North East Museums
Collections Development Policy
for Museums and Galleries

Name of governing body: North East Museums Strategic Board

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Date for next review: March 2030

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Collections Development Policy

Please note: this policy contains references to Collections Appendices - these will be updated separately and are available at request.

Policy review procedure

The Collections Development Policy (formerly known as the Acquisitions and Disposals Policy) will be reviewed at least once every 5 years, by North East Museums Strategic Board. During the intervening period, North East Museum's Collections Working Group will monitor the policy and ensure any minor changes are updated as necessary, with any significant changes being brought back to the Strategic Board early for review and approval.

The date when the policy is next due for formal review is March 2030.

Arts Council England will be notified of any changes to the Collections Development Policy, and the implications of any such changes for the future of existing collections.

1. Relationship to other relevant policies / plans of the organisation:

1.1 North East Museums' statement of purpose:

Our mission is to welcome and connect people to the past, present and future of the North East through stories, shared spaces and experiences.

We will help people understand and act on local and global challenges:

- **Equality** – we will provide a warm welcome to everyone, break down barriers caused by inequality and discrimination and share diverse stories.
- **Wellbeing** – we will use our spaces and services to support people's physical and mental health.
- **Social mobility** – we will deliver learning experiences, volunteering opportunities and pathways for personal development for people of all ages and backgrounds.
- **Climate** – we will raise awareness about the environment and encourage people to act for a sustainable future.
- **Place** – we will celebrate North East England, inspire local pride and use our resources to support research, innovation and economic regeneration.

Our vision for the future is for everyone to have access to our provision in Tyne and Wear and Northumberland, to use this access and to value it for the significant and positive impact that it makes upon their lives. We will provide real or virtual, worldwide access to our museums and archives and their collections

1.2 The Strategic Board will ensure that both acquisition and disposal are carried out openly and with transparency.

1.3 By definition, the museum has a long-term purpose and holds collections in trust for the benefit of the public in relation to its stated objectives. The Strategic Board therefore accepts the principle that sound curatorial reasons must be established before consideration is given to any acquisition to the collection, or the disposal of any items in the museum's collection.

1.4 Acquisitions outside the current stated policy will only be made in exceptional circumstances.

1.5 NEM recognises its responsibility, when acquiring additions to its collections, to ensure that care of collections, documentation arrangements and use of collections will meet the requirements of the Museum Accreditation Standard. This includes using SPECTRUM primary procedures for collections management. It will take into account limitations on collecting imposed by such factors as staffing, storage and care of collection arrangements. Acquisitions will be guided by the advice of NEM conservators regarding any hazards inherent in the collection and consideration of an object's condition. Acquisitions will take into account NEM's current and future storage capabilities.

1.6 NEM will undertake due diligence and make every effort not to acquire, whether by purchase, gift, bequest or exchange, any object or specimen unless the governing body or responsible officer is satisfied that the museum can acquire a valid title to the item in question.

1.7 NEM will not undertake disposal motivated principally by financial reasons.

1.8 This policy should be read in conjunction with:

- The Great North Museum's Acquisitions and Disposals Policy
- The Great North Museum's Human Remains Policy
- The Great North Museum's Repatriation Policy
- The Great North Museum's Sacred Objects Policy
- Sunderland Museums Acquisitions and Disposals Policy.
- NEM's Archives Collection, Acquisition and Disposal Policy
- NEM's Documentation Policy
- NEM's Collections Care and Conservation Policy and Documentation Procedural Manual (in development) are also relevant as these documents outline procedures to be followed to complete an acquisition and care after an acquisition has been accessioned.

- Appendix A to this policy which detail the collections which make up TWAM including details on: history; scope; collection priorities; areas for rationalisation.

1.9 The Collections Development Policy is intended as a guiding document for the governing body and museum staff and for public understanding of NEM's collecting remit and activity.

2. History of the Collections

2.1 NEM brings together a wide range collections from Gateshead, Newcastle, North Tyneside and South Tyneside councils. Appendix A details the history and development of each area of the collection. The Fine Art, Maritime and Science and Industry Collections were designated by the Government as of national importance in 1997. These individual collections are subdivided into, and discussed under, the following collections areas:

- Archaeology
- History
- Maritime
- Social History
- Costume and Textiles
- Fine Art
- Decorative Art
- Contemporary Craft
- Design
- Ethnography
- Biology
- Geology

2.2 From 1st April 2025 NEM assumed management responsibility for the collections of Northumberland County Council. This is treated as a specific collections area in its own right. See Appendix A for a detailed description.

3. Overview of the current collections

3.1 North East Museums (NEM) holds collections in the fields of archaeology, art (including fine art, decorative art, contemporary craft and design), history

(including social history, costume, maritime history and engineering, science and industry) and natural sciences (including geology and biology), as well as, from 1st April 2025, the specific collections of Northumberland County Council. These are listed separately as they were never part of the broad Tyne & Wear Metropolitan Borough Council collections.

3.2 Please see Appendix A for very detailed descriptions of the existing collections, their history and collecting themes.

3.3 Please also see the Acquisitions and Disposals Policy for the Great North Museum (revised October 2021), which is governed by a separate body and so requires a separate policy document.

3.4 The collections held by Tyne & Wear Archives are covered by a separate Collection, Acquisition and Disposal Policy (revised March 2022).

3.5 NEM is engaged with Sunderland Museums in an ongoing process of separating out collections belonging to Sunderland Council. In the case of any recommendations for rationalisation, agreement from both governing bodies will be sought.

4. Themes and priorities for future collecting

All collecting activity must take account of the following principles:

4.1 Items collected should normally have a strong connection with North East England or with existing collections.

4.2 Future collecting will reflect the diversity of the North East's people and places both past and present. The contemporary collecting programme will continue to be inspired and guided by diverse audiences. Items collected should serve NEM's statement of purpose and be useful for research, a broad range of exhibitions, learning and other public programmes in order to promote and share diversity in all its forms.

4.3 Future collecting will show particular regard for people with protected characteristics (age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership, and pregnancy and maternity) and for people in different socio-economic groupings. This will be especially so where there are gaps in representation within the existing collections.

4.4 Please see Appendix A for more detailed information relating to future collecting by collection and/or venue.

4.5 Where appropriate, items collected should be in good condition and require minimal conservation treatment (with the exception of archaeological items).

4.6 Items collected should not contain materials that pose a risk to health or safety, without a plan in place to manage the risk presented and should take account of current legislation, for example, Ionising Radiation Regulations 2017 (IRR17) and the associated approved code of practice (L121 Work with Ionising Radiation ACoP).

4.7 Items collected must not duplicate items already in the collection unless an exceptional case can be made, for example, group value for display purposes or better provenance.

4.8 Items that are in better condition or have better provenance may be collected to replace items already in the collections; the items replaced will be disposed of in accordance with the Disposal section of this Policy (see 13 below).

4.9 Where appropriate, transfer to NEM of copyright/and or reproduction rights will be sought at the time of acquisition. If this is not possible, then permission to make and use reproductions will be requested.

4.10 All available sources of funding for purchases will be explored and made use of where appropriate.

4.11 Loans will be accepted where these would enhance displays and/or contribute significantly to research or project work. Five years is the maximum period before review with the lender. Where a loan meets the criteria laid out (points 4.1-4.4) they will be considered for acquisition in the event of being offered as such.

4.11 Advice will be sought from qualified persons outside NEM where existing curatorial advice in the particular field is limited.

4.12 NEM recognises its responsibility, in acquiring additions to its collections, to ensure that care of collections, documentation arrangements and use of collections will meet the requirements of the Accreditation Standard. It will take into account limitations on collecting imposed by such factors as staffing, storage and care of collection arrangements.

4.13 Acquisitions outside the current stated policy will only be made in very exceptional circumstances, and then only after proper consideration by NEM Strategic Board itself, having regard to the interests of other museums.

5. Themes and priorities for rationalisation and disposal

5.1 NEM recognises that the principles on which priorities for rationalisation and disposal are determined will be through a formal review process that identifies which collections are included and excluded from the review. The outcome of review and any subsequent rationalisation will not reduce the quality or

significance of the collection and will result in a more useable, well managed collection.

5.2 The procedures used will meet professional standards. The process will be documented, open and transparent. There will be clear communication with key stakeholders about the outcomes and the process.

5.3 Please see Appendix A for each collection/venue's approach to rationalisation and disposal. The documentation backlog remains the priority in order to support any future rationalisation projects.

6. Legal and ethical framework for acquisition and disposal of items

6.1 NEM recognises its responsibility to work within the parameters of the Museums Association Code and Ethics when considering acquisition and disposal.

6.2 NEM will abide by the legal and ethical standards as detailed below (9 to 13).

7. Collecting policies of other museums

7.1 NEM will take account of the collecting policies of other museums and other organisations collecting in the same or related areas or subject fields. It will consult with these organisations where conflicts of interest may arise or to define areas of specialism, in order to avoid unnecessary duplication and waste of resources.

7.2 Please see Appendix A for details of specific organisations whose collecting policies relate to NEM by venue/collection.

7.3 NEM would consider any opportunities presented regarding joint acquisition.

8. North East Museums Archival holdings

8.1 The collections held in Tyne & Wear Archives are covered by separate policy but there are significant areas of overlap in particular through the history collection, please see appendix A for details.

8.2 As NEM holds archives, including photographs and printed ephemera, the Strategic Board will be guided by the Archives and Records Association 'Code of Ethics' (February 2020) and the Code of Practice on Archives for Museums and Galleries in the United Kingdom (3rd ed., 2002).

9. Acquisition procedures

9.1 Normally, acquisitions are authorised by the Keepers of the collections. Major acquisitions will be authorised at senior management level. Access to museum/gallery purchasing funds requires permission from the Director and a financial limit will be agreed in advance of any purchase, e.g. at auction.

9.2 As per 1.6 NEM will undertake vigorous due diligence in order to determine that the donor/vendor of a potential acquisition holds full legal title to the object being acquired.

9.3. In particular, NEM will not acquire any object or specimen unless it is satisfied that the object or specimen has not been acquired in, or exported from, its country of origin (or any intermediate country in which it may have been legally owned) in violation of that country's laws. (For the purposes of this paragraph 'country of origin' includes the United Kingdom).

9.4. In accordance with the provisions of the UNESCO 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, which the UK ratified with effect from November 1 2002, and the Dealing in Cultural Objects (Offences) Act 2003, NEM will reject any items that have been illicitly traded. The governing body will be guided by the national guidance on the responsible acquisition of cultural property issued by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport in 2005.

9.5 NEM will not acquire any material without reference to the NEM Collection Care and Conservation Plan or without reference to NEM conservation officers to ensure that specific and potential health and safety hazards are considered as well as potential costs to the service to dispose of hazardous items in future.

10. Human Remains

10.1 If NEM were to acquire human remains under 100 years old, it would obtain the necessary licence under the Human Tissue Act 2004 and any subordinate legislation from time to time in force.

10.2 As NEM holds or intends to acquire human remains from any period, it will follow the procedures in the 'Guidance for the care of human remains in museums' issued by DCMS in 2005. See also Great North Museum Policy for the Care of Human Remains, and the Great North Museum Human Remains Research Access Policy.

11. Biological and geological material

11.1. So far as biological and geological material is concerned, NEM will not acquire by any direct or indirect means any specimen that has been collected, sold or otherwise transferred in contravention of any national or international wildlife protection or natural history conservation law or treaty of the United Kingdom or any other country, except with the express consent of an appropriate outside authority.

12. Archaeological material

12.1. NEM will not acquire archaeological antiquities (including excavated ceramics) in any case where the governing body or responsible officer has any suspicion that the circumstances of their recovery involved a failure to follow the appropriate legal procedures.

12.2 In England, Northern Ireland and Wales the procedures include reporting finds to the landowner or occupier of the land and to the proper authorities in the case of possible treasure (i.e. the Coroner for Treasure) as set out in the Treasure Act 1996 (as amended by the Coroners & Justice Act 2009).

13 Exceptions

13.1 Any exceptions to the above clauses 10,11 or 12 will only be because NEM is either: acting as an externally approved repository of last resort for material of local (UK) origin; or acquiring an item of minor importance that lacks secure ownership history but in the best judgement of experts in the field concerned has not been illicitly traded; or acting with the permission of authorities with the requisite jurisdiction in the country of origin; or in possession of reliable documentary evidence that the item was exported from its country of origin before 1970. In these cases NEM will be open and transparent in the way it makes decisions and will act only with the express consent of an appropriate outside authority.

14. Spoliation

14.1 NEM will use the statement of principles ‘Spoliation of Works of Art during the Nazi, Holocaust and World War II period’, issued for non-national museums in 1999 by the Museums and Galleries Commission.

15. The Repatriation and restitution of objects and human remains

15.1 The Strategic Board, acting on the advice of NEM’s professional staff, may take a decision to return human remains (unless covered by the “Guidance for

the care of human remains in museums" issued by DCMS in 2005), objects or specimens to a country or people of origin. NEM will take such decisions on a case by case basis; within its legal position and taking into account all ethical implications and available guidance. This will mean that the procedures described in 16.1-.5 will be followed but the remaining procedures are not appropriate.

15.2 The disposal of human remains from museums in England, Northern Ireland and Wales will follow the procedures in the "Guidance for the care of human remains in museums".

16. Disposal procedure

16.1 All disposals will be undertaken openly and with transparency. By definition, NEM holds collections long term and in trust for society in relation to its stated objectives. The governing body accepts the principle that sound curatorial reasons for disposal must be established before any consideration is given to disposal of any item in the collection.

16.2 Any disposals will be undertaken with reference to: the SPECTRUM Procedures on disposal; the Museums Association (MA) disposal toolkit 'Off the Shelf' and to NEM's documentation procedures.

16.3 NEM will confirm to the best of its knowledge that it is legally free to dispose of an item. Agreements on disposal made with donors will also be taken into account. Where gaps in knowledge exist it will take a risk based approach to proposed disposals (see Disposals Risk Matrix).

16.4 When disposal of a museum object is being considered, NEM will establish if it was acquired with the aid of an external funding organisation. In such cases, any conditions attached to the original grant will be followed. This may include repayment of the original grant and a proportion of the proceeds if the item is disposed of by sale.

16.5 In most circumstances disposal should only be motivated by curatorial reasons. TWAM will not undertake disposal motivated principally by financial reasons.

16.6 The only exception to the above will be objects where there is considered to be an unmanageable hazard present.

16.7 The decision to dispose of material from the collections will be taken via a system of delegated authority (as recommended in the MA Disposal toolkit 'Off the Shelf', 2023), NEM's Director will have authority to authorise disposals of objects considered 'low-risk'. The Strategic Board only will have authority to authorise disposals of all objects which are 'high risk' and some objects which are considered 'medium risk'. See Disposals Risk Matrix for details. Objects

going to the Strategic Board must first be assessed by the Audit Committee who will make a recommendation to the Strategic Board.

16.8 The decision to dispose of an object will only be taken after a full consideration of the reasons for disposal. Other factors including public benefit, the implications for the museum's collections and collections held by museums and other organisations collecting the same material or in related fields will be considered. Expert advice will be obtained and the views of stakeholders such as donors, researchers, local and source communities and others served by the museum will also be sought.

16.9 Decision to dispose of an object cannot and will never be taken for financially motivated reasons.

16.10 No decision to dispose of a specimen or object will be taken by one individual alone. For both Director level and Strategic Board level disposals the decision to recommend disposal will have been considered by curatorial, collections and conservation staff applying the above mentioned Disposals Risk Matrix.

16.11 Where a decision to dispose has been made the procedures outlined below will be followed and the method of disposal may be by gift (transfer), sale, recycling, exchange or, as a last resort, destruction.

17. Methods of disposal

17.1 A proportional approach to disposal will be taken and will follow guidelines and suggestions laid out in the MA disposal tool kit 'Off the Shelf', 2023.

17.2 Where there is a good likelihood of an object finding a new home priority will be given to retaining the object or specimen within the public domain. NEM may choose to prioritise another Accredited Museum but it will also seek to benefit other public institutions including but not limited to heritage organisations and educational institutions (as per updated guidance from the MA 'Off the Shelf' disposals toolkit, 2023).

17.3 In finding a home for an object NEM will make use of resources including but not limited to: the MA's Find an Object web listing service; an announcement in the MA's Museums Journal and in other specialist publications and websites.

17.4 NEM will ensure accountability and impartiality in decisions of transfer by measures including but not limited to; ensuring at least 2 months advertising period; informing other Accredited museums which collect in the same or related areas of the proposal and inviting comment;

17.5 NEM will consider disposal by exchange for objects in another collection.

17.6 Sale of an object or specimen may be considered in very limited circumstances: no uptake when offered for transfer (NB- all objects being disposed of by this method should go via Strategic Board for approval); where an object is damaged beyond repair as scrap. Any income generated from sale will be invested in the long-term benefit of the museums of NEM and its collections.

17.7 Recycling of an object will also be considered in the above circumstances with the additional circumstance of very low risk objects which have an unlikely transfer value.

17.8 If it is not possible to dispose of an object through transfer, sale or recycling, it may be possible for NEM to destroy it. Where necessary, specialist advice will be sought to establish the appropriate method of destruction. Health and safety risk assessments will be carried out by trained staff where required. The destruction of objects should be witnessed by an appropriate member of NEM's workforce. In circumstances where this is not possible, e.g. the destruction of controlled substances, a police certificate should be obtained and kept in the relevant object history file.

17.9 Destruction is also an acceptable method of disposal in cases where an object is in extremely poor condition, has high associated health and safety risks or is part of an approved destructive testing request identified in an organisation's research policy.

18. Documenting disposal

18.1 Full records will be kept of all decisions on disposals and the items involved and proper arrangements made for the preservation and/or transfer, as appropriate, of the documentation relating to the items concerned, including photographic records where practicable in accordance with SPECTRUM Procedure on deaccession and disposal. In accordance with NEM's Documentation Policy, item 4.7, disposals will be documented on Emu as part of the object exit procedure.

19. Appendix list

19.1 Appendix A 1 Archaeology
Appendix A 2 History
Appendix A 3 Art (Fine, Decorative, Design, Ethnography)
Appendix A 4 Natural Sciences
Appendix A 5 Northumberland