

Committee: Community Committee

Agenda Item

Date: 16 March 2006

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Title: Museum Service Acquisition & Disposal Policy

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Item for decision

Summary

The Museum Service needs to adopt a new Acquisition & Disposal Policy for its collections, as required by the new government Accreditation scheme for museums (formerly known as the Registration Scheme). This policy, following Accreditation guidance, states what the Museum collects and defines the constraints and priorities in acquiring or disposing of items from the collections, which are owned by the Saffron Walden Museum Society, and the method and authorisation for acquisition and disposal.

Recommendations

Committee is asked to approve the Acquisition & Disposal Policy for Saffron Walden Museum / Uttlesford Museum Service

Background Papers

Accreditation Standard, MLA, 2004 [Museum Libraries Archives]
Code of Ethics for Museums, Museums Association, 2002

Impact

Communication/Consultation	Saffron Walden Museum Society and MLA's Accreditation Guidelines have been consulted
Community Safety	No issues identified
Equalities	No issues identified
Finance	No direct impact; on rare occasions where items are purchased (rather than donated) the cost is met by the Museum Society.
Human Rights	No issues identified
Legal implications	Circumstances in which UK and international laws apply to certain acquisitions and disposal procedures are identified in the Policy. Museum must be certain of acquiring valid

	legal title to acquisitions and disposal policy and procedures must be rigorously upheld
Ward-specific impacts	All (collections reflect whole district)
Workforce/Workplace	Museum staff

Situation

- 1 Collections define the nature, purpose and scope of the Museum Service. Acquisition is necessary to update and improve the collections and service, and to reflect evolving knowledge, interests and demands on the Service, within sustainable limits.
- 2 Saffron Walden Museum Society owns the collections and leases them to the Council under the terms of the Management Agreement for the Museum Service.
- 3 Museums hold collections in trust on behalf of the public, present and future. There is a strong presumption against disposal, however it is permissible in certain circumstances as outlined in the Policy.
- 4 The Museum Service must present a new Acquisition & Disposal Policy for the government's Accreditation Scheme by the end of July 2006. The Policy incorporates the essential information and wording advised by the MLA (Museums Libraries Archives – the national government body) and further detail to guide the public, Museum staff and specialists. Committee is asked to approve the new Acquisition & Disposal Policy for this purpose.
- 5 The Acquisition & Disposal Policy may also need to be submitted to other professional, governmental and funding organisations on occasion, such as the Heritage Lottery Fund. It will be published on the Museum's website.
- 6 Section 5 of the Acquisition & Disposal Policy (subject-by-subject detail) provides a blue-print for assessing collections as part of the Heritage Quest project, so that rationalisation of collections can take place where justified and future collecting can be more pro-active in addressing deficiencies, for example, aspects of 20th century history as experienced by local people.

Risk Analysis

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
New policy not adopted or submitted for Accreditation	Low	High	Policy contains essential wording required by Accreditation scheme. Failure to submit to MLA by July deadline would

			jeopardise attainment of accredited status, with consequences for how Museum is perceived by the public, profession and potential funding sources.
Acquisition not controlled and monitored: duplicate and irrelevant or inappropriate items could be acquired and retained	Low	High	Adoption of this Policy will control the collections. Museum staff familiar with policy and its implications. Collecting needs to be focused with aim of improving service and its relevance, with reference to restrictions of space and resources.
Museum unable to acquire items necessary for improving and updating collections	High	High	Poor quality and cramped accommodation for some collections a long-standing issue and restricting acquisition in some subjects. Heritage Quest Centre project and longer-term plans for Museum will resolve this.
Illegal, unethical or over-hasty disposal damages Museum, collections and compromises future service	Low	High	Adherence to Disposal policy and MA <i>Code of Ethics</i> will prevent this. All disposals must be approved by Saffron Walden Museum Society and Museum Management Task Group, on officers' advice.
Insufficient staff time to undertake assessment of collections necessary to implement Disposal Policy	High	Medium	Research, assessment and reports on items considered for disposal is necessarily time-consuming. Heritage Quest centre project will provide space, extra staffing and framework to assess certain items for disposal to other museums or other uses
Collections will outstrip sustainable space and resources	Medium	High	Heritage Quest Centre and subsequent alterations to Museum will define limits for indefinite future