**Iarsmalann Chontae an Dúin**

**Down County Museum**

***Collections Development Policy***

#### Name of museum:

Down County Museum

#### Name of governing body:

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council

#### Date on which this policy was approved by governing body:

*July 2023*

#### Policy review procedure:

The collections development policy will be published and reviewed from time to time, at least once every five years.

#### Date at which this policy is due for review:

*June 2026*

Northern Ireland Museums Council will be notified of any changes to the collections development policy, and the implications of any such changes for the future of collections.

# Relationship to other relevant policies/ plans of the organisation:

**1**

* 1. The museum’s statement of purpose is:
  + To collect, care for and research our rich cultural heritage to support continued understanding of our history, culture and environment.
  + To connect residents and visitors to our collections, place and history through dynamic and inclusive exhibitions and activities.
  + To celebrate our unique places and identities.
  1. The governing body will ensure that both acquisition and disposal are carried out openly and with transparency.
  2. 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 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.
  3. Acquisitions outside the current stated policy will only be made in exceptional circumstances.
  4. The museum 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.
  5. The museum will undertake due diligence and make every effort not to acquire, whether by purchase, gift or bequest, 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.
  6. The museum will not undertake disposal motivated principally by financial reasons.

**2**

# History of the collections

* 1. Down County Museum’s collection was created in 1981 and consists mainly of objects donated by members of the public. These include items relating to the social, cultural, political, and economic history of County Down such as archaeological, geological, ecclesiastical, numismatic, and natural history collections as well as documents, photographs, agricultural items, fine and applied art and objects relating to the history of the Old County Gaol of Down, in which the museum is situated.
  2. This collection, obtained largely by public donation between 1981-2000 forms the basis of the permanent exhibitions in the Governor’s Residence and the Cell Block extension.
  3. The construction of the Cell Block Extension in 2015 facilitated the reorganisation of the collection’s storage, providing an additional onsite collections store that is currently used for large industrial and agricultural items.

# An overview of current collections

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* 1. The collection currently comprises over 13,000 individual items ranging from prehistoric flint to contemporary art. Notable collections include the fine art collection, textile collection, medical collection, 1798 collection and the agricultural collection.
  2. In addition, there is a large photographic archive of approx. 50,000 photographs, negatives, and slides.

# Themes and priorities for future collecting

**4**

* 1. Historically the collecting remit for Down County Museum covered the whole of county Down however following an organisational restructure into Newry, Mourne and Down Museums (NMD Museums) and a subsequent strategic review, the collecting remit has been revised to reflect the area covered by the museum’s governing body; Newry, Mourne and Down District Council.

Within the area covered by Newry, Mourne and Down District Council and as part of NMD Museums, Down County Museum provides a local museums service for Downpatrick and its hinterland ranging from but not limited to, Saintfield, Strangford, Newcastle, Castlewellan and Ballynahinch (the legacy Down District Council area).

* 1. The Collections Development Policy of Down County Museum also respects the previous collecting remit of the museum and Downpatrick’s historic importance as the county town of county Down. At Curatorial discretion, items of significant interest may be accepted from areas within county Down that do not fall within the area administered by Newry, Mourne and Down District Council.
  2. Part of NMD Museums’ mission is ‘to collect, care for and research our rich cultural heritage to support continued understanding of our history, culture and environment.’ To ensure that sufficient time and resources are devoted to caring for, researching, and understanding the collection by curatorial staff, immediate future collecting will be temporarily suspended. This will enable curatorial staff to identify gaps in the collection for future collecting and identify priorities for rationalisation.
  3. At the Curatorial team’s discretion, items will only be accepted via public donation if they are of significant historical interest or in identified areas of weakness within the collection.

# Themes and priorities for rationalisation and disposal

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* 1. The museum 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.
  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.
  3. To optimise storage space and increase accessibility to the collection, the Museum will de-accession items that fall under the following themes:
     + generic and duplicate objects
     + items that are broken or in poor condition
     + items that fall outside either the current or previous collecting remit as set above in 4.1
     + Photography equipment
     + Textile Collection
  4. In addition, the museum will seek to reduce the number of items on loan from other museums and organisations with a view to maximising access to its own collection.

# Legal and ethical framework for acquisition and disposal of items

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**6.1** The museum recognises its responsibility to work within the parameters of the Museum Association Code of Ethics when considering acquisition and disposal.

# Collecting policies of other museums

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* 1. The museum 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.
  2. Specific reference is made to the following museum(s)/organisation(s):
     + Newry and Mourne Museum
     + National Museums Northern Ireland
     + North Down Museum
     + Downpatrick and County Down Railway Museum
     + Lisburn Linen Centre and Museum
     + Public Record Office of Northern Ireland
     + F.E. McWilliam Gallery, Banbridge
     + Northern Ireland War Memorial
     + Linen Hall Library

# Archival holdings

**8**

* 1. The Museum accepts archival material relating to County Down, mainly as part of larger collections of objects and associated records, and where they may be considered as objects which shed light on the area defined in section 4.1 of this policy.

# Acquisition

**9**

* 1. The policy for agreeing acquisitions is:

The Curatorial staff of Down County Museum, as Newry, Mourne and Down District Council’s appointed museum professionals, have delegated authority and responsibility for the acceptance or rejection of potential donations or bequests to Down County Museum and for makings purchases and soliciting donations in accordance with the terms of this policy.

* 1. The museum 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).
  2. 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, the museum 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.

# Human remains

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* 1. As the museum holds or intends to acquire human remains under 100 years old, it will obtain the necessary licence under the Human Tissue Act 2004 and any subordinate legislation from time to time in force.
  2. As the museum 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.

# Biological and geological material

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**11.1** So far as biological and geological material is concerned, the museum 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.

# Archaeological material

**12**

* 1. The museum will not acquire archaeological material (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.
  2. In England, Wales and Northern Ireland 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).

# Exceptions

**13**

* 1. Any exceptions to the above clauses will only be because the museum is:
     + acting as an externally approved repository of last resort for material of local (UK) origin
     + acting with the permission of authorities with the requisite jurisdiction in the country of origin

In these cases the museum will be open and transparent in the way it makes decisions and will act only with the express consent of an appropriate outside authority. The museum will document when these exceptions occur.

# Spoliation

**14**

**14.1** The museum 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.

# The Repatriation and Restitution of objects and human remains

**15**

* 1. The museum’s governing body, acting on the advice of the museum’s professional staff, if any, 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. The museum 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.
  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’.

# Disposal procedures

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* 1. All disposals will be undertaken with reference to the Spectrum primary procedure on disposal.
  2. The governing body will confirm that it is legally free to dispose of an item. Agreements on disposal made with donors will also be taken into account.
  3. When disposal of a museum object is being considered, the museum 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.
  4. When disposal is motivated by curatorial reasons the procedures outlined below will be followed and the method of disposal may be by gift, sale, or as a last resort – destruction.
  5. The decision to dispose of material from the collections will be taken by the governing body only after 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.
  6. A decision to dispose of a specimen or object, whether by gift, sale or destruction (in the case of an item too badly damaged or deteriorated to be of any use for the purposes of the collections or for reasons of health and safety), will be the responsibility of the governing body of the museum acting on the advice of professional curatorial staff, if any, and not of the curator or manager of the collection acting alone.
  7. Once a decision to dispose of material in the collection has been taken, priority will be given to retaining it within the public domain. It will therefore be offered in the first instance, by gift or sale, directly to other Accredited Museums likely to be interested in its acquisition.
  8. If the material is not acquired by any Accredited museum to which it was offered as a gift or for sale, then the museum community at large will be advised of the intention to dispose of the material normally through a notice on the MA’s Find an Object web listing service, an announcement in the Museums Association’s Museums Journal or in other specialist publications and websites (if appropriate).
  9. The announcement relating to gift or sale will indicate the number and nature of specimens or objects involved, and the basis on which the material will be transferred to another institution. Preference will be given to expressions of interest from other Accredited Museums. A period of at least two months will be allowed for an interest in acquiring the material to be expressed. At the end of this period, if no expressions of interest have been received, the museum may consider disposing of the material to other interested individuals and organisations giving priority to organisations in the public domain.
  10. Any monies received by the museum governing body from the disposal of items will be applied solely and directly for the benefit of the collections. This normally means the purchase of further acquisitions. In exceptional cases, improvements relating to the care of collections in order to meet or exceed Accreditation requirements relating to the risk of damage to and deterioration of the collections may be justifiable. Any monies received in compensation for the damage, loss or destruction of items will be applied in the same way. Advice on those cases where the monies are intended to be used for the care of collections will be sought from the Northern Ireland Museums Council.
  11. The proceeds of a sale will be allocated so it can be demonstrated that they are spent in a manner compatible with the requirements of the Accreditation standard. Money must be restricted to the long-term sustainability, use and development of the collection.
  12. 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.

## Disposal by exchange

* 1. The museum will not dispose of items by exchange.

## Disposal by destruction

* 1. If it is not possible to dispose of an object through transfer or sale, the governing body may decide to destroy it.
  2. It is acceptable to destroy material of low intrinsic significance (duplicate mass-produced articles or common specimens which lack significant provenance) where no alternative method of disposal can be found.
  3. 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.
  4. 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.
  5. The destruction of objects should be witnessed by an appropriate member of the museum 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.

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