Birmingham Museums

Birmingham Museums Trust

Collections Management Framework 2025-2030

Birmingham Museums Trust

Collections Management Framework 2025-2030

This Collections Management Framework 2025-30 was agreed by Birmingham Museums Trust's (BMT) Board of Trustees on 11 July 2025 and by Birmingham City Council (BCC) on 15 July 2025.

This Collections Management Framework will be published and reviewed from time to time, at least once every five years or at the expiry of the Agreement. The next date for review will be no later than 31 March 2030.

The Collections Management Framework 2025-30, which comprises this document and its related appendices, replaces the previous Collections Management Framework 2020-25 and its related appendices. The Framework has been written to meet the requirements of

- the UK Museum Accreditation Standard
- Spectrum, the UK museums' collections management standard
- The Code of Ethics for museums
- BS EN 17820:2023 Conservation of Cultural Heritage- Specifications for the Management of Moveable Cultural Heritage Collections

1. INTRODUCTION

<u>This Collections Management Framework is for the period 15 July 2025 – 31 March 2030</u>.

The Collections Management Framework concerns the management of Birmingham City Council's Museum collection, managed on its behalf by Birmingham Museums Trust in accordance with the Service Level Agreement, and in the context of the nine museum sites operated by Birmingham Museums Trust (BMT). These sites comprise: Aston Hall, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery (BMAG), Blakesley Hall, Museum Collections Centre, Museum of the Jewellery Quarter, Sarehole Mill, Soho House, Thinktank Birmingham Science Museum and Weoley Castle.

The Collections Management Framework sets out Birmingham Museums Trust's policies, plans, processes and procedures for undertaking and improving the management of the collection over the period 2025-30 including the development of, information on, access to, and care of the collection. The Collections Development Policy 2020-26, which forms part of this Framework, expires 31 March 2026 and will be replaced with an updated Collections Development Policy 2026-30 to align with the 31 March 2030 review date for this overall Framework.

This framework is supported by the accompanying appendices:

1. Development of the Collection

Appendix 1.1: Collections Development Policy 2020-26
Appendix 1.2: Archaeological Archive Standards

2. Information on the Collection

Appendix 2.1: Documentation Policy 2025-2030

Appendix 2.2: Documentation Plan 2025-2030

3. Access to the Collection

Appendix 3.1: Collections Access Policy 2025-30
Appendix 3.2: Lending Guidelines & Procedures

4. Care of the Collection

Appendix 4.1: Collections Care and Conservation Policy 2025-2030
Appendix 4.2: Collections Care and Conservation Plan 2025-2030
Appendix 4.3 Working Objects Policy 2025-2030

The Collections Management Framework and related policies, guidelines and plans support BMT to achieve its charity objects, vision and strategic aims, through its commitment to managing the collection. These are:

Birmingham Museums Trust 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 COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT POLICY

2.1 Legal and Statutory Basis

In 2012 Birmingham City Council established a wholly owned charitable company named Birmingham Museums Trust ("BMT"), operating as Birmingham Museums. BMT currently has two wholly owned subsidiary companies, Thinktank Trust (a charity) and Birmingham Museums Trading Limited.

The Council initially entered into an agreement on 30 March 2012 with BMT to provide museum and collection services on its behalf (together "the Agreement"), with further extensions agreed over the coming seven years. The Agreement, dated 5 March 2019 is for the twenty-five-year period 1 April 2019 – 31 March 2043, it was further updated and signed on 8 November 2022.

These services include the operation of museums within the city of Birmingham which are owned by the Council, being Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery, Thinktank Birmingham Science Museum, Aston Hall, Soho House, Blakesley Hall, Sarehole Mill, Museum of the Jewellery Quarter, Weoley Castle and the Museum Collections Centre.

The accessioned collection which is held in the museums ("the Collection") remains in the ownership of the Council and contractual arrangements are in place between the Council and BMT whereby BMT is granted certain rights and undertakes certain obligations in relation to the Collection. These rights and obligations include the management, display, preservation and maintenance of the Collection and are specified under the terms of the Agreement between the Council and BMT.

2.2 Purpose of the Framework

The Collections Management Framework (this document and its associated appendices) sets out how BMT will manage and develop the Collection in its care and will be reviewed regularly by both the Council and the Board of Trustees of BMT. The adoption and implementation of this Framework and its related policies by the Council and the Board of Trustees of BMT is a requirement of the Arts Council England Accreditation Standard. The rights and obligations of BMT in relation to the Collection including lending, acquisition and disposal, are specified under the terms of the Agreement and must also conform to the standards of the Accreditation Scheme.

BMT cares for the Collection owned by or on loan to the Council. The Board of Trustees of BMT accepts the general principle that it is their responsibility to ensure to the best of their ability that all of the Collection in the care of BMT is adequately housed, conserved and documented, and to prepare reports to the Council on the Collection as specified in the monitoring arrangement of the Agreement.

3 ACQUISITIONS

It is the intention of BMT to continue to develop the Collection by adding new acquisitions on behalf of the Council. BMT recognises its responsibility, in acquiring additions to the Collection, to ensure that collection care, documentation and use of the Collection will meet the standards of the Accreditation Scheme and the terms of the Agreement. The Collections Development Policy 2020-26 expires 31 March 2026 and will be replaced with an updated Collections Development Policy 2026-30 to align with the 31 March 2030 review date for this overall Collections Management Framework.

3.1 Due Diligence

BMT will exercise due diligence and make every effort not to acquire on behalf of the Council, whether by purchase, gift, bequest or exchange, any object or specimen unless the Director of Collections and Estate is satisfied that a valid title can be acquired to the object in question.

3.2 Collecting Area

The Collections Development Policy 2020-26 describes detailed strategic objectives and priorities for collecting, and the criteria that will be applied to future acquisitions and disposals, acknowledging that indefinite growth is not sustainable.

Acquisitions outside the stated policy will be made in very exceptional circumstances and then only after proper consideration by BMT, in consultation with the Council and with consideration of the interests of other museums.

3.3 Emergency Rescue

In an emergency, and to ensure the preservation locally (and in public ownership) of important material, the Co-CEOs of BMT are exceptionally authorised to collect material on behalf of the Council from outside BMT's stated collecting area. Such material will be retained and recorded as a '*holding'* on the understanding that it be transferred to the party deemed most appropriate at a future time.

3.4 Acquisitions Process

The acquisitions process is described within the Collections Development Policy 2020-26, which also includes detail on disposals.

4 COLLECTIONS RATIONALISATION AND DISPOSALS

In this Framework the term 'disposal' is used to refer to the transfer, reuse, deaccessioning or disposal of objects in the Collection. If BMT is to be financially and environmentally sustainable, and relevant to the Birmingham communities it serves in the 21st century, then it must take a proactive approach to collections management and review. Ethical transfer, disposal, reuse and deaccessioning are every day and necessary aspects of collections rationalisation for the long-term sustainability of the Collection and the service.

BMT has a long-term purpose and should possess (or intend to acquire) a permanent Collection on behalf of the Council in relation to its stated objectives. The Board of Trustees of BMT accepts the principle that there is a strong presumption against the disposal of objects from the Collection except for sound curatorial, conservation and ethical reasons.

All disposals will be dealt with in accordance with the Museums Association's Code of Ethics and related guidelines for the rationalisation and disposal of collection objects.

4.1 Disposals of Purchases, Donations and Bequests

4.1.1 Grant-aided Purchase: When disposal of an object from the Collection is being considered, BMT will establish if it was acquired with funding from outside bodies or individuals, creating obligations for, or liabilities to, the Council. In such cases, BMT will seek prior written agreement from the Council.

4.1.2 Permissions from Donors or Benefactors: Objects given or bequeathed will not normally be disposed of without consultation with the original donors or their heirs within the first generation, and wherever possible their approval should be obtained to the course of action proposed. This is, however, a matter of courtesy and not a legal requirement. The Co-CEOs of BMT will be able to waive this requirement where all reasonable efforts to trace a Donor have failed, and where it can be firmly established that no details of the Donor exist. In all cases a written report detailing the efforts to locate the Donor must be appended to the Disposal Report.

4.1.3 Return to Donor or Benefactor: The Donor or their successors or the Benefactor may be asked to accept the return of the object when all attempts to dispose of an object to an Accredited or publicly accessible museum have failed.

4.1.4 Museum's Rights: No Donor will be entitled both to veto all practicable transfer options and to refuse to accept the return of the accessioned object. If the Donor refuses to accept the return of the accessioned object then it may be disposed of without the consent of the Donor in accordance with the terms of this Policy.

4.2 Disposals Process

The disposals process is described within the Collections Development Policy 2020-26, which also includes detail on acquisitions.

5 LENDING TO AND FROM THE COLLECTION

BMT will provide access to the city's collection by lending to museums of Accredited or equivalent status, and organisations that comply with the conditions of loan. BMT may also borrow works from other institutions or private individuals for the purpose of public programming or research. BMT recognises its responsibility, in lending to or from the Collection, to ensure that the conditions of loan will meet the requirements of the Accreditation Standard and the terms of the Agreement. Each outward loan will be the subject of a loan agreement regulating the conditions under which the loan is made. Where appropriate, BMT will seek insurance cover for inward loans under the Government Indemnity Scheme.

All loaned items will be recorded on BMT's collections management system and overseen by the Collections Access Officer (Loans) to ensure loan records remain up-to-date and accurate.

The following conditions apply:
1. BMT will give three months' advance notice to the Council of any intended inward or outward loan that includes an item with an insurance value of over £2 million.
2. BMT will give three months' advance notice to the Council of any intended loan to an institution outside the UK.
3. In submitting a loan schedule to the Council every quarter, the Council may withdraw its consent to loans with a duration beyond the lifetime of the current Agreement. However, the Council's consent will not be withheld unreasonably.

5.1 Inward Loans

The acceptance of objects on loan, normally for a finite period for display or scientific study, may be authorised by the Co-CEOs of BMT, on behalf of the Council, on the basis of recommendations from BMT's Collections Circle – the former 'Collections Committee' (Appendix 3.2). In exceptional cases, a privately owned object of major importance that falls outside the scope of this Policy may be accepted on a finite long-term inward loan basis (each agreement to be renewed every three years, or earlier depending on the duration of the loan) whether or not it is required for immediate public programming or research.

No object will be received or lent on "permanent loan". It is noted that this term has no legal status. The period of all loans will be agreed in writing between the Co-CEOs of BMT, and the owner or borrower of the object before the time of deposit. No loan contract will be for a period of more than

three years. Where the term of the loan has expired, it may be renewed or extended for further finite periods, at the discretion of both the owner or borrower and the Co-CEOs of BMT.

5.2 Licence Agreements for Inward Loans

Licence agreements will be made between BMT and the artist/maker covering the performance or display of conceptual art or other theme/subject areas using film, video, audio or other equipment. These may also include service warranties for maintenance of equipment.

5.3 Long Loans

Birmingham Museums has a substantial backlog of long-term inward loans from private individuals which is being addressed through collections inventory and a rolling programme of review. Long-term inward loans may be subject to changes of status in several ways:

- The lender or lender's heir may request to donate the object to the permanent collection. In this case all conditions relating to acquisition and disposal will apply.
- The lender or lender's heir may ask for the item to be returned.
- The lender or lender's heir may request that the object be transferred to a third party as a donation or for sale.

In considering changes to the status of long-term inward loans Birmingham Museums will require the lender to submit proof of identity and address such as a passport, driving licence, bank statement and/or utility bill, and/or in the case of heirs a formal solicitor's letter attesting the legal relationship to the owner.

5.4 Lending Procedure

The lending procedure is described in Appendix 3.2: Lending Policy and Guidelines.

6 DOCUMENTING THE COLLECTION

The Collection includes both physical and digital objects, and their associated data. Information about the collection and associated intellectual property is key to enabling public access to the collection in support of learning, creativity and enjoyment.

Information about the collection is currently recorded in a variety of formats:

- Digitally on the collections management system, KE EMu
- Paper based records in object history files
- Accession Registers
- Inventory cards
- In a variety of other manual records such as site files, artist files, stock books etc.
- Time based media

BMT's Collections Management System, KE EMu, is SPECTRUM Compliant and - with the exception of the Natural Science collection - the majority of BMT documentation conforms to the latest SPECTRUM standard, the UK Standard for Collections Management; in addition to BS EN 17820:2023 Conservation of Cultural Heritage – Specifications for the Management of Moveable Cultural Heritage Collections. (see Appendix 2.2 BMT Documentation Plan 2025-2030 for backlog details)

6.1 Policy and Plan

The Documentation Policy 2025-2030 (appendix 2.1) further sets out the policy with regards to documentation, with the Documentation Plan 2025-30 (appendix 2.2) outlining the specific actions that will be carried out in delivery of this policy.

7 CARING FOR THE COLLECTION

The Collection Care and Conservation Policy 2025-2030 (see appendix 4.1) applies to the following activities relating to the Collection and public programmes of the Birmingham Museums Trust: acquisitions, display, storage, general maintenance, treatment, exhibitions and loans of objects, research and information. Objects on loan to BMT or being examined in the BMT conservation department are also covered by this policy.

7.1 Policy and Plan

The Collection Care and Conservation Policy 2025-2030 (appendix 4.1) further sets out the policy with regards to collection care and conservation, with the Collection Care and Conservation Plan 2025-2030 (appendix 4.2) outlining the specific actions that will be carried out in delivery of this policy.

8. ACCESS TO THE COLLECTION

The Collections Access Policy 2025-2030 (see appendix 3.1) applies to the physical and digital activities relating to access to the collection, and the associated collections information. It outlines how BMT will provide access to and encourage the use of the collection through displays, loans, storage visits, learning and research, the website, online volunteering, image request service, public enquiries, digital creating, curating and commissioning.

It also demonstrates BMTs commitment to increasing public participation in the care and management of the collection through the Dynamic Collections Progammme 2022-2032, a programme which uses a democratic, participation centered model to engage the public with the collections, and in doing so create BMT's first publicly accessible collections database. Onsite opportunities for volunteering include collections audit, documentation, research, photography and conservation activities. Online volunteer opportunities include large scale online collections documentation, research and engagement through crowdsourcing.

9 COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT AIMS AND PRIORITIES 2025-2030

9.1 Development of the Collection

Over the period 2020-26 the development of the collection will focus on the following aims and priorities:

1. Audience-led: to engage with and consult audiences about collecting and disposal, encouraging personal donations
2. Life in Birmingham: to collect material that reflects and represents the stories of people, places and products associated with the city and wider region
3. Diversity: To reflect the super-diversity of Birmingham's people and places, promoting and sharing diversity in all its forms and showing particular regard for people with protected characteristics and for people in different socio-economic groupings

4. A global city: to collect material that reflects Birmingham to the world, and the world to Birmingham.
5. Quality & Significance: To acquire objects of pre-eminent quality which contribute to the breadth, range and quality of the collection

This policy will be reviewed by March 2026 with new collecting aims and priorities for the period 2026-30.

See Appendix 1.1 Collections Development Policy 2020-26.

9.2 Information on the Collection

Over the period 2025-2030 the documentation of the collection will focus on the following aims and priorities:

1. Improve the standard of information in the collections records by transferring the data in the paper records are to the Collections Management System. This will aid the development of the records as well as the work towards an online public collections system as part of the Dynamic Collections Programme 2022-2032.
2. Ensure the accuracy of collections knowledge through a rolling programme of audits, particularly at the Museum Collections Centre, Thinktank and Museum of the Jewellery Quarter.
3. Continue the development of the Collections Management System, with a programme of improvements to streamline workflows to enable more efficient and sustainable working practices, and activities that support the development of an online system for public access to the collections records.
4. Improve the cataloguing and documentation of collections, in particular through targeted collections research and digitisation projects, as well as establishing a rolling programme of collections inventory.
5. Ensure that collections information can be shared, by supporting the training of BMT staff in the collections management system, Emu, as well as Imu for wider staff usage. As well as supporting the development of the Digital Asset Management System through adding collections images created through digitisation and inventory projects.

See Appendix 2.1 Documentation Policy 2025-30 and 2.2 Documentation Plan 2025-30

9.3 Care of the Collection

Over the period 2025-2030 the Conservation team will focus on the following aims and priorities:

1. The condition checking and treatment of collections, particularly linked the Historic Properties where there are varying levels of control in the environment. It will also include those identified during inventory and cataloguing activities, those identified for display, exhibition and the ongoing loans programme.
2. The environmental monitoring and control of buildings, with an improvement to building management, such as a review of heating systems at the Historic Properties and in particular planning for the replacement of Hanwell.
3. Support the management and maintenance of buildings, taking a joint lead on Sustainability initiatives, and feeding directly into capital plans, such as the redevelopment of the MCC, improving the current building management systems and future sustainability opportunities.
4. Mitigate against the impact of HS2 on the building and collections at the Museum Collection Centre through the continued monitoring of dust and vibration, and targeted relocation of collections in situ.

5. Continue the rolling programme of housekeeping across all sites, which provides ongoing opportunities for community volunteer programmes.

See Appendix 4.1 Collections Care and Conservation Policy 2025-30 and 4.2 Collections Care and Conservation Plan 2025-30

9.4 Access to the Collection

Over the period 2025-30 BMT will seek to broaden access to the collection through the following aims and priorities:

1. Provide public access to the collection through displays and exhibitions, with an emphasis on showcasing BMT's own collection.
2. Provide public access to the collection when not on display and in storage, as well as the information held about the collection, through learning and engagement programmes, facilities tours and visits, public open days, and collection research projects alongside a managed collection enquiries process.
3. Provide public access through a rolling programme of participation-led collections management activities as part of the Dynamic Collections Programme both online and on site.
4. Provide broader access to collections through loans and touring exhibitions as well as building up a programme of community-based loans.
5. Provide public access to the collection through BMT websites (such as www.birminghammuseums.org.uk) including the Digital Image Resource (http://dams.birminghammuseums.org.uk/) and through supporting their-party web services.
6. Seek to grow volunteering opportunities for the people of Birmingham by removing any access barriers to enable them to actively participate in the care, management and development of their civic museum collection across our different sites and online.

See Appendix 3.1 Collections Access Policy 2025-30

10 RESOURCES, ROLES, RESPONSIBILITY, ACCOUNTABILITY AND AUTHORITY

The Co-CEOs of BMT are the senior museum professionals responsible to the Board of Trustees of BMT for the operation of Birmingham Museums according to proper professional standards and the implementation of the terms of the Agreement. The Director of Collections & Estate is the officer responsible to the Co-CEOs of BMT for the physical and intellectual integrity of the Collection.

BMT will meet Council representatives at least quarterly to review its performance, to discuss current opportunities and to ensure the Council are in regular communication on any key issues concerning the collections.

Under the Agreement, BMT has responsibility for lending objects to and from the Council subject to the terms and conditions specified in this Framework's Lending Guidelines & Procedures (Appendix 3.2). BMT has delegated this responsibility to the Co-CEOs of BMT as its senior museum professionals under BMT's Scheme of Delegations.

Under its Agreement, BMT has responsibility for disposing of certain defined categories of object, subject to the terms and conditions specified in the Collections Development Policy 2020-26 (Appendix 1.1). BMT has delegated this responsibility to the Co-CEOs of BMT, as its most senior

museum professionals. BMT will seek prior written agreement from the Council for disposal of all other specimens or objects, whether by gift, exchange, or sale in writing, such approval not to be unreasonably withheld.

The Co-CEOs of BMT have the delegated authority to take decisions on the immediate disposal of the following categories of item:

- Objects or specimens containing materials that present a risk to health and safety, such as asbestos, explosives, radioactive material, arsenic or decaying biological matter
- Archaeological or natural history bulk finds or specimens with no future display or research value, on the recommendation of a qualified specialist
- Items that have deteriorated or been damaged beyond the point of recognition and use, or contain pest infestations that present a risk to the collection

The Director of Collections & Estate will report on performance under the terms of this policy quarterly in arrears in August, November and February, and annually in May. The Co-CEOs of BMT will present the reports to the Board of Trustees of BMT. A written report will form part of the quarterly reporting to the Council as part of its contract monitoring arrangements. The report will cover the following headings:

- Inward loans, including those connected with exhibitions
- Outward loans, including community loans and handling boxes
- Acquisitions
- Disputes/returns including spoliation
- De-accessions and disposals
- Destructive analysis
- Conservation
- Stores
- Research
- Inventory and audit
- Collections incidents
- Exhibitions and display changes
- Security and building maintenance issues
- BMT's performance in respect of carrying out the BMT obligations under the terms of the Agreement
- Any failure in performance or observation of the obligations of the respective Parties under the terms of the Agreement

The Director of Collections & Estate will prepare an annual collections report for the Co-CEOs of BMT to present to the Board of Trustees of BMT summarising performance under the Agreement, which once agreed by the Board will be submitted to the Council.

The Head of Collections leads the planning and delivery of the Collections Care and Conservation Plan, and Documentation Plan. The Head of Curatorial and Participation coordinates acquisitions in support of the Collections Development Policy.

The delivery of the above plans is supported by the wider Collections staff.

11 POLICY REVIEW PROCEDURE

This Collections Management Framework will be published and reviewed from time to time, at least once every five years or at the expiry of the Agreement. The next date for review will be no later than end March 2030. Arts Council England will be notified of any changes to the Collections Management Framework, and the implications of any such changes for the future of the existing Collection.

This policy supersedes all previous and existing practices and policies, formal or informal, relating to the management of objects for the Collection of the Council by BMT.

12 CHANGE CONTROL

Issue	Date	Author	Comments

Collections Management Framework 2025-2030
Appendices

Development of the Collection

Appendix 1.1 Collections Development Policy 2020-26
Appendix 1.2 Archaeological Archives Standards

Information on the Collection

Appendix 2.1 Documentation Policy 2025-30
Appendix 2.2 Documentation Plan 2025-30

Access to the Collection

Appendix 3.1 Collections Access Policy 2024-29
Appendix 3.2 Lending Guidelines & Procedures

Care of the Collection

Appendix 4.1 Collections Care and Conservation Policy 2025-30
Appendix 4.2 Collections Care and Conservation Plan 2025-30
Appendix 4.3 Working Objects Policy 2025-30