
Collection Disposal Request – West Berkshire Museum

Committee considering report:	Individual Executive Member Decisions
Date of Committee:	12 June 2026
Portfolio Member:	Councillor Nigel Foot
Report Author:	Janine Fox
Forward Plan Ref:	ID4815

1 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek urgent approval of a disposal request for items in the Museum collection. The need for this decision is a result of The Accommodation Review and subsequent reduction in storage capacity for the Museum Collections. The objects that are being highlighted no longer fall within the Museum’s Collection Development Policy and are eligible for disposal.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 We are asking the decision maker to review, assess and approve 19 object groups from the Museum collection that have been highlighted for disposal. Each object group can be given an individual member decision should they wish for some items to be kept.
- 2.2 Recommendations have been presented by the Museum Collections Development Panel for each of the selected objects with reasons for disposal.

3 Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary
Financial:	There is likely to be a cost associated in couriating large objects to another museum or in the destruction of large objects. A courier would be £500 per half day. In order to obtain a quotation for destruction we have to first go through the process of agreeing to dispose and finding no luck in transferring objects to another museum.
Human Resource:	There are no HR implications.

Legal:	West Berkshire Council owns the material that are being highlighted for disposal, apart from 3 items on the list that we cannot find documentation for, and these have 'T' numbers.
Risk Management:	Although all efforts have been made to find further information about the 3 unknown items with no success, it is possible that something could be found after disposal, which might have changed our decision to dispose in the first place.
Property:	With reduced capacity, the Museum is under increased pressure to review collections that no longer fall within the Collections Development Policy. If the disposal proceeds, it will improve capacity at the Museum store.
Policy:	Museum Collections Development Policy. It is an Arts Council England requirement for Accredited Museums.

	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
Equalities Impact:		/		No equalities impact

A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?		/		
B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?		/		
Environmental Impact:		/		No environmental impact
Health Impact:	/			By removing objects with deteriorating wood and coatings (unknown previous treatments or paints)
ICT Impact:		/		No ICT impact
Digital Services Impact:		/		No impact on Digital Services
Council Strategy Priorities:	/			1.5. Strong budgetary control, use of resources and initiatives to maximise financial efficiency by ensuring the budget for the Museum is used only for collections that are significant to the District and its residents.
Core Business:	/			Supports The Accommodation Review
Data Impact:		/		

Consultation and Engagement:

Culture and Libraries Manager. The Collections Development Panel consisting of the Museum Curators, Heritage Access Assistant, Museum Learning & Participation Officer, The Archaeology Team and Volunteer representative.

The Museum consulted with the Museum Development Officer for the South East who confirmed the steps the Museum should take to ensure it adheres to Arts Council Museum Accreditation guidelines.

The guidelines provided by the Museums Association and noted in our Collections Development Policy, is that once the decision to dispose is agreed by the Governing Body, the Museum can then contact other Museums directly to offer the objects to them, to list them online and share with other organisations who might be interested in them - <https://findanobject.collectionstrust.org.uk>. The Museum can offer them to local people/groups if there is no interest from the museum community. The last and final option is destruction.

Ethically the Museum would prefer transfer over sale, but if anything could be sold, the money would have to go back into supporting the Museum collections and could not be used as a saving as this would mean that the Museum would lose its Accredited status.

4 Executive Summary

- 4.1 This report is being brought forward due to the reduction in storage capacity for the Museum because of The Accommodation Review. The objects that are being highlighted for disposal no longer fall within the Museum's Collection Development Policy. There is an urgency to the decision due to the project to relocate the contents of the Bone Lane Museum store to Building 150. As part of this project the Museum team have had to undertake a review and rationalisation of a group of objects at Building 150 that fall outside the current collecting policy and are eligible for disposal. The deadline for this is 12th August 2026.
- 4.2 Disposal is the permanent removal of an object from the Museum's permanent collection. All disposals will be undertaken with regard to the Museums Association's Disposal guidelines. Disposal by definition is:
- Transfer to a handling, schools loan, education, working, or demonstration collections
 - Transfer to another accredited museum by gift or sale
 - Transfer to another public institution by gift or sale
 - Repatriation to country of origin
 - Return to donor or lender
 - Charitable donation

- Cannibalisation or set dressing
- Sale on the open market, or
- Destruction (as a last resort)

4.3 The proposal will:

- Describe each object highlighted
- Present the recommendation from the Collections Development Panel on how to proceed with the disposal

5 Introduction/Background

Introduction

5.1 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 Museum Collections Development Policy states that 'The governing body 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.' It also states that 'the Museum will not undertake disposal motivated principally for financial reasons'.

Background

5.2 A Collections Development Panel was created so that decisions around the growth and reduction of the collections are not made in isolation. The panel meets in person around 3 times a year. An Impact Assessment for either an acquisition or disposal is generated by a member of the curatorial team with a proposal that contains images and research. This is then circulated to panel for a decision. The majority vote is usually the decision made.

5.3 A Collections Development Policy is written to help guide the panel through the decision making process. This is regularly reviewed and agreed by the Museum's Governing Body.

5.4 The Collections Development Policy sets out the themes and priorities for collecting and for rationalisation and disposal. These are:

- To create a sense of place and reflect the communities of West Berkshire
- Seek acquisition through donations
- To have a strong association with West Berkshire

5.5 The Museum's Collections Development Policy (2018, page 33) states that the Museum will only dispose of an object from the collection for the following reasons:

- Repatriation and restitution
- Health and safety risk
- Extensive deterioration in condition
- Objects posing a conservation hazard to other parts of the collection
- To provide better care or access (includes geographical relevance)

5.6 All disposals must be approved by the Museum's Governing Body before actioning, and this is why this proposal has been brought forward by the Collections Development Panel.

Proposals

5.7

Accession Number	Object Description	Proposal from Panel	Reasons for recommendation
T250	Wooden chair 'MS' marked underneath. Modes states "Chair. School use. Marked 'M5'." Possibly Shaw House related but unsure. Active woodworm. Covered in Guano.	Dispose: Offer to Shaw House in the first instance (would need to clean and woodworm treat) open up to other Museums	Health and safety risk (guano) Objects posing a conservation hazard to other parts of the collection To provide better care or access
1976.43	Cart wheel. No further information is recorded in catalogue. Accession Register states donor's address is Speen, so came from a local person, but use and origin is unknown. Object History Files refer to a letter regarding donor's plans to make a model landau. Active woodworm. Large and heavy so would require a courier to move to the Museum for any exhibition.	Dispose: Offer to Museum of English Rural life in the first instance, then open up to other Museums.	Extensive deterioration in condition Objects posing a conservation hazard to other parts of the collection To provide better care or access
1975.5	Jail door (The Museum has three in total, we are looking to dispose of the one in poorest condition). Probably salvaged when Old Guildhall was demolished in 1828 (? From the Bridewell). The two were stored at Camp Hopson for years. It is similar to the	Dispose of the one in poorest condition, leaving two in the Museum collection: Offer to Weald and Downland Living Museum in the first instance, then open	Health and safety risk (metal protrusions) Extensive deterioration in condition

	<p>old door currently in Gallery 2 at museum which came from the prison at the Old Guildhall. They are in very poor condition. One was stolen in 1996 and then found and given back to the Museum. One of the two doors has metal spikes coming out of the door, which causes a hazard. Large and heavy so would require a courier to move to the Museum for any exhibition.</p>	<p>up to other Museums.</p>	<p>Objects posing a conservation hazard to other parts of the collection</p> <p>To provide better care or access</p>
T232	<p>White painted wooden door with name plate 'Dr B.B Letham'. This object has been assigned a Temporary Number, which means that the object was found in store with no associated existing number / tag / documentation connected with it. With some online research we believe that this item might relate to a Dr Bruce Baird Letham, part of Dr B. B. Letham & Partners, Eastfield House Surgery, 6 St Johns Road, Newbury, RG14 7LW. Poor condition. The name plate is what makes the door significant. Large and heavy so would require a courier to move to the Museum for any exhibition.</p>	<p>Retain name plate but dispose of door.</p>	<p>Health and safety risk (possible lead paint)</p> <p>Extensive deterioration in condition</p> <p>To provide better care or access</p>
T234	<p>Catalogue states that these are "Timbers which appear to be the rail and uprights to the old staircases on the external Granary balcony. (Not certain this is there use.)". 4x long timbers and 2x decorative finials. However, the pendants look similar to those on the Cloth Hall arches. This object</p>	<p>Retain pendants as important decorative feature but dispose of larger timbers.</p>	<p>Objects posing a conservation hazard to other parts of the collection</p> <p>To provide better care or access</p>

	has been assigned a Temporary Number, which means that the object was found in store with no associated existing number / tag / documentation connected with it. Active woodworm. Lack of clear provenance makes it difficult to use. Large and heavy so would require a courier to move to the Museum for any exhibition.		
L140	Wooden parts to make a clock frame. Came from Hampstead Norreys church and supported a 17th century clock (not in the Museum collection). Is possibly a loan from 1988, but records are confusing. Active woodworm. Large and heavy so would require a courier to move to the Museum for any exhibition.	Dispose: Offer back to Hampstead Norreys then offer to Weald and Downland Living Museum	Objects posing a conservation hazard to other parts of the collection To provide better care or access
1987.115.1	Crosscut saw (prob c. 1960) One man American tooth pattern with hole in blade to convert to 2-man operation. Used by husband of donor. Donor's address is Moppers Cottage, Crux Easton, Highclere, Hampshire. No further information on location of use. The saw in question is the one in the lower section of image. Active woodworm and there is not a West Berkshire connection.	Dispose: Offer to Hampshire organisation - e.g. Cultural Trust, Milestones, Manor Farm Botley	Objects posing a conservation hazard to other parts of the collection To provide better care or access
OC32.20	Angel carving from St Mary's Church, Kingsclere. Active woodworm and there is not a West Berkshire connection.	Dispose: Offer to Hampshire Cultural Trust Mention to parish council in Kingsclere	Objects posing a conservation hazard to other parts of the collection

		- and there is a history group	To provide better care or access
D3106 (T3418)	2x bottle crates for Ferguson's Reading. Active woodworm and there is not a West Berkshire connection. Donor states on entry form that is happy for the Reading related crates to be offered to Reading Museum.	Not accessioned anyway, but offer to transfer to Reading Museum	Objects posing a conservation hazard to other parts of the collection To provide better care or access
1979.68 (T2811 / T2810)	Dado rail, multiple lengths/widths and 20x planks of wood. This object was assigned a Temporary Number, which means that the object was found in store with no associated existing number / tag / documentation connected with it. Contacted a previous Curator and they believed these belong to a medieval ceiling that was from 1 Market Street, Newbury. The Museum also had smaller decorative features in boxes from this same ceiling. Large and heavy so would require a courier to move to the Museum for any exhibition.	Retain a sample of plank and a sample of dado to keep with the decorative elements and then dispose of the rest.	Health and safety risk (unknown treatments) Objects posing a conservation hazard to other parts of the collection To provide better care or access
1996.59.1	Electric cooker. Made by Revo. With loose grill pan. The cooker was bought by an hire purchase arrangement from the Electricity Board in 1939. It has always been used by the donor who comes from Reading. Not West Berkshire related. It is very heavy so would require a courier to move to the Museum for any exhibition.	Dispose: Re-offer to Reading Museum, then other Museums.	To provide better care or access

D3721.1	School desk. Removed from Shaw House during 2003-2006 restoration. No further information about item is known. Never been accessioned into the collection, but items owned by West Berkshire Council.	Dispose: Shaw House do not want the items. Could offer to regional historic houses with public access.	Extensive deterioration in condition To provide better care or access
D3721.2	Belfast sinks x 4. Removed from Shaw House during 2003-2006 restoration. No further information about item is known. Never been accessioned into the collection, but items owned by West Berkshire Council.	Dispose: Shaw House do not want the items. Could offer to regional historic houses with public access.	Extensive deterioration in condition To provide better care or access
D3721.3	Metal grating for sink. Removed from Shaw House during 2003-2006 restoration. No further information about item is known. Never been accessioned into the collection, but items owned by West Berkshire Council.	Dispose: Shaw House do not want the items. Could offer to regional historic houses with public access.	Extensive deterioration in condition To provide better care or access
D3721.4	Sink furniture. Removed from Shaw House during 2003-2006 restoration. No further information about item is known. Never been accessioned into the collection, but items owned by West Berkshire Council.	Dispose: Shaw House do not want the items. Could offer to regional historic houses with public access.	Extensive deterioration in condition To provide better care or access
D3721.5	Metal bracket for sink. Removed from Shaw House during 2003-2006 restoration. No further information about item is known. Never been accessioned into the collection, but items owned by West Berkshire Council.	Dispose: Shaw House do not want the items. Could offer to regional historic houses with public access.	Extensive deterioration in condition To provide better care or access

D3721.6	Mirror. Removed from Shaw House during 2003-2006 restoration. No further information about item is known. Never been accessioned into the collection, but items owned by West Berkshire Council.	Dispose: Shaw House do not want the items. Could offer to regional historic houses with public access.	Extensive deterioration in condition To provide better care or access
D3721.7	Large Belfast sink. Removed from Shaw House during 2003-2006 restoration. No further information about item is known. Never been accessioned into the collection, but items owned by West Berkshire Council.	Dispose: Shaw House do not want the items. Could offer to regional historic houses with public access.	Extensive deterioration in condition To provide better care or access
D3721.9	Rolled top bath. Removed from Shaw House during 2003-2006 restoration. No further information about item is known. Never been accessioned into the collection, but items owned by West Berkshire Council. Large and heavy so would require a courier to move to the Museum for any exhibition.	Dispose: Shaw House do not want the items. Could offer to regional historic houses with public access.	Extensive deterioration in condition To provide better care or access

6 Supporting Information

- 6.1 A document will accompany this report that contains images of the above. The member can make individual decisions on each object in this document should they wish. This will be provided as a separate appendix.
- 6.2 Emails and spreadsheets used in the decision-making process by the Collections Development Panel to produce the recommendations above can be made accessible if required.
- 6.3 The Museum Collections Development Policy (Approved by Governing Body in 2018). There has been an updated policy written, but this still needs to go for approval to the Governing Body, but it still adheres to the same principals. This will be provided as a separate appendix.

7 Options for consideration

- 7.1 The alternative option is to do nothing. This means these objects remain in the Museum collection. This option is not recommended as the council will be committing resources to store and care for objects that it is unlikely to be able to use. Many of the objects highlighted have active woodworm or are deteriorating due to poor environmental conditions, which will need treating.

8 Proposals

- 8.1 The Museum is asking the decision maker to review and approve the recommendations for the 19 object groups from the Museum collection that have been highlighted for disposal. A document has been provided for the member to make individual decisions on each object should they wish.
- 8.2 The proposals will enable the Museum to more effectively manage the collection in a smaller store. Retaining these objects will have a direct impact on the urgent relocation of objects from Bone Lane to B150 as the available space is extremely limited.
- 8.3 The proposals will also reduce the cost of caring for objects that are not relevant to the residents of West Berkshire, reduce the risk from woodworm spreading through the collection and enable objects that are not used in the collection to be accessed in another repository.

9 Conclusion

- 9.1 The Museum is asking the decision maker to review and approve the recommendations for the 19 object groups from the Museum collection that have been highlighted for disposal. A document has been provided for the member to make individual decisions on each object should they wish.
- 9.2 The proposals will enable the Museum to more effectively manage the collection in a smaller store. Retaining these objects will have a direct impact on the urgent relocation of objects from Bone Lane to B150 as the available space is extremely limited.
- 9.3 The proposals will also reduce the cost of caring for objects that are not relevant to the residents of West Berkshire, reduce the risk from woodworm spreading through the collection and enable objects that are not used in the collection to be accessed in another repository.
- 9.4 Appendix A – Collections Development Policy 2018
Appendix B – Object Review List: Images and Space for Decision-Making

Subject to Call-In:

Yes: No:

The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval

- Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council
 - Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position
 - Considered or reviewed by Scrutiny Commission or associated Committees or Task Groups within preceding six months
 - Item is Urgent Key Decision
 - Report is to note only
-