

Decision by Portfolio Holder



Report reference: HCS-018-2020/21
Date of report: 11-February-2021

**Epping Forest
District Council**

Portfolio: Housing and Community Services - Councillor H Whitbread
Author: Francesca Pellegrino (Ext 4996) Democratic Services: J Leither
Subject: Epping Forest District Museum Rationalisation Disposal Decision One
Decision:

To approve the attached list of items (agreed by the Rationalisation Steering Committee) for reallocation from the Epping Forest District Museum Collection following the Museums Association's Code of Ethics and Disposals guidance.

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| ADVISORY NOTICE: <i>A Portfolio Holder may not take a decision on a matter on which he/she has declared a Pecuniary interest. A Portfolio Holder with a non-pecuniary interest must declare that interest when exercising delegated powers.</i> | |
| I have read and approve/ do not approve (delete as appropriate) the above decision: | |
| Comments/further action required: None | |
| Signed: Cllr H Whitbread | Date: 3 rd March 2021 |
| <i>Non-pecuniary interest declared by Portfolio Holder/ conflict of non-pecuniary interest declared by any other consulted Cabinet Member:</i> None | <i>Dispensation granted by Standards Committee:</i> Yes/No or n/a N/A |
| Office use only: Call-in period begins: 3 rd March 2021 | Expiry of Call-in period: 10 th March 2021 |

***After completion, one copy of this pro forma should be returned to
Democratic Services IMMEDIATELY***

Reason for decision:

Collection Rationalisation is taking place as part of a review of the collections held by Epping Forest District Museum which is an appropriate and necessary process. The decision to remove an item/items from the collection needs to be taken by the Portfolio Holder under delegated authority.

Options considered and rejected:

Options include to retain all items currently held in the collections as current, or to approve the reallocation of the items as per the recommendation in the attached report.

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| Initialed as original copy by Portfolio Holder: |
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Background Report:

Epping Forest District Museum's (EFDM) collections cover the breadth of local community history. Over the years, an unclear collecting policy combined with sub-standard documentation has led to much collecting of material, some of which is either not relevant or suitable for the museum and its audiences. The collection now totals over 100,000 objects throughout 4 storage locations.

Like many museums, the collections have begun to exceed the space available for storage and this presents a risk to their future care, management and access. The main stores which are on site benefitted from a major lottery funded capital redevelopment in 2016. Improvements included an environmentally controlled store and a 'public viewing' store. Whilst this is a major improvement, the redevelopment project did not address the collection documentation problems or the growing collections here and in the off-site storage. All are now at full capacity. In addition, the three off-site stores do not provide a sound environment for the collections held there. Some of the objects are stored very high up on shelves, boxes are collapsing, and there are objects obstructing the aisles, making it increasingly difficult for staff and volunteers to access them properly. This full capacity means that there is no expansion space to allow for filing of gaps in the collection which are highlighted in the Collections Development Policy.

Collections have now grown without due diligence in documentation procedure, resulting in a lack of knowledge of what the collection contains. Without this knowledge, it is impossible to provide a full or accurate public service.

A lot of items that were acquired fall outside of the museum's collecting policy, there are also duplicate items some of which may not have any local stories or provenance linked to them.

The team recognises the importance of addressing this pressing issue now by embarking upon a realistic rationalisation project across its collections in order to remain relevant to their audiences and for their collections to engage and inspire generations in our community.

The team undertaking this work are following the Museum Association guidelines which includes a code of ethics for the appropriate methods to address these decisions.

The first group of items located at one of the off site storage locations has been assessed and considered and the attached list is the items which the team have determined do not fit within the collecting policy of the museum.

This list has been discussed at the Rationalisation Steering Committee and the group, comprising of staff, volunteers, councillors and specialists, has agreed these items for reallocation outside of the collection.

The items listed here, once approved, will go on to follow the Museum Association guidelines which ensures the priority is to keep these items in the public domain by reallocation to other museums or community groups as the priority.

Resource Implications: Within existing budget and staff resourcing.

Legal and Governance Implications: The Museum Association guidelines and Code of Ethics provide the industry standard for ensuring this project complies with procedures.

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

Through this project the resource and environmental impacts of managing collections across 4 different locations will be improved. Once complete the product will ensure safer access to collections for staff and the public. The project will also see a number of local groups and the community to benefit. Not only through better access to the collection itself but objects that are not reallocated to other museums will be offered to the community and local groups to support their work and projects.

Consultation Undertaken:

A strict scoring process has been followed under the guidelines that are produced by the Museum Association. The list of items has been reviewed by a steering committee who have agreed the proposed decision. The Steering Committee consists of staff members who are not undertaking the project itself, Councillor Mary Sartin, a freelance museum consultant and where appropriate subject specialists, volunteers and community groups. Where appropriate, the person or persons who donated the items has been contacted and the Waltham Abbey Historical Society which provided a number of items for the collection has also been consulted. If the recommendation is approved – following Museum Association guidelines the items will first be offered to other accredited museums then follow the process of reallocation which includes a number of steps to ensure the items stay in the public domain.

Background Papers: N/A

Impact Assessments:

N/A

Risk Management:

This project has been assessed as one of the council's high priority projects and a risk assessment has been undertaken. The key risks which have been assessed are:

- Not following the Museum Association guidelines for correct procedures for Rationalisation. This could lead to reputational damage; and
- Not undertaking proper consultation – this could also risk reputational damage.

These two risks have been properly assessed and all plans and guidelines for this project ensure that the risk has been mitigated. The project team are following a guided process to ensure the two risks above have been accounted for.

Equality Analysis:

The Equality Act 2010 requires that the Public Sector Equality Duty is actively applied in decision-making. This means that the equality information provided to accompany this report is essential reading for all members involved in the consideration of this report. The equality information is provided as an appendix to the report.

Key Decision Reference (Y/N): N