

Derbyshire County Council

Meeting with Cabinet Member, Health and Communities

15 July 2014

**Report of the Strategic Director, Health and Communities and the
Strategic Director, Economy, Transport and Environment**

COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT

1. Purpose of the report:

To inform the Cabinet Member, Health and Communities of progress at Elvaston Castle and to request permission to address further collections management issues.

2. Information and analysis:

- 2.1 Significant work has been undertaken at Elvaston Castle since 2001 to resolve outstanding museum collections management issues dating from the 1990s. This work has been undertaken in line with the Museums Association (MA) Code of Ethics and latterly guided by their Disposal toolkit (revised 2014). The process has been overseen by regional Museum Development Officers and, with regards to artefacts carrying grant aid the awarding bodies, the V&A Purchase Grant Fund and the PRISM fund.

Elected members have previously been informed of progress at Elvaston and made aware that a much reduced collection would remain, which would need further refinement.

- 2.2 In 2008 the collection had been reduced to approximately 7500 items, the majority small and mainly agricultural in nature. They include ceramics, examples of country crafts and costume, tools including horticultural hoes, spades, and rakes. These were retained because they may have a long term use in any future interpretation at Elvaston.

There are also non-rural objects including a dental anaesthetist's machine and ethnographic material e.g. African drums, previously from the historic collections of the Derbyshire Museums Service (housed at John Turner House until 1991), or transferred from the School Museums Service.

- 2.3 All the objects had been catalogued on the MODES database. The majority have been removed from storage in the Castle to a single

location in the Coach Block. Objects are packaged to museum standards and where necessary protected from light, dust, pests etc. A review in 2013 using the MA Collections Link's Benchmarking Assessment for Accreditation found that while the building, storage and environmental control benchmarks were adequately met, work is needed to meet benchmarks for environmental monitoring, housekeeping and emergency preparedness. Progress is being made to resolve this where possible.

In addition, the furniture from the cottage display previously in the Working Estate Museum remains in store in the Castle. This includes a kitchen dresser, bedstead and chests of drawers. This was retained because it may have a long term use in any future interpretation at Elvaston.

A small number of items remain in buildings in the Museum yard, which are large and heavy. This includes the Field Marshall tractor (with good Derbyshire, agricultural provenance and purchased with grant aid), a collection of Derbyshire brick samples, a few examples of agricultural machinery, a bier and an invalid carriage and a large corn mill (which is a loan). The gas engine and bench saw are part of the original fittings from Elvaston.

- 2.4 Since 2012 staff have been undertaking review of the collections using the MA Assessing Significance Toolkit. This enables curators to review items in a collection for their role, function and purpose, and while every item is examined, it is photographed and the condition is appraised.

There is a need to undertake a further review, to highlight objects that do not fit with the museums collecting policy or are in such a condition that they could not be displayed. So far over 300 objects have been marked for transfer or disposal, about 40% of the objects reviewed. If this trajectory continues it is estimated that the collection will be reduced from 7500 objects to 4500, all of which will have relevance to the collection with potential to be used within exhibitions and outreach.

- 2.5 There is now a further tranche of material to be disposed in line with MA guidance, by being offered first to local accredited museums and then through the MA 'Find an Object' online portal. Donors who donated objects over 20 years ago (pre-1994) will not be approached in this process but every effort will be made to contact donors who have given material since 1994, in order to offer the objects back to them. This follows on from previous attempts to return items to their original owners.

Should there be no interest from accredited museums the disposal may be either by transfer to non-accredited museums and heritage organisations, or through public auction or permanent disposal. Any

disposal should be in line with the MA Code of Ethics and each item will be recorded and the records retained in perpetuity.

- 2.6 Ultimately the collection that is housed at Elvaston will be of reasonable museum quality and have function and purpose within the county's collections.

When the review process began, there was always likelihood that there would be an interpretation facility at Elvaston relating to the development and management of the historic garden, so collections which seemed relevant were retained for this use.

Other collections have merit as having good Derbyshire provenance and help to tell elements of the social history of Derbyshire. They have been used in library exhibitions, at Buxton Museum and have been lent to independent museums. However, this remaining collection will need to be managed, stored and used for the long term. Options for the future use of the collection will be the subject of a further report to the Cabinet Member.

3 Financial Consideration:

- 3.1 The Museums Association Code of Ethics recommends that any monies raised as a result of disposal should be applied 'solely and directly for the benefit of the museum collections' and this recommendation has previously been followed by the County Council.
- 3.2 It is unlikely that any item of value will be considered for disposal. Should items be considered sellable, then following the agreed procedures, an appropriate auction house will be sought in line with recommendations from County Procurement and suitable terms agreed.
- 3.3 There will be a retained collection and support for its long term preservation and storage need to be resolved.

4 Equality of Opportunity:

The assessing significance procedure scrutinises every object with regard its museum values, including its potential use by visitors and non-visitors. By undertaking sound collection management routines, the collection at Elvaston will be better able to be used in exhibitions in public libraries and in local museums.

5 Legal considerations

Officers continue to make every effort to determine the provenance of the collections guided by the MA Code of Ethics and Disposal Toolkit.

6. Other considerations:

In preparing this report the relevance of the following factors has been considered: prevention of crime and disorder, human resources, environmental, health, property and transport considerations.

7. Background papers:

Cabinet Member/Chief Officer – Cultural and Community Services, 11 April 2006: Joint Report of the Strategic Director of Cultural and Community Services and the Director of Environmental Services: ELVASTON CASTLE

Meeting with Cabinet Member – Cultural and Community Services, 20 February 2007: Joint Report of the Strategic Director of Cultural and Community Services and the Strategic Director of Environmental Services: PROGRESS AT ELVASTON CASTLE

Meeting with Cabinet Member – Cultural Services, 27 July 2007: Joint Report of the Strategic Director of Cultural and Community Services and the Strategic Director of Environmental Services: COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT

Meeting with Cabinet Member – Cultural Services, 11 December 2007: Joint Report of the Strategic Director of Cultural and Community Services and the Strategic Director of Environmental Services: COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT (Community Services)

8. Key Decision:

No

9. Call-in:

Is it required that call-in be waived for any decision on this report?

No

10. Strategic Director's Recommendation:

That the Cabinet Member, Health and Communities

1. Notes the report
2. Agrees to the relocation and disposal of items from the collection at Elvaston in accordance with the Museum Associations Guidelines

David Lowe
Strategic Director
Health and Communities

Mike Ashworth
Strategic Director
Economy, Transport and Environment