

North Hertfordshire Museum

Documentation Policy 2018-2023



Name of governing body: *North Hertfordshire District Council*

Date of approval: 05/08/2019

Date at which this policy is due for review: 20/12/2023

Introduction

This policy will guide the work of North Hertfordshire Museum (NHM) in the field of collections documentation.

Documentation underpins every aspect of museum activity. Recording collection information is central to being accountable for the collections, their accessibility, management, research, study and use.

Our policy for the documentation of the collections is to ensure that the information we hold relating to the collections is accurate, secure, reliable and accessible.

The aim of the documentation policy is to ensure that the museum fulfils its responsibilities in relation to security, management and access of collections

- Improve accountability for collections
- Maintain at least minimum professional standards in documentation
- Extend access to collection information
- Strengthen the security of the collections

Ethics and legislation

Our work will adhere to published standards and guidance, in particular the Arts Council England Accreditation Standards.

We will abide by the Museums Association Code of Ethics, which is characterised by the following headings

Public engagement & public benefit

- Actively engage and work in partnership with existing audiences and reach out to new and diverse audiences
- Treat everyone equally, with honesty and respect
- Provide and generate accurate information for and with the public
- Support freedom of speech and debate
- Use collections for public benefit – for learning, inspiration and enjoyment

Stewardship of collections

- Maintain and develop collections for current and future generations
- Acquire, care for, exhibit and loan collections with transparency and competency in order to generate knowledge and engage the public with

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collections

- Treat museum collections as cultural, scientific or historic assets, not financial assets

Individual & institutional integrity

Museums and those who work in and with them should:

- Act in the public interest in all areas of work
- Uphold the highest level of institutional integrity and personal conduct at all times
- Build respectful and transparent relationships with partner organisations, governing bodies, staff and volunteers to ensure public trust in the museum's activities

Collections information will be recorded in compliance with all legal requirements, the Freedom of Information Act (2000) and The Data Protection Act (2018)

Accountability

North Hertfordshire Museum commits to maintaining at least the minimum level of collections documentation allowing us to identify and locate all items for which we are legally responsible, including loans.

Standards

North Hertfordshire Museum is committed to following SPECTRUM, The UK Collections Management Standard. We specifically commit to meeting the minimum standards for the SPECTRUM primary procedures:

Object Entry

North Hertfordshire Museum will record all items entering its site, whether potential acquisitions, loans, enquiries or other deposits. This information will be recorded on an object entry form and on a digital day book.

Acquisition

The acquisition and disposal of objects from the collections is covered by the current version of the Collections Development Policy.

Each accession will be allocated a unique number and this will be marked onto the item whenever practicable. In the case of bulk archaeological and natural science material a number will be allocated to a whole site. This information is recorded in an accessions register which is maintained by Curatorial staff.

Loans

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All loans in and loans out of the Museum will be recorded following the appropriate procedures and in accordance with the Loan In/Loans Out policies.

Detailed operational guidelines concerning documentation procedures are recorded in the Documentation Procedural Manual.

Access to collections information

NHM is committed to working towards improving access to the collections information. There will be an increased emphasis on digitisation ensuring objects are photographed or scanned to a high standard. We will seek to publish collections online and to use collections information to enhance our exhibitions and community engagement programme. The standards applied to cataloguing and digitisation will ensure that our collections information can be integrated into partnership projects using shared digital platforms. This will ensure that collections information is more accessible to general visitors, staff, researchers and other users.

Security of Collections information

NHM is committed to ensuring the physical security of the records in our documentation systems and the long-term preservation of those records, including a regular back up of electronic data and security copying of key records such as Accession registers.

Online collections database

Our collections database, eHive, is a web-based database. All data is stored on multiple hard disks to allow eHive to continue running in case of a hardware failure. The main data centre which runs eHive (in Dallas, Texas, USA) has redundant power systems, generator back up, redundant air conditioning and multiple independent connections to the Internet. Data is backed up to a different city (Auckland, New Zealand) to preserve data during an extreme event, such as a fire at the data centre. The entire content (text and media files) is backed up daily, weekly and monthly.

Accession Registers

The original hard copy Accession Registers are stored in a safe at the North Hertfordshire Museum. A secondary digital copy is maintained and stored on the shared G drive in cloud storage. External hard drives contain copies of the old hand-written Hitchin and Letchworth Accessions Registers, and these are being digitised by volunteers.