsplash, Pinterest, X.

7.2.2 Digital Asset Resource

BMT will provide free public access and reuse of images of its collection, sites and exhibitions as well as other content including audio files from the City Sound Archive (within stated parameters), via its Digital Asset Resource http://dams.birminghammuseums.org.uk/

Out-of-copyright collection images will be made freely available to download and reuse under a Creative Commons CC0 licence, at a size of up to 3Mb files and up to 300dpi. This is supported by BMT Public Task Statement. City Sound Archive audio files will be released under a Creative Commons BY-NC 4.0 license, and can be downloaded for non-commercial use only.

BMT's will provide a Picture Library service enabling access to downloadable, higher resolution collection images including for commercial purposes, if an object is out of copyright and for which there may be a fee.

7.2.3 Online Public Enquiries

BMT will support online public enquiries service, for specific enquiries concerning collection items and wider BMT services and programmes. Where enquiries are unrelated to BMT or its collection then staff will – where possible – advise where to find relevant information.

7.2.3 Dynamic Collections (Digital)

BMT's Dynamic Collections programme [see 7.1.3] will deliver online mass-participation collections programmes such as 'Documentation Detectives', recruiting large numbers of online volunteers through an online crowdsourcing platform to transcribe and improve BMT's collections data records on a large scale.

Under this same programme BMT will provide participatory digital access to the Oral History digital collections through Voices of the City (digital volunteering programme, community steering group and community-shaped public programmes) and the Public Health partnership (digital volunteering programme, and public programmes using digital collections to impact population health).

Where collections information shared online may cause potential harm to the public, content warning notes will be communicated prior to receiving any information, and a BMT Take Down Policy is in place to review content in quick response to any concerns.

7.2.6 Digital creating and curating

Through the Creative Commons CC0 licence, BMT will encourage online users and commission digital creatives, to use the digital collection assets to create and curate unique digital exhibitions, artworks and experiences that further widen public access to, engagement with and interpretation of the collection.

7.3 LEARNING AND RESEARCH ACCESS

BMT creates annual learning and engagement programmes directly inspired by the collections. Promoting collection access and discovery remains central to the learning provisions, with BMT creating a diverse range of experiences for lifelong learners to develop an understanding of and access to the objects.

The newly established Learning and Research team at Birmingham Museum's Trust presents a key opportunity to establish new a new strategic approach. Enabling access to the collection through multiple learning and research programmes will drive the development of a new Learning and Research Strategy (to be developed collaboratively in 2025).

It is essential that lifelong learners have multiple methods of engagement with the collection through rich and varied learning and research programmes and we are committed to enabling this through:

- Vibrant and engaging family programming during school holidays
- Curriculum mapped school sessions for EYFS and KS1-4, with a renewed focus on gallery based learning to ensure maximum collection access
- An annual programme of bespoke school projects and activities designed to pilot and test new approaches to collections access as part of our strategy development
- Early years programming, providing meaningful collection focussed exploration for our youngest visitors
- A vibrant public programme of special events and collaborative projects
- Museum in a Box, a popular museum handling outreach service for local schools and community groups

8. IDENTIFYING NEEDS OF USERS AND NON-USERS

Birmingham Museums Trust is committed to working with the people of Birmingham to identify their needs and barriers to accessing and engaging with the collection and the nine sites where it is held, and to work together to mitigate those barriers as far as possible. We will identify the needs of users and non-users through:

- Market research into current and potential audiences
- Visitor evaluation across our sites on a regular annual basis
- Evaluation of bespoke collections programmes such as Dynamic Collections
- Community partner panel(s) to advise and steer the nature of our collections services
- Site access audits

9. MONITORING PROGRESS

BMT will monitor the implementation of this policy and its resulting programmes through monthly meetings of BMT's Collections Working Circle (formerly titled 'Collections Committee'), the actions and minutes of which are reported to and approved by the Co-CEOs and Senior Leadership Team.

Such progress is also reported to BMT's Board of Trustees on a quarterly and annual basis, as well as to the owner of the collection – Birmingham City Council and its relevant representatives.

10. POLICY REVIEW PROCEDURE

This Collections Access 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 March 2030. This policy supersedes all previous versions.

11. CHANGE CONTROL

Issue	Date	Author	Comments