

Birmingham Museums

Strategy and Business Plan 2025-30: Laying the Foundations

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Contents

Made possible with Heritage Fund

Statement from the Birmingham Museums Trust Citizens' Jury, January 2025

"At the beginning of this process we didn't know what to expect. Many of us haven't been to a museum in a long time, we didn't know what Birmingham Museums Trust was about, and what it could mean to us. We were not engaged and did not feel close to our museums.

As a result of the process, we feel more pride in our museums and the city. We heard a range of perspectives speaking on diverse topics that relate to how the industry works. As a group of different people with different lives we have different opinions, but have found consensus in our shared aspirations for Birmingham Museums Trust to thrive. We feel more connected to our museums and hopeful for their future. We have enjoyed being a part of this decision-making process and it has made us advocate for and promote our museums in our own communities.

Our museums need to update how they are perceived in Birmingham and on a national stage. The re-opened Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery is much more appealing, we hope to see this continued across the other sites and that the Trust makes sure the people are aware of the amazing things it has to offer and the process it has gone through.

We acknowledge our museums are fighting for their survival; they must take risks in their bid to be inspiring, educating, engaging to all. It is important for our museums to involve and represent the communities they are responsible to, i.e. the people of Birmingham and they shouldn't be precious about doing so. We deserve museums that are proud of us, that we can be proud of, that celebrate what's unique about Birmingham.

The voice of the museum is to some extent, the voice of the people, and we want everyone to hear us a mile coming."

Statement from the Board of Birmingham Museums Trust

"Our Board have been pleased to see the progression of the programme of activity that has resulted in this 5 Year plan. We recognise the challenge that Birmingham Museums Trust faces, and have sought to advocate on behalf our Executive and their teams throughout.

Trustees have welcomed the opportunity to be engaged in this work, whether through attending sessions on the development of the Theory of Change, the launch event of the Citizens' Jury, or our own sessions.

As a Board, a key concern is the financial sustainability of Birmingham Museums Trust moving forward. This work will be a valuable tool in communicating with our funders and also in communicating with the communities that Birmingham Museums serves.

We recognise also, the strong vision that the Executive team have introduced to Birmingham Museums, building on its existing culture, legacy, and ethos; this document serves to support that, in clarifying that vision, the impact that is sought, and the work that must be done to move us towards it.

We look forward to seeing this work develop, and Birmingham Museums grow and move in confidence and strength in the delivery of its ambitious vision."

Statement from Councillor Saima Suleman, Birmingham City Council Cabinet Member for Digital, Culture, Heritage & Tourism

The City Council is grateful to the National Lottery Heritage Fund for supporting Birmingham Museums Trust in their resilience planning. We welcome the Trust's ambitions, including innovative initiatives such as the Citizens Jury and their commitment to enhancing community engagement and environmental sustainability through their 'net zero' goal.

While the Council continues to face financial pressures, we remain committed to supporting Birmingham Museums Trust through substantial annual revenue and capital funding, as well as continually seeking additional external resources, such as the recent Shared Prosperity Funding.

We look forward to working closely with the Trust and our partners to secure a vibrant, sustainable future for Birmingham's museums, ensuring they remain at the heart of our city's cultural life.

Birmingham Museums Trust Leadership Statement

"Birmingham Museums Trust (BMT) is an independent charity, spun out from Birmingham City Council (BCC) as a Trust in 2012 and entrusted with a contract until 2043 to manage its world class, accredited and designated collections and nine museum sites. We had hoped, after 15 years of cuts, that the £15 million invested by the City Council in refurbishing the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery (BMAG) building (though not the displays) meant our fortunes were about to change, but Birmingham's S114 bankruptcy has put everything in doubt. Currently we don't have the funding to open all our venues, or even all of BMAG. Even before the cuts, Birmingham had the fewest museums by population of any of the UK's large cities outside London: our citizens had fewer opportunities to visit museums than most people in Britain.

This is therefore an unapologetically ambitious plan to invest in the city's greatest cultural asset, to create a world class museum service, which can be at the forefront of making Birmingham a great place to live, work, play and visit. And even beyond this, to deliver our mission as part of the wider arts and culture sector.

Even if things get worse before they get better, the people of Birmingham deserve no less. We recognise our obligation to be more entrepreneurial and to generate more income to capitalise on both the core investment by the city (48% of BMT's income, 2024/25), and the support of Arts Council England (ACE) and our many other funders and supporters.

This business plan attempts both to address the worst financial crisis in the history of Birmingham's civic museums, and to set out a vision of the world class and world changing institutions they have the potential to become.

Our belief in the potentials and values of BMT is shared by the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF), who have funded this Business Plan and the Laying the Foundations (LtF) programme of which it is a part."

Sara Wajid and Zak Mensah, Co-CEOs
Birmingham Museums Trust

Our bold ambitions for Birmingham

Our mission

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

Our vision

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

Our impact on Birmingham

Birmingham is a vibrant, interconnected city where cultural richness thrives, citizens are empowered, communities find joy and belonging, trust is nurtured, inequalities are diminished, and sustainability and equity are central to our society

We face a challenging environment: across our sites, the city and culture sector

A national funding crisis for culture

- Funding to civic museums nationally has fallen 37% in real terms between 2010 and 2023.
- Operating costs are rising across the country, driven by increases in National Insurance and the National Living Wage announced in the 2024 Autumn Budget.
- Commercial revenue and audiences are down on pre-pandemic levels, with the cost-of-living crisis still heavily affecting spend per visitor on retail, catering and other activities.

Our sites have faced closures and need repair

- BMAG is currently partially open following closure 2020-24. Full reopening requires a major capital programme and is targeted for 2031.
- Museum Collection Centre's asbestos roof and heating have reached end of life, with water ingress and inadequate storage facilities.
- Museum of the Jewellery Quarter (MJQ) has been closed since 2020, due to roof damage and water ingress, repairs and redisplay due to complete in 2026.
- Soho House historic building remains closed due to leaking sewage pipes and collapsed cellar.
- Aston Hall requires essential roofworks and electrical upgrade.

Our primary sources of funding have reduced

- Since 2015 we've seen an almost 25% drop (excluding inflation) in regular revenue funding, taking the total received from Birmingham City Council and Arts Council England.
- Birmingham City Council's issuing Section 114 has made the funding landscape more challenging, though recognising that the council acknowledges the risks that reduced support poses to the city and its heritage.

Economic conditions are difficult

Despite increasing income generation, costs continue to outpace income. At the same time, our commitment to greater democratisation – and ensuring wider access to heritage for people from diverse backgrounds – means we are at a critical point of risk and opportunity.

We need a radical rethink across every aspect of our organisation to become financially sustainable, inspire a sense of hope and belonging, and champion inclusion, creativity and social justice.

Laying the Foundations: a five-year strategy to meet these challenges

Through our Laying the Foundations programme, we've engaged Birmingham's citizens, our employees, sector experts and researched our audiences to shape a new strategic plan and Theory of Change for Birmingham Museums Trust.

- Following the Covid-19 pandemic, the Laying the Foundations project was proposed to develop a 10-year plan for Birmingham Museums Trust.
- Between our submission and receiving funding from The National Lottery Heritage Fund, the landscape changed fundamentally – war in Europe, an energy and financial crisis, and Birmingham City Council filing Section 114 completely changed our operating environment.
- Our consultants, Human Economics, advised that we needed a more focused proposal, and agreed a detailed two-year plan that navigated the immediate financial crisis, setting the path for a subsequent three-year transition plan. The product is this Five Year Plan for Birmingham Museums Trust.
- The requirement of that plan remained the same; a radical transformation of Birmingham Museums Trust to a resilient and financially sustainable organisation with the structure, culture, skilled workforce and audience insights to deliver our ambitious vision.
- Alongside and to inform this 5 Year Plan, the Laying the Foundations programme has delivered:
  - The development of a Theory of Change
  - Research into existing and new audiences
  - The delivery of a Citizens' Jury which will inform and shape Birmingham Museums Trust
  - Internal insights and input from across our teams.

Who we are

Nine sites showcasing Birmingham's heritage and communities


Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery


Thinktank


Museum Collection Centre


Aston Hall


Blakesley Hall


Museum Of The Jewellery Quarter


Sarehole Mill

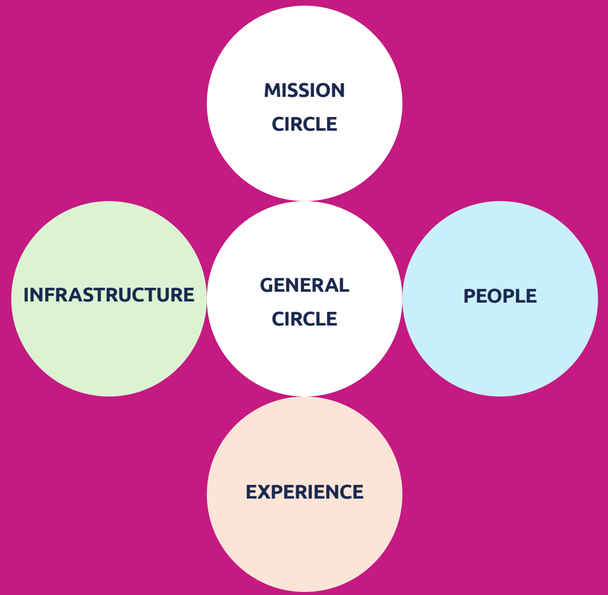

Soho House


Weoley Castle

One of the UK's top civic collections

- We manage the city's museum collection on behalf of Birmingham City Council. This is Birmingham's greatest cultural asset, and one of the top three most important civic museum collections in the UK – a priceless resource for learning, engagement and creativity.
- An encyclopaedic collection of over one million objects and specimens covering art, human history, science and industry, and natural science. It represents all corners of the globe, covering the pre-historic to the contemporary.
- Most of our collections are Designated by Arts Council England. This means they are of national importance, with many of international significance. This includes the finest collection of Pre-Raphaelite art in the world, and – closer to home – the Anglo-Saxon Staffordshire Hoard.
- We've recently won awards for our audience-led approach to contemporary collecting, developing the collection so it better represents and reflects the stories, histories and creativity of the people of this ever-changing and increasingly diverse city.

A committed workforce delivering services alongside communities and volunteers



- We deliver a range of services both within our sites and beyond them, including learning, retail, catering, events, exhibitions, technical and collections services.
- These services are delivered by approximately 160 staff across a range of dedicated teams.
- Those teams work collaboratively as ‘circles’ – ‘teams-of-teams’; decision-making sits directly with these, delegated by the leadership team, around the areas of **Infrastructure**, **People** and **Experience**.
- We are committed to becoming a more open and transparent organisation that reflects our communities.
- We provide engaging opportunities for formal volunteering and participation across Birmingham Museums.

Change is already underway

In Pursuit of Repetitive Beats exhibition

- The recent internationally acclaimed, award-winning interactive VR adventure that transports you into the heart of the Acid House movement
- Signals a new tone to displays and space, bringing joy, music and history together
- Innovative use of technology to exhibit our culture

Victorian Radicals exhibition

- Leveraging Birmingham's world-famous collection of Pre-Raphaelite art
- Generating income from a touring exhibition, the largest and most complex touring exhibition we've ever staged
- Providing new interpretation and telling new stories

Citizens' Jury

- A bold and sector-leading experiment in sharing power directly with our communities
- Made up of a representative group of Birmingham citizens shaping recommendations for the kind of museums they want and need
- Ongoing commitment to engage with our jury throughout the journey

A New Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery

- In 2024, we started to re-open Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery
- A radical reuse of the space with 'Made in Birmingham' exploring Birmingham's characteristics and what it means to be shaped by this city
- Redisplay of the Round Room, introducing more diverse works into an iconic space

Dynamic Collections

- Making our collection catalogue more accessible by embedding participation in its care and use
- Evolving our team into a cross-functional group driving our shared vision
- Connecting with communities both on-site and remotely through digital participation

Who we serve

We operate Birmingham's museums on behalf of Birmingham City Council and in partnership with Arts Council England

Birmingham City Council – Service Level Agreement

Birmingham City Council invests approx. £5 million per year into Birmingham Museums Trust to deliver the Service Level Agreement.

This requires us to:

- Operate the museum sites and manage the collection to the UK Museum Accreditation standard and in accordance with the Code of Ethics for museums.
- Manage and maintain the museum buildings owned by the Council in accordance with the lease agreements.
- Deliver museums services that engage the public with the collection and buildings including community engagement, participatory practice, learning programmes.
- Attract growing and increasingly diverse audiences of residents and visitors to the city.
- Provide advice on heritage and public art to the Council.

Arts Council England – National Portfolio Organisation

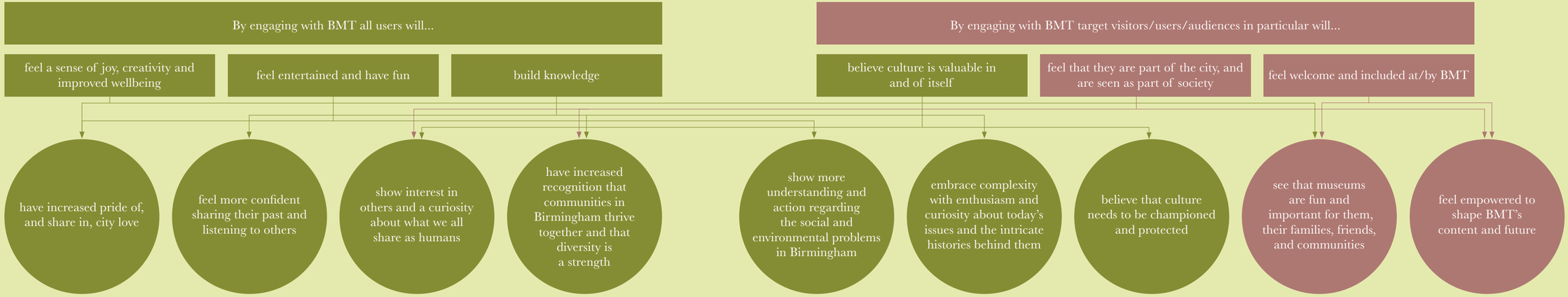
Birmingham Museums Trust currently holds a National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) agreement with Arts Council England to deliver their Let's Create Strategy for 2020 – 2030. This is focused on:

  - Three outcomes – Creative People, Cultural Communities and A Creative and Cultural Country.
  - Four investment principles – Ambition & Quality, Dynamism, Environmental Responsibility, Inclusivity & Relevance.
- The agreement is dependent upon us delivering against the activity plan and investment principles plan submitted in our NPO application.
- Our current NPO agreement is for £3,078,107 spread evenly over three financial years from 2023-24 to 2025-26. An extension was applied for an additional year for 2026/27 for a sum of £1,026,107.
- Arts Council England stopped the next investment round which was due to take place in 2025 and has recommended to Government that the current National Portfolio extends to 31 March 2028.

Our sites and collections belong to the people of Birmingham. Our services aim to contribute positively to their lives and the city.

outcomes

As part of Laying the Foundations, we have developed a Theory of Change for BMT. This includes nine outcomes that we want to bring about. We aspire to begin measuring our progress by 2030.



impact

Birmingham is a vibrant, interconnected city where cultural richness thrives, citizens are empowered, communities find joy and belonging, trust is nurtured, inequalities are diminished, and sustainability and equity are central to our society.

All BMT audiences

Target (under served) BMT audiences

Attracting wider audiences, from every community in Birmingham

The challenge

- We won't bring about the scale of change in engagement with a 'one size fits all' approach; our diverse audiences have different needs and expectations.
- Our underrepresented target audiences are across the global majority (the collective term for people of African, Asian, indigenous, Latin American, or mixed-heritage backgrounds) and young people and families, and those of working class backgrounds.
- These audiences see the least connection between museums and their everyday lives. Many of these people don't see museums and galleries as offering what they want from their free time, so they often choose other activities instead.
- With limited leisure time, museums must make a strong case that visiting is a worthwhile and rewarding way to spend it.

Our audience wants stories of Birmingham's people and their experiences – to show their place in the world

People | Stories | Experiences – with Birmingham at the centre

Our citizens' jury and audience research tell us:

- Birmingham Museums are valued for showcasing the city's achievements to the world
- Audiences are interested in the stories of Birmingham – past and present – especially when told through the people who lived them
- Birmingham's identity is seen as a strength, but it must be balanced with global perspectives
- The strongest museum experiences are interactive, immersive and narrative driven
  - Static displays in glass cases are less appealing than multi-sensory, hands-on experiences with strong storytelling
  - Social history and human narratives resonate strongly across audience segments
  - Technology can enhance engagement, but it should feel meaningful, not gimmicky

This focus on people, stories and experiences, suggests the need to consider rebranding, to reflect these aspects more clearly.

Our audiences seek different stories and museum experiences, depending on their life stage and situation

There are key differences between some audience groups, resulting in a segmentation which should inform our future approach to audiences and programming.

Social Identity Seekers

Under 35s with no children

Urban Explorers

35 – 59s with no children at home

Memory Makers

Families: parents aged 35 -59 with children under 16 at home

Discerning Enthusiasts

60s and over

Our five-year strategic plan

2025-30 strategic plan

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
Principles	Democratic | Informed & Considered | Intrapreneurial | Fair and ethical | Self-renewing | Sustainable

Experience

Aims:
By 2030 audiences will see Birmingham Museums Trust:
creating fun, meaningful, involving experiences for the full diversity of our communities and their uses of our collection and services

- Deliver a programme driven by our mission and vision; representative of Birmingham, creating spaces for discourse on social-political issues relevant to our audiences, and partnering with our communities and stakeholders
- Develop the foundations for a Cultural Citizenship Research Centre that integrates collections, audience and participatory research
- Become a trusted destination in the region and online for culture and heritage, and a keystone partner in the City

Infrastructure

Aims:
By 2030 audiences will see Birmingham Museums Trust:
at the heart of Birmingham's communities, providing inclusive access to the people's sites and collections, including digital access

- Develop and deliver, in partnership with Birmingham City Council, a roadmap to the security, accessibility and operation of the sites we're entrusted with
- Respond to the Climate Emergency by transitioning to net zero and reducing CO_2 emissions
- Engage our communities in the development and use of our collections
- Connect our people, audiences and activities digitally

People

Aims:
By 2030 audiences will see Birmingham Museums Trust:
as a boldly progressive organisation, increasingly rooted in and porous to Birmingham's communities, with the skills and culture to engage with our target audiences and the things that matter to them

- Grow participation, including by skilled, supported volunteers who can advocate for BMT and our vision
- Engage employees and citizens in our decision making
- Build the culture and people Birmingham Museums Trust needs through a cohesive People plan that supports a skilled and diverse workforce
- Implement an Equality, Diversity & Inclusion plan which enables success by creating cultural change for BMT as a radical museum

Financial

Aims:
By 2030, Birmingham Museums Trust will:
be a sustainable, more independent organisation that provides affordable, surplus-generating services and experiences that add social and economic value to Birmingham, and will have secured funding to support its priority capital projects

- Grow each of our major earned revenue streams (sales, admissions and revenue fundraising)
- Secure continued financial backing from our existing partners
- Capitalise on increased relevance and engagement (as a result of experience, infrastructure and people initiatives) to increase and diversify our audiences, positively impacting revenue

Programming

We will deliver a programme driven by our mission and vision and representative of Birmingham, creating spaces for discourse on social-political issues relevant to our audiences, and partnering with our communities and stakeholders

Audiences will be at the heart of everything we do

By 2026, Birmingham Museums Trust will create an audience development strategy and programming plan, guided by our audience research, Citizens' Jury and Theory of Change. This will provide us with a framework to programme experiences and activities – both onsite and online – that respond to audience needs, helping us to determine each site's key activities up to two or three years in advance.

This will include exhibitions, events, displays, learning activities and other public uses of the sites.

The insights from this work have told us that if we engage audiences with experiences that are in line with our Theory of Change (based on the principles below), we will have wider appeal across Birmingham's communities, and positively impact their lives.

- Joy-Inspiring
- Inclusive and Welcoming
- Compassionate and Solidarity-driven
- Interculturally-representative and Connective

Programming

We will deliver a programme that is as impactful as it is diverse, responds to needs and is developed with partners and communities

Our Theory of Change will shine through our programming in the following ways:

Joy-inspiring: Fostering creativity and resilience

- We will create spaces that inspire creativity, spark imagination, and enhance resilience by bringing joy into our experiences
- We will consult people on what they expect from their museums, and also use internal and external expertise to programme surprising, awe-inspiring and thought-provoking content
- By designing dynamic, interactive, and emotionally engaging programmes, we will cultivate positive and lasting connections with our audiences

Inclusive and welcoming: Breaking down barriers

- We will prioritise inclusivity by actively breaking down barriers to engagement
- The experiences we offer will be designed to ensure they are welcoming and accessible to our target audiences, particularly those identified in our audience development strategy
- Through accessible and empowering content, we will expand cultural participation, ensuring that all voices are valued

Compassionate and solidarity-driven: Tackling important issues

- We are committed to addressing complex societal issues by engaging fearlessly with topics such as anti-racism, feminism, and social justice
- Through experimentation, user-testing and formative evaluation of our programming and content, we will learn how to inspire curiosity, empathy and reflection in response to complex, painful or contested histories
- We will experiment with display approaches to learn which are most likely to inspire people to become more involved in their city
- By representing multiple perspectives and community partnerships, we will amplify marginalised voices, challenge or enrich dominant narratives, and facilitate meaningful discussions

Interculturally representative: Linking narratives

- The aim of our storytelling will be to ensure that all visitors see their cultures represented, and also see links across cultures by weaving together diverse histories and lived experiences
- By fostering dialogue and shared understanding, we will help visitors and participants to recognise their place in a wider cultural and historical ecosystem
- We aim to represent the heritage and contemporary expressions of all Birmingham's communities, and to make links across time and spaces to the stories represented by the city's world class collections

Research

We will develop the foundations for a Cultural Citizenship Research Centre (CCRC) that integrates collections, audiences and participatory research and enhances university and community partnerships

Our ambition is to transform Birmingham Museums Trust into a renowned organisation for research within the museums sector. This builds on previous research and insights, e.g. Bridging the Gap, and is driven by our vision to involve audiences in shaping collaborative collection research projects that authentically reflect the history and people of Birmingham.

By learning more about our collections, we will innovate to improve the programming and display of historic collections for our target audiences.

To create the CCRC, we will define our research strategy goals and initiatives, mapping current projects and partnerships against these. We will identify under-researched areas of the collection and where research could support local and regional needs, for example, in public health. We will develop research partnerships and projects with civic organisations, universities and public bodies that fit our research strategy. And we will set up the structures for our Research Centre to facilitate working with partners.

Becoming a trusted destination

We will become a trusted destination in the region and online for culture and heritage – a keystone partner in the city

We want Birmingham's museum sites to be recognised as places for experiences that create joy, are inclusive, promote solidarity and represent Birmingham's communities.

Through audience research and insight from the Citizens' Jury, we now know who we need to communicate better with, and how, in order to convey what Birmingham Museums Trust offers them.

To connect with these audiences, we will build partnerships, refresh our approach to marketing and communications, and rethink our brand.

- We will actively seek to build relationships with organisations across Birmingham to become a trusted partner for democratic and culturally rich activities, increasing our impact on the city's health and wellbeing needs.
- We will promote our museums, programmes and activities to our target audiences, with a refreshed marketing, communications and digital strategy; built on the understanding gained through recent audience research, our Citizens' Jury and upcoming audience development strategy
- This insight has shown us that Birmingham Museums Trust's current brand doesn't resonate with our forward vision or many of our target audiences; we'll raise funding for a rebrand of Birmingham Museums Trust and our sites, to build recognition and trust in what we stand for, our vision and future plans across the estate.

Refurbishing Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery and advancing plans for a new museum of science

We're raising funds for Birmingham's largest museums to be refurbished, reorganised and redisplayed in an inclusive way, to appeal to all of Birmingham's communities

Museum	**Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery** (priority)
Goal	• Raise capital funding for and start refurbishment of Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery (BMAG), to reopen the full museum in the early 2030s
How the museum will be transformed	• We will upgrade BMAG's spaces (public and non-public) to increase its civic use, offering a wider range of experiences, activities and uses to benefit all of Birmingham's communities and the economy. • We will redisplay BMAG focused on the people of Birmingham, telling stories and perspectives that reflect the diversity of the city and its uniqueness.

Other sites require major investment, once the future of BMAG and the science museum have been secured. For example, the Museum Collection Centre requires major capital investment to create a publicly accessible modern collections centre on the current site, with state-of-the-art facilities.

Museum	**Thinktank**
Goal	• Improve the visitor experience at Thinktank • Use our 'City of Ideas' museum of science and industry feasibility study to inform long term redevelopment plans at Millennium Point, to grow audiences, income and STEAM engagement across Birmingham, to be realised within the 2030s.
How the museum will be transformed	• We will enhance the visitor experience at Thinktank with modern, flexible exhibition spaces, an upgraded planetarium, a better environment to show more collections, and an expanded commercial offer. • The future museum will elevate Birmingham Museums Trust's role as a leader on STEAM engagement – including natural science – across the city, supporting communities to share their stories about the role of local people in science and industry – past, present and future.

Working with Birmingham City Council and local citizens to put historic properties at the heart of our communities

The historic properties[1] around Birmingham are vital parts of our city's heritage. They can be hubs for community activity, but current funding is inadequate to maintain, open and deliver a visitor experience at these.

Situation

- The six historic properties cost £900k annually to maintain and open. The requirement to balance priorities in the services we need to deliver makes this a challenge we are currently unable to resolve.
- To secure public access, we need a solution that meets community needs and is financially sustainable.

Action

- We will continue to work with Birmingham City Council on a long-term solution to fund access to these sites, including in working out the Service Level Agreement for 2026–30, so that these can remain open beyond 2025.
- We will also engage with Birmingham's communities to understand their needs from these sites, and how communities and organisations could play a greater role in their operation.

This could lead to…

Working with special interest groups to deliver experiences at the sites

Hiring out spaces to local workers including creatives, craftspeople and artists

Offering spaces for use by community groups

Hosting pop-up markets (e.g. craft, art, food)

Renting spaces to local or national educational organisations

Creating and hiring out distinct spaces within the sites for commercial use

1. Aston Hall, Blakesley Hall, Museum of the Jewellery Quarter, Sarehole Mill, Soho House, Weoley Castle – 2024-25 Budget Forecast for Birmingham Museums Trust

Preserving our museum sites and protecting the environment

We'll work with Birmingham City Council to get ahead of museum site maintenance and repairs, and to reach Net Zero by 2040 – engaging our audiences in protecting our city's urban environment

In 2022, we commissioned audits of each site we manage. For the first time, we now have a complete picture of the immediate and five-year maintenance and repair needs across our estate[1]. This enables us, alongside Birmingham City Council, to make better decisions to sustain and improving Birmingham's heritage site.

We will respond to these audits by:

Developing a five-year rolling programme of maintenance and repair for all Birmingham Museums Trust sites, and a capital fund to support this

We are reviewing and prioritising the actions identified in the audits.

This will allow us to work with Birmingham City Council to agree how works should be prioritised, and by whom:

- Works for Birmingham Museums Trust to commission, funded through our own maintenance and repair budget.
- Works for Birmingham City Council and Millennium Point Trust to commission and fund, as our corporate landlords.
- Works for Birmingham City Council and Birmingham Museums Trust, or Millennium Point Trust and Birmingham Museums Trust to work together to fund.

Commissioning a roadmap to Net Zero, informing our wider Climate Action Plan

These plans will:

- Set out measures to improve the energy efficiency of our sites
- Protect biodiversity in sites like Sarehole Mill and Soho House, which provide urban wildlife habitats
- Identify actions to improve our ways of working
- Show how BMT will work with communities to improve the environment – for example through learning programmes and the work we present

Opening up digital access and involving people in collections decisions

We are working to make our collections digitally accessible for audiences in Birmingham and beyond.

- We will continue the ***Dynamic Collections*** programme, which aims to make Birmingham's collections fully digitally accessible by 2032.
- Over the next five years, our focus will include:
  - Establishing and launching a mass digitisation programme for museum objects
  - Developing a plan and prototype for an online interface for the digital collection

Birmingham's citizens will play an increasingly important role in shaping the future of our collections

- Our experience commissioning a Citizens' Jury in 2024 demonstrated the value of involving Birmingham's people in decisions about their museums.
- We want to involve a Citizens' Jury in developing our next five-year Collections Development Policy. This has been delayed by a year to allow time for fundraising and establishing a jury, which will shape our approach to collections and contribute to the policy.

Example: Sub-Saharan African Collections Programme

- Birmingham Museums Trust holds significant Global Majority collections – including collections of historic objects from Sub-Saharan Africa – but these are under-researched, not digitised and have limited public access. There is great value in better understanding these collections, and we have a responsibility to display them appropriately and, in some cases, to return objects to their communities of origin.

- We will work with international communities and researchers, and train and support Birmingham residents to audit, document and digitise these collections to make them more accessible.
- This programme will also reinterpret and redisplay these collections, and support restitution, guided by community and research expertise and our collections strategy.

Engaging employees and citizens in decision-making

Internal example:
Embedding our Circles structure

Birmingham Museums Trust is moving towards a more democratic approach to decision-making and organisational management

Our Circles are part of a system known as sociocracy, which creates cross-functional teams who are empowered to make decisions in an effective and efficient way.

- We will **align the objectives of Circles and departments** to strategic aims and activities
- **Circles' objectives** will align directly to strategic aims
- **Departments** will have a primary focus on a single aim, alongside objectives that cut across multiple strategic aims
- **Personal objectives and performance management** will be linked to these aims

Audience example:
Citizens' Jury and governance

Birmingham Museums Trust is moving away from the traditional top-down model, where audiences are expected to be passive and "done to" by the provider

This process has shown how citizens can be proactively involved in decision-making through a Citizens' Jury. In this five-year period we plan to:

- Continue to engage the recent jury as we implement their recommendations for BMT
- Run future juries focused on individual sites and collections
- Explore ways to involve Birmingham citizens in the governance of the museums

To make this beneficial for BMT, our audience, and the citizens involved, we need to

- Factor in future costs associated with engaging in this way (e.g. Citizens' Jury will require additional external funding)
- Learn from our experience on where power can be shared most effectively, and where decision-making requires the skills, expertise and assets that only BMT has (employees, volunteers, collections and sites).

Rebuilding our volunteer base

We will grow a skilled, supported and diverse volunteer community that can advocate for Birmingham Museums Trust and reflects Birmingham's population.

We have fewer volunteers than before the pandemic and the closure of multiple sites. While this presents a challenge, it also offers the opportunity to rebuild a volunteer community that is representative of Birmingham. To do this, we will create a volunteering strategy focused on building a positive culture and strengthening our overall volunteering offer.

We will foster a positive volunteering culture by:

- Securing buy-in across all levels of the organisation
- Involving employees from the outset
- Creating consistently positive volunteering experiences
- Providing volunteering opportunities for staff
- Ensuring compliance with best practice and legal standards

We will strengthen our volunteering offer by:

- Understanding our current programme and the demographics of our current volunteer base
- Setting goals based on our skill and resource needs from volunteering
- Engaging with underrepresented groups to understand and address barriers to volunteering
- Designing and testing a range of volunteering initiatives tailored to different audiences

The result will be:

- Employees who are confident and motivated to work with a wide diversity of volunteers
- A refreshed set of volunteering offers that, together, build a more representative volunteer community including:
  - Local communities
  - Underrepresented groups
  - Corporate partners

Improving our employee experience

We will continue to roll out improvements that help our employees to deliver a high-quality, inclusive service

Culture & Health

- Improve and align our HR systems and policies
- Advance our culture change process and employee deal, reflecting our democratic approach
- Take a proactive, strategic approach to Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, building considerations and impacts on different groups into our decision making
- Monitor, manage and support staff experiencing absence or stress

Performance & Development

- Develop a more equitable and consistent recruitment process
- Provide a learning and development offer that supports employees throughout their career with us
- Create and roll out management standards and development pathways
- Improve consistency in performance management

Organisation Strategy & Design

- Clearly communicate our purpose, strategy and objectives
- Embed our balanced structure and Circles approach, and support teams to work effectively across them

Financial

Our five-year financial plan underpins our Strategy and Business Plan: our vision is for a long-term resilient and sustainable business model

Birmingham Museums Trust will continue to rely on the service level agreement we have with Birmingham City Council and the funding we receive to provide museum services. We will also continue to rely on valued supporters, trusts, foundations and grant giving bodies including Arts Council England (ACE).

We will lay the foundations to ensure a resilient financial future for our civic museums by:

- Creating a robust operating model which allows us to deliver on our ambitions and goals without jeopardising our future.
- Setting out a clear rhythm for financial planning and due process that meets the needs of the organisation and our stakeholders.
- Reporting that allows us to understand the impact of change and informs our long-term decision-making processes based on accurate data and insight.

We will grow our earned and contributed income ensuring that the needs of Birmingham citizens are at the heart of what we do. Our long term ambition is to:

- Continue to grow the percentage of our revenue which is self-generated, growing each of these prime revenue streams is a critical tenet of our business strategy.
- Establish and optimise our commercial trading activities to generate consistent business growth and surpluses from a mixed portfolio of income streams to de-risk BMT's overall financial position.
- Implement our five-year fundraising strategy to grow income from fundraising for revenue, priority projects and significant capital projects.

Summary of key milestones, from 2025–30

The next five years will be transformative for Birmingham's museums. If we get this right, they will feel like home to all our communities – and will be well placed to thrive beyond 2030.

Major milestones that this strategy will deliver	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032
A new programme plan that learns from our audiences and presents events, experiences and exhibitions that reflect Birmingham's people, across a wide range of formats								
A museum service that becomes a beacon for the cultural sector, involving employees and citizens in decision-making								
A comprehensive plan and set of tools to support our workforce and volunteers – who act as advocates for Birmingham's museums								
A thriving and mature commercial business that supports Birmingham's creatives, businesses and organisations, and helps sustain our core museum activities								
A refreshed Birmingham Museums Trust brand presence – updating how the people's museums are seen in Birmingham and beyond, and developed in partnership with trusted local organisations								
Accreditation for our research organisation, the Cultural Citizenship Research Centre, delivering breakthrough insights on collections that matter to our communities								
A supported plan for a 'City of Ideas' Science Museum, to replace Thinktank								
Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery fully refurbished and reopened								
The people's collections fully accessible online								

Achieving all of this is ambitious, but it will be game-changing – for the future of our museums and for Birmingham's citizens' experience of their city. This is the foundation we need, to start realising our vision of what Birmingham's civic museums can and should be to the city.

We look forward to working with Birmingham City Council, Arts Council England and all our present and future supporters to make Birmingham a vibrant, interconnected city where cultural richness thrives.

Epilogue – beyond 2030

Beyond 2030, we will continue to change and evolve – in line with the spirit of Birmingham

BMAG opened in 1885, one of many progressive initiatives which made it 'the best governed city in the world' (Forbes magazine 1890). However, BMAG's public entrances had steep flights of steps, both inside and outside the building: people with mobility issues were simply excluded. It took 110 years and decades of activism before the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) enshrined equal access in law. This paradox captures the nature of democracy – not a finished state, but a continuous struggle of increasing awareness and recognition of the rights of hitherto neglected, excluded or stigmatised groups. We will build on Birmingham's progressive tradition, and BMT's experience of community engagement, to continuously address our blind spots, so that our museums remain at the cutting edge of democratisation. Equality of experience for all, no matter their class, level of educational attainment, gender, ethnicity/race, sexuality, will be a non-negotiable baseline. We will embed deliberative democracy in our work, building on our work with a Citizens' Jury, in which a representative jury of 28 Birmingham residents made recommendations about the future of their museums.

In 1885 Britain was the dominant power in the world. Birmingham's innovative industries were intrinsic to this history and its collections reflect the city's global influence and networks. This history, in turn, profoundly shaped Birmingham itself, not least through providing thousands of jobs, and has important living legacies today. Birmingham is one of the most diverse cities in Europe. The spirit of innovation lives on today and Birmingham is still a city of makers, creatives, innovators and learners. BMT will celebrate and nurture the creative work of the city's residents, as well as enabling them to see world class international artists in their home city.

We will contribute to BCC's tourism and place-making agendas, and foster a sense of belonging to this place, nurturing social trust and modelling the skills of intercultural dialogue, creativity and understanding.

Implementation: what we will achieve by 2027

What we will achieve within two years

Experience

- Launch our Audience Development Plan
- Develop a programme offer and experiences, mapped to the needs of our segmented audiences
- Identify and start to implement a strategic approach to using our collections, to support community projects and partner programmes
- Identify and start to deliver a refreshed Learning Strategy, focussed on the most relevant, financially viable and equitable core learning activities – including an ambitious, impactful and recognised formal and informal learning offer
- Map the potential for digital engagement, skills and career development, in partnership with city organisations
- Define our new research centre model, financial case for support, key partners, capacity, and a forward programme of research

Infrastructure

- Reopen BMAG in advance of a major capital project
- Submit BMAG Phase 2 capital development plans to The National Lottery Heritage Fund and RIBA Stage 1+
- Complete short-term improvements at Thinktank (shop, picnic area relocation, science garden access, third-floor visitor experience)
- Secure a long-term lease for Millennium Point, with Birmingham City Council support for the science museum
- Develop medium to long term partnership models with third parties to enable community-led activity at select historic properties
- Complete essential repairs, redisplay and improvements to visitor experience at Museum of the Jewellery Quarter, Soho House, Blakesley Hall, Sarehole Mill
- Develop a roadmap to Net Zero and begin implementation (e.g. electrification, insulation, renewable energy)
- Pilot a collections access interface and complete mass digitisation of and cataloguing of oral history
- Create a central data repository and develop a consistent approach to managing organisational and audience data, insights and processes

People

- Deliver a Volunteer Strategy and Action Plan, alongside internal change programme to build staff skills in supporting volunteers
- Develop a new community partnership volunteering offer and pilot programmes that reach previously unengaged demographics
- Embed and evaluate our Circles structure
- Secure funding for future projects to involve citizens in museum decision-making processes (e.g. BMAG, Thinktank)
- Develop and embed equitable recruitment policies and processes
- Roll out staff learning and development programme, including performance management and coaching
- Implement an organisation-wide culture change programme, including an anti-racism plan and updated employee deal

Finance

- Secure next round of four year funding Service Level Agreement with BCC for 2026-30
- Establish BMAG as a top-of-the-market unique venue in Birmingham and invest in growing venue hire and associated catering incomes
- Develop, market and deliver BMAG and other museum sites as venues for a range of filming activities, to grow filming revenue stream
- Continue to build and hold a solid base of reserves to provide the organisation an ability to invest to maintain and improve the capital infrastructure.
- Identify a clear path to an operational break-even performance within 1-2 years.
- Diversify trading income sources to balance current reliance on Birmingham City Council funding and visitor spending.
- Develop a capital investment plan for Thinktank to support fundraising activities and to invest in its infrastructure to increase visitor numbers.
- Define and lay the foundations to deliver BMT's future fundraising strategy

Implementation: what we will achieve by 2030

	What we will achieve within in five years
Experience	• Collaborate actively with Birmingham's cultural, heritage and leisure organisations, as well as business and industry partners • Launch a compelling brand proposition and organisational identity that speaks to the wants and needs of Birmingham audiences • Establish key partnership agreements and research funding opportunities; define and form internal and external links to support research and its outcomes • Create a research centre and programmes that enable collaboration with partners and the sharing of best practice work; achieve Independent Research Organisation (IRO) accreditation
Infrastructure	• Begin Phase 2 construction of BMAG (RIBA Stage 5) • Develop a long-term, phased proposal for the 'City of Ideas' science museum • Complete phased heating improvements across the Museum Collection Centre site • Audit 15,000 objects at the Museum Collection Centre • Remain on track to deliver a digitally accessible collection by 2032, through the Dynamic Collections programme
People	• Fully embed our community partnership activity • Roll out a new corporate volunteering offer • Implement a new budgeting process and clear responsibilities • Develop our internal capability to run future Citizens' Juries or similar participatory processes • Deliver our staff diversity strategy
Financial	• Balanced trading income sources including recurring income from repeat events and rental income. • Achieve operational break-even performance with a path to surplus generation • Continue to build and hold a solid base of reserves to provide the organisation an ability to invest to maintain and enhance the capital infrastructure. • Develop and grow revenue fundraising streams including individual giving and fundraising partnerships

KPIs: measuring our success during the next five years

We are committed to measuring our progress, and have identified 13 organisational performance measures to monitor regularly. Over time, we also plan to measure progress towards our Theory of Change outcomes, by calculating our Social Return on Investment.

	How we will measure progress
Experience	• Visitor satisfaction • Total number of visitors across all venues • Percentage of visitors with one or more underrepresented characteristics • Combined web, video and social media engagements • Percentage of programme uptake, including learning visits across all venues
Infrastructure	• Capital funding secured vs targets • CO_2e emissions
People	• Employee satisfaction • Number of volunteers or volunteering days vs target (including through Citizens' Jury) • EDI impact measures (to be defined through a forthcoming EDI plan)
Financial	• Admissions income • Sales income & Return on Investment • Fundraised income & Return on Investment

We will continue to use four key service metrics to measure the performance and improvement of both external and internal-facing services. These also feed into the broader organisational performance framework.

- Take-up
- Completion
- Satisfaction
- Cost per transaction


Birmingham
Museums