Executive summary

Introduction

The Collections Management Plan provides a framework for all collections-related aspects of the museum service. The plan aims to consolidate best practice in all aspects of collections management, and to ensure compliance with the national museum Accreditation scheme.

Collections Development

The Collections Development Policy aims to maintain and document appropriate formal procedures for the entry of objects to and the exit of objects from the collections. It incorporates a review of the existing collections to establish a context within which to chart their future development. It identifies gaps and potential growth areas, and provides criteria for the acceptance or otherwise of objects that may be offered to the Museum as donations, or which may appear as available for purchase. It establishes priorities for future collecting, including that of contemporary material.

Documentation

The documentation policy statement sets out in-house procedures established by the Museum for processing new acquisitions, cataloguing collections, recording location and movement, information retrieval, and exit and loan records.

Collections care and conservation

The statement on collections care and conservation aims to establish a balanced and flexible policy which combines high standards of collections care with the provision of a wide range of opportunities for people to engage with the collections. It is based on the standards set out in the checklist Benchmarks in Collection Care. Its coverage includes monitoring and control of environmental conditions, storage, handling, and remedial conservation.

Security and disaster planning

This section covers precautions, including alarm systems, against damage to the collections or any event which compromises the integrity of areas where collections or displayed or stored; for example, fire or flood, vandalism or theft. It includes security procedures, and provides a background for the Museum’s emergency plans for responding to disasters and emergency care of at risk or damaged objects. The aim is to meet the standards for best practice set out in Benchmarks in Collection Care.

Access

The collection, documentation and preservation of objects, which form the subject of the rest of this plan, are not ends in themselves. These processes take place with a view to facilitating a high standard of physical and intellectual access to and enjoyment of the collections. Consideration of access issues links collections management with the Museum’s other policies relating to learning and audience development. Means of access discussed in this section include on-site displays and
exhibitions, outreach displays, open storage, study access, learning and outreach events and digital media.
1 Introduction

1.1 Overall aim and national context

The Collections Management Plan for Tunbridge Wells Museum and Art Gallery provides a framework for all collections-related aspects of the museum service. The plan aims to consolidate best practice in all aspects of collections management, and to ensure compliance with the national museum accreditation scheme.

The structure and contents of the original 2006 plan were informed by the then new Accreditation Standard produced by the MLA for museums throughout the United Kingdom, and by the standards set in the checklist *Benchmarks in Collection Care*. The layout of topics was arranged to follow a pattern which had been adopted, in response to these evolving standards, by a number of national and regional museums. The original document was reviewed and revised in the light of the requirements of the revised Accreditation Standard introduced in 2011, which requires an approved Collections Development Policy, Documentation Policy and Care and Conservation Policy. These requirements are covered by individual sections of the overall Collections Management Plan.

1.2 Local context

The borough of Tunbridge Wells has a special nature which has grown out of its unusual story. Originally a rural area of West Kent, the town itself grew up only four hundred years ago. In that four hundred years it became a centre of resort, of leisure, of residence and of commerce, still set in its rural hinterland. Tunbridge Wells today therefore has both a special story to tell, and a varied and unusual mix of communities with which to share that story.

The Museum and Art Gallery in the centre of the town has long been a focus of that story and these communities. Over the years since a major service review in 2000-2001, the Museum has aimed to widen that focus in terms of access to collections and the range of services provided, while sharpening the focus in terms of the coherence and quality of the customer experience. Since 2000, the Museum has increasingly reached out to the community through innovative education and outreach work, information and learning initiatives and customer response. The audience development activities at the Museum have been a means of establishing a special relationship between the Museum, its collections and the people of the borough.

The Museum's mission is to enrich the lives of the people of the borough of Tunbridge Wells by sharing collections and knowledge in participative experiences through which they can learn, enjoy and be inspired.

The key values of the Museum are
- Community ownership
- Increased access to collections
- Excellence
Effective collections management is vital to the fulfilment of this vision, and this plan sets out ways in which collections can be both well cared for and made widely accessible to users through a variety of means.

1.3 History of the Museum and Art Gallery

Tunbridge Wells Museum was originally created through volunteer effort by the Tunbridge Wells Natural History and Philosophical Society. The Tunbridge Wells Natural History and Antiquarian Society, as it was originally named, was founded by a local medical doctor and well known philanthropist, Dr George Abbott, in 1885. The society organised outings to places of interest, expeditions to collect natural history specimens, indoor meetings of various kinds, and public lectures. Members’ interests centred on natural history, but their programme of events covered many other areas, including archaeology, folklore, and astronomy.

One of the Society’s stated aims was the establishment of a local museum, and members began assembling specimens with this in view, the collection being finally adopted by the local Council (the 1889 Council of the Borough of Tunbridge Wells) as a Municipal Museum in 1918.

The oldest element in the Museum collections consists of the natural history specimens assembled by the Tunbridge Wells Natural History Society from 1885. These included plants, insects, birds, mammals, fossils, rocks, and minerals. The founder Curator, Dr George Abbott, and his successor Dr John Given were both geologists, so great emphasis continued to be laid on natural history until the latter’s retirement in 1948. From quite an early date, local history and archaeological material began to collected, including examples of the local industry of Tunbridge ware and topographical views of the town and its environs. In 1933 the Museum received the large Mackintosh collection of Tunbridge ware, which provided the basis for the Museum's future supremacy as an exhibitor of this craft.

In the early days, many non-local curiosities were collected, including ethnographical objects, exotic birds and butterflies, and foreign archaeological specimens. In the 1930s most of the ethnographic objects were sold to the Wellcome Museum, and subsequently transferred by them to the Museum of Mankind.

Domestic and agricultural bygones were acquired to some degree from the start of the twentieth century, but were collected more particularly in the 1950s. The collections of dolls, toys, and costume date mainly from this period, being an enthusiasm of Edythe Bradley, the third long term Curator, who took over in 1952. She was a well known figure in the local community and evidently persuaded many local families to donate objects that had come down to them from the Victorian era and early 20th century.

The arrival of the Ashton Bequest in 1952 added an extra dimension to the Museum’s picture collection, which had previously been exclusively focussed on local history subjects.

The Museum’s governing body (since 1974) is Tunbridge Wells Borough Council.
2 Collections development

1. Introduction

The purpose of the Collections Development Policy is to maintain and document appropriate formal procedures for the entry of objects to and the exit of objects from the collections of Tunbridge Wells Museum and Art Gallery (including the Borough Archives). The Museum’s governing body is Tunbridge Wells Borough Council. It incorporates a review of the existing collections to establish a context within which to chart their future development. The policy will serve as a guide to the criteria to be used by museum staff in making informed and consistent decisions about the acceptance of objects offered to the museum, and will establish priorities for active collecting projects. It will also inform members of the public, especially potential donors and other benefactors, of the reasoning behind individual collecting decisions and the shape of future collecting activities.

The Collections Development Policy forms an integral part of the Museum’s overall Collections Management Plan, which is guided by the Museum’s overall mission “to enrich the lives of the people of the borough of Tunbridge Wells by sharing collections and knowledge in participative experiences through which they can learn, enjoy and be inspired”.

The Collections Development Policy has been designed to comply with the requirements of the national standard established for Arts Council England’s Accreditation Scheme for Museums and Galleries, and thereby to encourage public confidence in the museum as a suitable repository. It represents a revision of the previous policy which was approved under delegated powers in 2004 and 2007, and which itself replaced an earlier version adopted by the museum’s governing body, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, in 1995. The structure and contents of the policy follow the template set out by Arts Council England (ACE) for its accreditation scheme, and the policy incorporates the mandatory wording on legal and ethical issues included in that template.

This present version was approved under delegated powers in 2012, and is due for review in 2017.

2. Overview of existing collections and criteria governing future collecting

The collections of Tunbridge Wells Museum and Art Gallery primarily illustrate and document the story of the people, landscape, and flora and fauna of the town of Royal Tunbridge Wells, the present borough of Tunbridge Wells and the Kent High Weald area (which are largely coextensive), and the immediately adjacent parts of East Sussex which have traditionally looked to Tunbridge Wells as their centre, set within the wider context of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), within which Tunbridge Wells is the major urban centre. This collecting area can be viewed metaphorically as a series of three concentric circles comprising Royal Tunbridge Wells, parts of Kent and Sussex which are or have been linked with the town historically and/or administratively, and the wider landscape area within which the former are contained. In order not to duplicate the work of other agencies,
and in due recognition of resource limitations, the detailed historical focus of the collections has been and will continue to be on the centre, with an increasingly general overview of the outer circles.

Objects from a wider geographical area are included where they have a significant connection with local people, or are generic social history items of which similar examples would have been used locally, or make a contribution to the Museum’s education, enquiry and research services. Further details of the existing collections and anticipated future acquisitions are given below, divided for convenience into subject areas, although it is recognised that these overlap considerably and are closely interrelated by reason of their essentially local provenance.

2.1 Natural History

The Natural History collection currently comprise 28,800 individual specimens. These consist mainly of rocks and minerals; fossils; herbarium sheets (flowering plants, ferns, mosses and liverworts, lichens); other plant specimens (fruits and seeds, fungi); land, freshwater and marine shells; insects (mainly butterflies and moths, and beetles); birds’ eggs and nests; mounted birds and mammals; animal skulls and bones; microscope slides. The bulk of the collection was acquired in the period from 1885 to 1950, in collaboration with the Tunbridge Wells Natural History Society. The plants, insects and shells, in particular, are rich in material which is scientifically valuable on account of its local provenance. The collection as a whole also serves to illustrate the social history of the natural history movement in Britain and locally. All sections include a limited number of non-local and non-British specimens, which are nonetheless of interest and value for their connections with local naturalists and their use in local and social history displays and outreach activities. Supplementary material includes original illustrations, most notably an extensive collection of mid-19th century watercolours of fungi by Richard Deakin); photographs; publications about local natural history or by local naturalists; manuscript biological records; and documents and ephemera relating to the Tunbridge Wells Natural History Society and its members.

The Museum will continue to acquire natural history specimens from the borough of Tunbridge Wells and the High Weald area of Kent and Sussex, provided that these have full written data and, in the case of well-represented groups, add significant value to the existing collection. Priority will be given to groups currently not or poorly represented. Specimens without provenance, or specimens from other parts of Britain or abroad, may be acquired if they have some significant connection with local people, or if they are specifically required for display or outreach purposes. Supplementary material such as that described above will also be collected.

2.2 Archaeology

The Archaeology collection consists of excavation material – finds and documentation – exclusively from the local area, and individual objects from Kent and Sussex, other parts of Britain and abroad. The excavation material (6000 objects) covers some small digs from the early 20th century, a number of major excavations in the 1950s and 1960s, e.g. High Rocks, Castle Hill, Minepit Wood, Stonewall Park, and the results of small rescue digs and watching briefs from 1980 onwards. There is a small but significant collection of finds, sketches and other material relating to
pioneer archaeologist Benjamin Harrison of Ightham. The individual objects from outside the local area include a number of early accessions from members of the Tunbridge Wells Natural History Society, which illustrate Victorian and early 20th century collecting and display practices, as well as certain themes that are important for the museum’s education service, e.g. Egypt and Greece, but which are not covered by permanent displays.

The Museum will continue to acquire excavation material – subject to constraints of storage space – and casual finds from Tunbridge Wells borough and adjacent parts of Kent and Sussex. This will be subject to consultation with Maidstone Museum and Art Gallery, or Lewes for East Sussex, as the designated places of deposit for excavation material. Small finds will be reported, if this has not already been done by the finder, to the current county small finds reporting scheme, and advice taken on the appropriate place of deposit. Objects from other parts of Britain or abroad may be acquired if they have some significant connection with local people, or if they are specifically required for display or outreach purposes.

2.3 Local history – pictures

The Museum has a collection of 6300 paintings, drawings, prints, photographs and postcards illustrating local places, events and people from the late 17th century onwards. They cover the borough of Tunbridge Wells, the Kent High Weald, and adjacent areas of Kent and Sussex. Pictures from outside the borough or the Kent High Weald are mainly views of places, such as Tonbridge, traditionally visited by tourists staying at Tunbridge Wells, or relate to the East Sussex villages that have looked to Tunbridge Wells as their urban centre. There are photographs that have been taken by museum staff for the collection, with a view to documenting current developments and events, and providing a contemporary set of views of key areas of the town and its environs. The collection includes work by local artists (notably Charles Tattershall Dodd, William Conyers Fisher and Kenneth Pengelly) and photographers (notably Thomas Sims and Henry Peach Robinson), the products of local printers and publishers, or items otherwise associated with local people (notably Sir David Salomons’ collection of early motoring prints).

The museum will continue to acquire images of local places, people and events, and the work of local artists and publishers, with priority being given to subjects – particularly people-related rather than purely topographical – and periods that are currently not well represented, such as local industries, leisure activities and everyday life in general. Contemporary collecting will take place in collaboration with user groups. Moving images will be collected in collaboration with Screen Archive South East Film, which will hold any original while providing copies for display or research at the museum.

Original images in digital media, or digital copies of originals which are unavailable for acquisition, will be collected. However, collecting through digital media should not detract from the importance of collecting real objects, where they are available. In the case of a digital image, the information content is separable in its entirety from the physical object (CD, computer drive) that carries it. However, a digital print can be an object if framed and mounted as an artistic work. In other cases, the object is the information and not the medium, which is disposable. Means will be needed to allow for technological obsolescence and degeneration of the medium by a programme of regular transfer to new media.
2.4 Local history – books, maps and ephemera

The museum has a collection of books (including local guides and directories), maps and ephemera (including events programmes, advertising material from local businesses, transport timetables, and souvenir albums). They cover the borough of Tunbridge Wells and adjacent areas of Kent and Sussex from the mid 17th century to the present day, although the bulk of the collection apart from books and the Sprange collection is 19th century and later. As well as covering purely local topics, the collection also illustrates the impact of national events on local life: in particular, local celebrations of national historical landmarks and material relating to the two World Wars. Most notable is a collection of late 18th and early 19th century printer’s proofs, consisting of the contents of two original albums in which local printer Jasper Sprange pasted examples of all his work, giving a cross section of the social and business life of the town. Some effort has been made over the years to collect contemporary material.

The museum will continue to acquire books, maps and ephemera that fall within the criteria already established and described above, and which illustrate the social, political and economic history of Tunbridge Wells and associated areas. Books by local authors, or fictional works set in Tunbridge Wells, may be acquired. Newspapers, apart from cuttings books, will not be collected in cases where there would be duplication with the national collection, and where the Library has microfilm copies available for reference, with the exception of commemorative issues and supplements which document particular landmarks in local history and which can be displayed as objects in their own right. The Museum will endeavour to document contemporary life, covering a broad range of topics and sections of the community.

2.5 Local history – archives

Until 1990, the museum’s archive holdings consisted of a small and varied collection of manuscript documents relating to the history of the town and local people, plus a number of specific groups of material such as the records (mainly logbooks and entry registers) of closed local schools (most notably King Charles the Martyr School, the earliest in Tunbridge Wells), management committee minutes of the local hospital, records of the local Chamber of Commerce and local groups such as the Tunbridge Wells Photographic Society, the extensive journals from the 1930s and 1940s of local civil defence leader Brigadier Manley-Sims, and material relating to Victorian Nonconformist cleric Thomas Edwards. In 1990, museum staff took over responsibility for the Borough Archives, an extensive collection of minute books and other documents covering the complete history of local government in the town of Tunbridge Wells from the Local Board of 1835, through incorporation as a borough in 1889 to the dissolution of the ‘old borough’ in 1974. The collection also includes the minutes of Cranbrook and Tonbridge Rural District Councils, which were incorporated in the ‘new borough’ established in 1974, and an ongoing series of agendas and minutes of the current Tunbridge Wells Borough Council. Although the Borough Archives are not technically part of the museum collection, being managed as a local archive with the approval of, and with advice from, the Kent History and Library Centre (the county record office), they form part of an integral local studies service offered by the museum, which has the potential to be further integrated with that of the Library.
With due regard to limitations of space, and realising that much local archival material may be more appropriately deposited at the Kent History & Library Centre, the museum will continue to collect archives which significantly enhance and supplement the existing museum collection or the Borough Archives. There will be a presumption against branching out into entirely new areas. This means that, generally speaking, the museum will restrict its collecting to the history of local government in the town of Tunbridge Wells prior to 1974 and in the wider borough after that date, and to the history of significant people, local businesses and institutions within the town of Tunbridge Wells and its immediate environs. The museum will not collect manuscript documents from East Sussex.

2.6 Local history – 3D objects

The museum has a collection of three-dimensional objects which illustrate aspects of the history of Tunbridge Wells, the Kent High Weald and adjacent areas of Sussex. Although there is a somewhat diffuse boundary between this collection and more general social history covering the everyday lives of local people, the museum has placed a significant priority on collecting local souvenirs besides Tunbridge ware, such as transfer printed and crested china; and the products of local crafts and industries, such as Wealden iron objects, mineral water bottles, biscuit tins, pottery, bricks and tiles, cricket equipment, and the work of the Frant woodcarver Frank Rosier. The collection also includes objects relating to the activities of local government and other local institutions, such as musical instruments from town and church bands, police equipment, standard weights and measures, telephone equipment, commemorative objects for ceremonies such as stone-laying, and presentations to the local council from outgoing mayors and visiting dignitaries.

The museum will continue to acquire objects relating to local government, public services, utilities, transport, tourism, sport, entertainment, crafts, industries and other topics and aspects of everyday life within Tunbridge Wells and associated areas of Kent and Sussex. There will be a presumption against the acquisition of large and bulky objects. Efforts will be made to acquire material illustrating contemporary history and that complements the existing historic collection.

2.7 Tunbridge ware

The Museum has an extensive collection of 1750 pieces of Tunbridge ware, illustrating the development of the craft from the late seventeenth century to the fading out of the original living tradition in the early 1960s. It is the largest collection in any public institution. The collection includes workshop material (blocks and loose veneers), tools and designs, illustrating the process of manufacture, along with associated documents, photographs and other images, books and articles, and ephemera. Products of the small-scale revival of Tunbridge ware making since the 1970s are included. There is also a collection of related decorative art objects, and associated material, representing industries which influenced or were influenced by Tunbridge ware, which exhibit similar designs or techniques, or which were contemporary rivals for the same niche in the market. These related industries include Berlin wool-work, straw work, Sorrento ware, Mauchline ware and Hakone ware.
The Museum will continue to collect Tunbridge ware objects which add significantly to the existing collection. Priority will be given to types and styles of objects hitherto unrepresented, objects with new topographical views or other subjects not yet represented, objects associated with little-known makers or labelled objects by makers who rarely label their wares, objects of outstanding decorative merit, and objects from the very early or very late periods of the industry. Should further significant examples of workshop material, designs or manufacturing records come to light, the Museum will endeavour to acquire whatever does not duplicate the existing collection. The Museum will collect photographs, documents and printed material which shed light on the lives of Tunbridge ware manufacturers and their employees. The Museum will continue to acquire representative examples of Tunbridge ware by contemporary makers, and to document the continuing story of the industry. The Museum will continue to develop a representative but not comprehensive collection of related decorative arts and associated material. Industries that are already well represented, e.g. straw work, Sorrento ware and Mauchline ware, will not normally be collected, but priority will be given to those that are poorly or not at all represented, e.g. Spa ware and Hakone ware.

2.8 Costume and textiles

The Museum’s collection of British costume, accessories and textiles comprises around 7500 objects and is regarded by specialists who have studied it over the years as one of the most extensive in regional museums. It was a major contributor through loan items to a museum of costume which in the 1950s and 1960s existed at nearby Eridge Castle. The collection was begun in the 1950s, based almost entirely on donations from local families, although few items other than wedding dresses have detailed provenance. The collection spans the period from the mid-eighteenth century to the present day. Although it is particularly strong in Victorian costume, there are some fine eighteenth, early nineteenth and early twentieth (especially 1920s) examples. There is a predominance of women’s costume, and a good representation of babies’ and children’s costume, including school uniform, but the collection is still – compared to others – relatively strong in men’s costume, including a fine collection of embroidered waistcoats. Wedding fashions are well represented. Apart from civic costume and smocks, there is little in the way of occupational costume.

Accessories include a particularly fine collection of fans, and good representative collections of umbrellas and parasols, shoes, hats, gloves, shawls, handkerchiefs (including printed examples), spectacles, bags and purses. The jewellery collection is relatively weak. Textiles include a strong collection of lace and whitework, along with a good selection of patchwork and embroidery (including some fine children’s samplers).

The Museum will continue to collect items of British costume, accessories and textiles which make a significant contribution to the diversity and quality of the collections. More emphasis will be placed on recording, where available, the provenance of each item to illustrate their role in the story of the people of Tunbridge Wells. Priority will be given to areas where the collection is currently weak, e.g. men’s costume, occupational costume and the later twentieth century in general. Contemporary collecting will be organised in collaboration with user groups.
2.9 Dolls, toys and games

The Museum holds an important collection of dolls, other toys, and games, comprising around 1200 objects. The collection was begun in the 1950s, based almost entirely on donations from local families, although few items have detailed provenance. It is particularly strong in dolls, toys and games of the 19th and early 20th centuries, and in this area is reckoned by specialists who have studied it over the years as one of the best collections in regional museums, containing some of the museum’s most popular exhibits. Highlights of the collection include two notable doll’s houses with original furnishings, and some fine Noah’s arks. There is some 18th and later 20th century material, and efforts have been made since the 1970s to collect representative examples of contemporary dolls, toys and games, most recently through specific contemporary collecting projects. Adult indoor games such as playing cards are represented, but there has been little collecting of outdoor sports equipment for either adults or children. There are associated collections of children’s books, both for instruction and entertainment, and educational objects such as globes and horn-books. A collecting project in 2005 acquired a good representative collection of material from the local sports games manufacturer Subbuteo.

The Museum will continue to collect dolls, other toys, and games of British provenance which make a significant contribution to the diversity and quality of the collections. Emphasis will be placed on recording, where available, the provenance of each item to illustrate their role in the story of the people of Tunbridge Wells. Priority will be given to areas where the collection is currently weak, e.g. toy vehicles other than trains, objects relating to outdoor games and pastimes, and the later twentieth century in general. Adult sports equipment will only be collected where it is the product of a local industry or serves to illustrate the history of local sports. Further collection of children’s books will generally be limited to those, as in the existing collection, whose significance lies in illustration and design rather than textual content. Further collection of educational objects will generally be limited to material which illustrates the history of local schools. Contemporary collecting will be organised in collaboration with user groups.

2.10 Social history – pictures

The Museum has an extensive and varied collection of magic lantern slides, many still housed in the original cases used by their former owners, and ranging in date from the Victorian era to the 1950s. Although most of them have some local connection, insofar as they are the work of local photographers, the personal collections of local people, or lecture series used by local groups or early museum staff, only a relatively small number represent specifically local subjects. The collection is of wider social history significance, for illustrating life in Tunbridge Wells, and for demonstrating the diverse roles of the magic lantern, including showing holiday pictures, entertaining and instructing children, and delivering public lectures. The range of subjects include local residents’ travels to a wide variety of British and European locations including Iceland and Russia, commercial series on America and the Middle East, lecture slides on natural history and archaeology, and children’s stories. There is a good selection of mechanical slides, including comic scenes and a number of fine series of astronomical slides.

Although the majority of the Museum’s other photographic material relates to local history, either depicting local subjects or being the work of local professional
photographers, there are some which, like the lantern slides, were acquired for their more general social history interest. These include a wide range of stereoscope cards, depicting topographical and narrative subjects, contemporary events, and various aspects of the arts and sciences. There are also examples of early photographic techniques including daguerreotypes and ambrotypes, and their ornate cases. There is a good selection of photograph albums, mostly without detailed provenance, which were acquired as social history objects in their own right, or because their contents illustrate costume, or the collecting of photographs of royalty and celebrities, or aspects of everyday life such as holidaymaking.

The Museum will not normally collect further magic lantern slides, unless these are of local subjects and meet the criteria for local history collecting above. Slides which are the work of significant local photographers, or which have a significant connection with local groups – e.g. the Tunbridge Wells Natural History Society’s public lecture programme – may be collected if these are of outstanding interest. No further stereoscope cards, early photographs or photograph albums will be collected unless they have some definite local connection and add significantly to the existing photographic collection.

2.11 Social history – books and ephemera

In addition to its collections of specifically local books and ephemera, and children’s books which are an adjunct to the toys and games collection, the museum has a small general collection of 18th to early 20th century books on a variety of topics including natural history and travel, and a more extensive collection of generic ephemera such as greetings cards and scrap-books. The collection is particularly strong in greetings cards of the 19th and early 20th centuries, and there has been some contemporary collecting in this area. The existing book collection makes a small but valuable contribution to the museum’s display and educational resources, but is not a candidate for expansion.

The Museum will continue to collect generic ephemera of British provenance which make a significant contribution to the diversity and quality of the existing collection. More emphasis will be placed on recording, where available, the provenance of each item to illustrate their role in the story of the people of Tunbridge Wells. Contemporary collecting will be organised in collaboration with user groups. Only in exceptional circumstances, where there is either a clear local connection or a definite display or educational need is met, will further books on non-local topics or by non-local authors and publishers be collected.

2.12 Social history – 3D objects

The Museum holds a wide-ranging collection of three-dimensional objects illustrating various aspects of British social history, with a particular focus on domestic life and agriculture within Tunbridge Wells and the wider High Weald area from the late 18th to early 20th centuries. It comprises around 935 items. The collection is based almost entirely on donations from local people, and a substantial number of items, particularly in the agricultural and craft areas, have a recorded provenance. There is a good representative selection of objects associated with traditional farming techniques in the area, in particular the hopping industry; this part of the collection is particularly closely associated with local history and could equally be seen as part of
the museum’s coverage of local industries. Recent contemporary collecting has added some 20th century material. There is a fairly comprehensive representation of objects relating to pre-1960 domestic life, such as cooking, eating, and washing utensils. There is a range of objects associated with urban and rural crafts such as smithing, carpentry, printing and shoemaking, which in some cases are very comprehensive; and some material relating to other businesses and professions, e.g. office equipment. A contemporary collecting project has been carried out to illustrate contemporary industries in the High Weald. There is a collection of optical and other scientific instruments, mainly microscopes connected with the town’s natural history tradition, magic lanterns and cameras. Other significant fields represented in the collection include clocks and watches, radios, gramophones and records, needlework accessories, smoking accessories including clay pipes, lighting equipment for both domestic and outdoor use, and writing and painting equipment.

The museum will continue to collect social history objects of local provenance, such as those described above, but with due regard for limitations of space and for the strengths and weaknesses of the existing collection. Priority will be given to areas where the collection of additional material will enable a continuous and coherent story to be told from an early period to the present day. For example, some objects at least are required to update the story of local farming. Contemporary collecting will be established on a more systematic basis in collaboration with user groups. There will be a presumption against the acquisition of large and bulky items, and modern general consumer goods which have no significant local connection such as local manufacture. It is recognised that in some areas where small collections exist, such as clocks and watches, gramophones and records, the existing material is adequate for the museum’s foreseeable needs, and there is no cause for significant growth. Collecting of cameras and associated equipment such as magic lanterns will be limited to objects which have no parallel in the existing collection in terms of date or type, and which therefore contribute to a limited but representative sequence illustrating the history of photography, or which have some outstanding local connection. There will be no further collecting of other optical instruments such as microscopes, unless these have some outstanding local association.

2.13 Fine art

The museum’s collecting policy in relation to paintings and drawings has focussed primarily on local topographical views. Although these include many works of high quality and by significant artists – mostly notably Charles Tattershall Dodd Senior and his son and brother – the criterion for selection has for the most part been the contribution made by particular works to the documentation of the natural and built environment of Tunbridge Wells and the High Weald. The only significant exception are the 36 mid-Victorian oil paintings comprising the Ashton Bequest, bequeathed by prominent local resident and photographer Ernest Russell Ashton in 1952. The Ashton Bequest contains works of consistently high quality by a number of nationally important artists such as Abraham Solomon, Frederick Hardy and John Linnell.

The museum has no aspiration to enlarge its generic fine art collection beyond the Ashton Bequest. In the past, there has been a theoretical policy of accepting donations as adjuncts to the Ashton Bequest, but in practice only one such work has actually been acquired. Since a large part of the Ashton Bequest’s significance lies in its provenance as the personal collection of a local individual, the collection should be regarded as closed. Future acquisitions of fine art will be restricted to the work of
local artists – including the Cranbrook Colony, who are represented in the Ashton Bequest – and work depicting local subjects. A key method of acquiring examples of the work of local artists will be commissioning new contemporary art works. A number of art works in various media – paintings, video, soundscape, installations – have been created in recent years for specific Art Gallery shows, and this practice will be continued.

### 2.14 Decorative art

Apart from Tunbridge and related wares and other local products and souvenirs, the museum has only a limited collection of decorative art objects, mainly comprising ceramics, glass and metalwork (mostly pewter). There are few items of outstanding quality, and the role of the collection has traditionally been as an adjunct to the social history collection rather than as a representation of the history of decorative art as such.

The museum has two collections of collage pictures: a small number of cloth pictures and standing figures by the early 19th century Frant tailor George Smart who built up a small souvenir industry, and the 1972 bequest of pressed flower collages by Tunbridge Wells craft worker Pamela McDowall, author in the late 1960s and early 1970s of several popular books and articles on the subject.

With the exception of items of local manufacture, or with designs or inscriptions of local significance, or crafts related to Tunbridge ware, further collecting of decorative art objects will take place only within the context of the social history collection, with its primary aim of documenting the story of the people of Tunbridge Wells and associated areas.

### 2.15 Coins, tokens, medals and paper money

The museum has a relatively small but representative collection of mainly post-medieval British coins, tokens, medals and paper money. There is also a collection of Roman and classical Greek coins, and a collection of continental European coins. The material included is not of outstanding significance, with the exception of an extensive collection of hop and fruit tokens, representing an aspect of an important local industry, and a collection of medals commemorating local events.

The museum will continue to collect hop and fruit tokens, local commemorative medals, and other items – such as paper money from local banks – with local history significance or which reflect aspects of the lives of local people (such as wartime medals). It is recognised that the remainder of the collection is adequate for its limited educational, display and research functions, and will not generally be added to.

### 2.16 Ethnography

At an early stage in its history, the Museum had a significant collection of ethnographical objects from a wide range of world cultures, but the bulk of this material was transferred to the Wellcome Institute in the 1930s and is now held by the British Museum (formerly in the Museum of Mankind). A small number of objects
were retained or acquired subsequently, and are used in displays illustrating the history of the museum, and in the museum's education service.

The small existing collection is adequate for the museum's current and foreseeable needs. Only in exceptional circumstances, and in consequence of some outstanding local connection, will further acquisitions be made.

3. Themes and priorities for future collecting

It has been widely observed that museums generally are not developing their collections to keep their stories up to date. This is for various reasons, including lack of staff resources, lack of space, and encouragement to focus on other activities, e.g. outreach. It is also the case that the collecting methods that built up older museum collections tended to be subject to the vagaries of donation and curatorial areas of interest. Generally, collecting was not carried out systematically or representatively, thereby ignoring less visible or less accessible sections of the community or aspects of life. There is a recognised need for museums to recover hidden histories, rather than to continue to focus too exclusively on a majority culture.

Section 2 above describes the current collections, identifying gaps and potential growth areas. It provides criteria for the acceptance or otherwise of objects that may be offered to the Museum as donations, or which may appear as available for purchase. Sections 2 and 3 are jointly complemented by a Collecting Plan which considers where active collecting is necessary or desirable, and relates this process to the stories which the Museum is seeking to tell and which are likely to be told in any redeveloped facility.

Development of the Museum’s collections forms an integral part of the Museum’s mission as a whole. The aim is to have collections that effectively represent the special nature of the town and the surrounding High Wealden area, and that provide the necessary resource for displays, outreach and other activities. Collecting will include commissioning new contemporary art works in the context of the Museum’s Exhibitions Policy.

Community ownership will be enhanced through specific collecting projects that focus on areas that are important, meaningful and relevant to the Museum’s various audiences. A style of collecting that focuses on people’s stories can serve to engage the community and be a way of giving the community ownership of the museum. Such projects provide opportunities for audience development as well as for enhancing the museum collections.

The overall aims of the Collecting Plan are:
- to complement the current collection, bringing the story up-to-date and maintaining its openness to the future.
- to fill gaps in the collection in terms of subject matter (e.g. unrepresented sections of the community or aspects of life) and medium (e.g. oral history).
- to reflect something of present day Tunbridge Wells and the surrounding High Wealden area.
- to represent a wide cross-section of local people and places outside the town of Tunbridge Wells.
- to document the life of sections of the community whose story may be under-represented by traditional history and collecting.
• to collect objects and information that have a direct usefulness and relevance to education, outreach and display work
• to acquire objects along with the stories of people associated with them

The Collecting Plan notes that in any future overall redisplay it is likely that, rather than being displayed as a series of curatorial collections, the story that the museum tells will become the story of the people of Tunbridge Wells. This would not imply a linear story but a series of themes radiate out from an introductory point, e.g. the discovery of Tunbridge Wells in 1606. The Plan therefore proposes that future collecting be focused on the following themes, which are developed there in more detail:

- The environment and natural history of Tunbridge Wells and the High Weald
- The story of the area before 1606
- The rural borough / High Weald
- Visiting Tunbridge Wells
- Living and working in Tunbridge Wells
- Tunbridge Wells today

The Collecting Plan emphasises the importance of contemporary collecting which may be defined as collecting objects and information from the present day and the recent past, with the aim of documenting the stories of living people and communities. Tunbridge Wells Museum, in aiming to tell the story of the local area and its people through the centuries, recognises that that story is ongoing, and that there is no arbitrary point in the past at which material becomes collectable. Collecting contemporary material offers the opportunity of a balanced and representative selection from what is available, whereas collecting from the past is subject to the bias of what happens to survive. Collecting contemporary material offers the opportunity to document the life of sections of the community whose story is under-represented. Collecting contemporary material offers the opportunity of collecting much more associated information - the stories behind the objects - than is generally possible with older material.

It is proposed that, in general, contemporary collecting should build on the strengths of the existing collections, in the fields of local history, costume and textiles, toys and games, and general social history; bearing in mind the need to fill obvious gaps in the existing collections, and the need to adequately reflect a wide cross-section of local people and areas outside the town of Tunbridge Wells. Not excluding passive collecting or active collecting by museum staff or through specific appeals, it is proposed that this will continue to be achieved particularly through project-based collecting, organising exhibitions and events with the aim of - or which have as one of their outcomes - enhancing the museum collections. The collection of oral history records will be included, taking due account of the possibilities for access and the stability of media for long-term storage. Such records may include the stories behind objects, as well as stand-alone accounts of local life.

4. Themes and priorities for rationalisation and disposal

The objects currently held by the Museum are well documented and focused primarily on a small number of core collections described in section 2 above. Over the course of its long history, involving several moves to new premises, the Museum – which started out with very disparate collections, including much non-local and non-
British material – became more focused on the story of the town and its rural hinterland. Records document a number of rationalisation projects which took place in the mid-20th century, e.g. extensive disposals of ethnographical material and non-British natural history specimens to other museums and related institutions. Comprehensive cataloguing and inventory projects between the mid-1970s and the mid-2000s confirmed the relevance of most objects to the Museum's core collections.

As explained in section 2, the small amount of material that remains from outside the Museum's current field of cataloguing is recognised as having value for various purposes, including illustrating the Museum's own history and the stories of the people who brought back objects from their careers or travels abroad and gave them to their local museum. It is also the case that material from closed collections is frequently of use for educational purposes, e.g. in meeting demand for school sessions on the Egyptians or Greeks.

Disposal may be considered for the small number of objects – e.g. sculpture – which are outside the Museum's current field of acquisition, have no local story to tell, are unlikely ever to be displayed, have no obvious education or outreach use, and for which more appropriate homes in the public domain exist. Disposal may also be considered for objects which – although of local provenance – take up disproportionate resources in terms of storage in relation to their actual or likely future usefulness for display, outreach or study. Any disposal will be conducted in the light of the principles and procedures set out in the Museums Association's Disposal Toolkit and in section 13 below.

5. Limitations on collecting

The Museum 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.

Donations and bequests will not be accepted with any attached conditions. The museum reserves the right to decline any offer of material.

5a. Loans

The Museum will not generally accept objects on loan, except for a limited period for temporary exhibitions, research or reproduction. Exceptions may be made if objects are required for long-term display, or to facilitate public access to items of outstanding local historical importance in cases where the option of permanent acquisition is excluded by the owner. In such cases, loans will still be established for a finite period.

Efforts will be made to phase out existing ‘permanent loans’, either by return to the owner if not of significant importance to the museum, conversion to a donation, or renegotiation as a time-limited loan, in all cases where the current owner is known.
Loans, and any subsequent renewals, will be agreed in writing between the owner and the museum, including details of responsibilities for insurance and transport, if applicable.

It is accepted practice for archives to acquire material from corporate bodies on the basis of ‘permanent deposit’ – which is interpreted by the Kent History and Library Centre as meaning a minimum of twenty years – where the depositing body has legal or other reasons for retaining title. The museum may acquire additions to the Borough Archives on this basis, in cases where the material is regarded as being at risk – e.g. through being held by private individuals in their homes – and/or in the interests of making important local history resources more easily accessible to potential users. Such archival material will be accepted under the same terms and conditions as are applied by the Kent History and Library Centre.

6. Collecting policies of other museums

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. Specific reference is made to the following institutions:

The only other museum within Tunbridge Wells Museum’s core collecting area is Cranbrook Museum. This is an Accredited volunteer-run museum established by Cranbrook and District Local History Society to which Tunbridge Wells Museum provides a Museum Mentor, and which serves the eastern end of the borough. Cranbrook Museum’s collecting area consists of the civil parish of Cranbrook and the adjacent parishes; it does not actively collect in the field of natural history, but otherwise the subject areas covered correspond closely with those of Tunbridge Wells Museum. In order to avoid potential conflict, it was agreed in 1995 that Tunbridge Wells Museum as the primary museum service within the borough should continue to consider its collecting area to encompass the entire borough, but that any potential acquisitions which originate from or are closely associated with Cranbrook’s collecting area may be redirected to Cranbrook Museum, or Cranbrook will be informed of the item’s availability, as appropriate.

Tunbridge Wells Museum’s collection contains a small number of objects from areas within the Kent High Weald that fall within the collecting policy of the Eden Valley Museum (a volunteer-run Accredited museum, to which Tunbridge Wells Museum provides a Museum Mentor). Consultations took place at the planning stage of the new museum, and a number of items from Tunbridge Wells Museum were placed on loan to the new museum. Tunbridge Wells Museum will not acquire further material from the Eden Valley collecting area without consultation with Eden Valley Museum.

The Salomons Museum at Southborough, managed by Canterbury Christ Church University, holds a specialist collection relating to the life and work of local motoring and electrical pioneer Sir David Salomons and his family. Tunbridge Wells Museum staff helped with the development of the current displays in 2005 and established an ongoing relationship. Tunbridge Wells Museum will consult with the Salomons Museum regarding acquisition of any future material relating to the Salomons family.
There are various national and provincial museums whose collecting policies in some respects overlap with those of Tunbridge Wells Museum. For example, Maidstone Museum sees its collecting area for archaeology and natural history as encompassing potentially the whole county of Kent, the Sussex Archaeological Society’s museums at Lewes cover the archaeology and certain aspects of the history of East Sussex, the Victorian and Albert Museum has universal collections of British costume, dolls, toys and games, and Birmingham Museum includes items of Tunbridge ware within the Pinto collection of wood ware. In practice, conflicts of interest have not and are not considered likely to arise, and it is considered that an attempt to establish formal lines of demarcation would be both impracticable and superfluous. Maidstone, for example, collects in practice primarily from its own district and areas of the county where museum provision is weak or absent. Within Kent and Medway, the current arrangements for partnership working among the major museums will facilitate discussions on acquisitions. Birmingham’s Tunbridge ware collection exists only as part of a larger whole, and is not considered to be a speciality or subject for expansion in its own right. As regards national museums, the presence of collections that are to some extent parallel in provincial centres is not considered to be problematic, but rather advantageous in terms of public access.

The Tunbridge Wells Library Local Studies collection is regarded as a complementary collection. Most of this material shares a common history with the museum collection, as prior to local government reorganisation in 1974 both were under the common ownership and management of the Council of the Borough of Royal Tunbridge Wells. At that time, the two collections operated in complementary fashion as parallel sources for local studies research, and the close relationship between museum and library served to avoid conflicts of interest. Thanks to continued sharing of a building, this state of affairs continued to a large extent after 1974. Currently the museum and library work closely together in the field of local history, and this partnership facilitates consultation on which collection should most appropriately receive offered donations.

The Kent History and Library Centre (formerly Centre for Kentish Studies) collects archives and other two-dimensional local history material – with the general exception of original works of art – from throughout the current administrative county of Kent, including Tunbridge Wells. Owing to constraints of space at KHLC, and in view of issues of accessibility to primarily local users, KHLC does not find the existence of archive collections at local centres such as Tunbridge Wells to be problematic. Tunbridge Wells Museum will divert to KHLC any offered Kentish material which falls outside its criteria for local history collecting set out above, or which for some other reason are not accepted into the Tunbridge Wells collection.

7. Policy review procedure

The collections development policy will be published and reviewed from time to time, at least once every five years. The date when the policy is next due for review is noted above.

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.
8. Acquisitions not covered by this policy

Acquisitions outside the current stated policy will only be made in very exceptional circumstances, and then only after proper consideration by the governing body of the Museum itself, having regard to the interests of other institutions.

9. Acquisition procedures

a. The Museum will exercise 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.

b. In particular, 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.

c. 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.

d. 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.

e. The Museum 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.

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 as defined by the Treasure Act 1996.

The Museum will not acquire any archaeological material found in Scotland.

f. Any exceptions to the above clauses 9a, 9b, 9c or 9e will only be because the Museum is:

- acting as an externally approved repository of last resort for material of local (UK) origin
- 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
- acting with the permission of authorities with the requisite jurisdiction in the country of origin
in possession of reliable documentary evidence that the item was exported from its country of origin before 1970. 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.

g. 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.

10. Spoliation

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.

11. Repatriation and restitution of objects and human remains

The Museum’s governing body, acting on the advice of the Museum’s professional staff, may take the 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 13a-d, 13g and 13o below will be followed but the remaining procedures are not appropriate. 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’.

12. Management of archives

As the Museum holds and intends to continue to acquire archives, including photographs and printed ephemera, its governing body will be guided by the Code of Practice on Archives for Museums and Galleries in the United Kingdom (third edition, 2002).

13. Disposal procedures

a. The governing body will ensure that the disposal process is carried out openly and with transparency.

b. By definition, the Museum has a long-term purpose and holds collections 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 consideration is given to the disposal of any items in the Museum’s collection.
c. The museum will confirm that it is legally free to dispose of an item and agreements on disposal made with donors will be taken into account.

d. 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.

e. When disposal is motivated by curatorial reasons the procedures outlined in paragraphs 13g-13s will be followed and the method of disposal may be by gift, sale or exchange.

f. The Museum will not undertake disposal motivated principally by financial reasons.

g. Whether the disposal is motivated either by curatorial or financial reasons, 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 the 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. External 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.

h. A decision to dispose of a specimen or object, whether by gift, exchange, 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, and not of the curator of the collection acting alone. Under the Cabinet style of government adopted by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, responsibility may be delegated to the appropriate portfolio holder.

i. Any monies received by the Museum governing body from the disposal of items will be applied 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 Arts Council England.

j. The proceeds of a sale will be ring-fenced so it can be demonstrated that they are spent in a manner compatible with the requirements of the Accreditation standard.

k. Once a decision to dispose of material in the collection has been taken, priority will be given to retaining it within the public domain, unless it is to be destroyed. 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.

l. If the material is not acquired by any Accredited Museums to which it was offered directly 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 an announcement in the
m. 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.

n. The Museum will not dispose of items by exchange.

o. 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.
3 Documentation

3.1 Introduction

Tunbridge Wells Museum recognises the vital importance of accurate, effective and comprehensive documentation systems as a tool for collections management in general, and specifically to facilitate access to, research on, and audit of the collections. The Museum devoted considerable resources over many years to bringing its procedures and coverage into line with current best practice. Documentation systems have been, and are being, continually adapted to take advantage of improving facilities offered by information technology. The museum aims to build on its past achievements in this field, and to maintain and improve its procedures in the light of future technical and theoretical developments.

3.1.1 History and current position

From an early stage in its history, the museum has employed a system of individual accession numbers. The current system dates from 1930 and has been maintained consistently ever since. Until the mid-1970s, the accessions register, supported by a manual index, was the sole documentation record. More detailed cataloguing, initially using manual file cards, began at that stage. Computerised cataloguing, using successive upgrades of MODES, began in 1999. The entire content of the preexisting accession registers was subsequently entered into MODES, followed by a process of transferring the more detailed data from file cards.

The issue of retrospective documentation began to be addressed in the mid-1970s. The old accession numbering system was incomplete, insofar as it was never applied to the substantial number of objects acquired before 1930, even though some of these did have numbers from older systems and were listed in earlier registers, and because some large mixed accessions acquired in the 1950s and 1960s were, due to staffing difficulties, not individually documented. Retrospective documentation has been carried out as part of the detailed cataloguing process on a section by section basis, and was eventually completed by 2007.

3.2 Documentation standards

The museum will follow nationally accepted best practice in its documentation procedures, and will keep these under review in the light of changing perceptions and technology. The museum will adhere to the standards laid down by the Museums Documentation Association in SPECTRUM, its UK Museum Documentation Standard.

The Museum will maintain an up to date Documentation Manual, stating the aims of the documentation system and explaining how to use it. Appropriate training and supervision will be provided for staff and volunteers involved with documentation procedures.
3.3 Entry records

All objects entering the museum will be immediately recorded on entry/exit forms, which will be signed by the depositor and a member of the museum staff. Standard MDA forms or an in-house equivalent will be used. One copy will be given to the depositor as a receipt, one will be filed as a permanent record, and one will remain with the object until it is returned to the depositor or formally accessioned into the museum collection. This will apply equally to potential donations or purchases, bequests, loans and objects left for identification. Forms will also be completed in the event of purchases by museum staff from external retailers, or transfers from other council departments. Forms will be numbered, and an entry made in a corresponding ledger.

In the case of donations, efforts will be made at this stage to record as much information as possible from the donor about the object. For potential donations, the entry form confirms the willingness of the depositor, or the person on whose behalf they are acting, to give the object to the museum, and their legal title to do so; and acknowledges on behalf of the museum that the object has been received into its care. The form does not at this stage constitute formal acceptance of an object into the collection, thus providing an opportunity for further consideration by both parties, if required.

3.4 Accession records

Once it has been decided by an appropriate member of staff, in consultation with colleagues if required, to accept an object into the permanent collection, a transfer of title form will be sent to the donor, executor or other authorised person as stated on the entry form. Signing of this form by the donor or other authorised person constitutes formal agreement to irrevocably transfer title in the object to the museum. Signing by the museum declares its acceptance of the obligation to care for the object for the public benefit. The object will then be given a unique accession number, and a brief but sufficient description with donor/depositor details and information received from the donor/depositor will be written in the accessions register. Fuller details will be entered into the museum’s computerised catalogue. In the case of sale, there is no transfer of title form, but the owner will invoice the museum and a copy will be retained and filed.

Transfer of title forms, along with their corresponding entry forms, correspondence and other documentation, will be permanently stored in a secure file in accession number order. Documentation records for long-term loans – i.e. excluding those required only for single temporary exhibitions, for which the entry form will be sufficient – will be maintained in a separate file.

3.5 Security and preservation of records

As a precaution against loss of essential documentation data through fire or other disaster, a photocopy of the accessions registers is stored at an off-site location – currently the town hall archive vault. This will be updated regularly. Back-up of computerised data held on the TWBC network is the responsibility of the Council’s IT department. Every effort will be made to safeguard the original accession registers as the physical record of the museum collection: these are stored in a fireproof
cabinet, to which they will be returned when not in use, and their retrieval will be
given a high priority in disaster response procedures.

Potential problems due to obsolescence of digital media will be avoided by use of a
nationally recognised and regularly updated documentation system (currently
MODES), and in general by use of the TWBC network on which all data is
continuously updated. Unique copies of digital information will not be held on
external media.

3.6 Marking and labelling

All accessioned museum objects or groups of objects will be marked or labelled with
their permanent accession number in a manner appropriate to the type of object, and
without damaging the object. Methods of marking will include pencil for paper
objects, cotton tape labels for costume and textiles, paper tags e.g. for vertebrate
specimens, or black or white permanent ink pens for most other 3D objects. For very
small objects e.g. coins the individual storage enclosure may be marked. Guidelines
on numbering and labelling have been drawn up.

Groups of objects for which individual numbering may be inappropriate will include
cabinets of pinned insect specimens, birds’ eggs or shells, and large assemblages of
archaeological excavation material; in such cases, primary containers such as
cabinet drawers, seal-tight bags or plastic boxes will be marked.

3.7 Location and movement recording

The museum’s computerised catalogue will contain details of the current location of
objects, whether in store or on display. When objects are moved from their current
location for display, research, outreach or other purposes, this movement will be
recorded by the person responsible on a form which will provide the details with
which the appropriate member of staff can update MODES. Exceptions will be made
to this procedure where an object is being moved for less than 24 hours, e.g. for a
single research visit or educational session.

3.8 Information retrieval

The museum’s computerised catalogue enables the efficient and swift retrieval of
information about any object in the collection. The MODES database provides for
information to be accessed via a variety of routes, including object name, associated
places and persons, date, etc. The computerised catalogue will provide at least a
brief description of each object, and any associated information provided by the
donor/depositor or which can be researched at the time of acceptance into the
collection. Where more detailed information has subsequently been researched,
whether by museum staff or outside specialists, this will also be added.

Where more detailed information is held on manual card indexes created for
individual collections during earlier stages of the retrospective cataloguing process,
this data will continue to be transferred to the computerised system as staff
resources permit. It is recognised that in some cases this is not an immediate
priority; for example, the manual natural history catalogue in taxonomic order is adequate to meet the needs of both internal and external users.

The museum recognises that objects that were formerly part of its collection but are no longer present, e.g. because they have been transferred to another institution, are nonetheless part of the museum’s own history, and records of these will be maintained in similar fashion to those of the current collection.

3.9 Exit records

The museum will maintain a permanent record, using entry/exit forms, of movements of objects out of the museum’s care and back to their original depositors. On the return of an object, the depositor will sign as a formal acknowledgement that the object has been safely returned to their keeping. In the case of long-term loans, the appropriate permanent files will be annotated. In accordance with the procedures set out on the entry form, unclaimed deposits may be disposed of after an appropriate period of time has passed: the depositor will be notified before this happens. This course of action will generally relate to objects of no significant intrinsic value, and will only be taken as a last resort in the case of objects of value, where all reasonable efforts to contact the depositor or persuade them to respond have failed, and where the object falls outside the criteria of the museum’s Collections Development Policy.

Any authorised disposals of unaccessioned objects will be fully documented on the permanent file copy of the entry/exit form. In the case of an object leaving the permanent collection, e.g. by transfer to another institution, a permanent record will be kept of the transaction and the reasons behind it, and the accession register, computerised catalogue and other relevant documentation files will be annotated accordingly.

3.10 Loan records

The museum will maintain records of all objects loaned to it for any purpose, whether by private individuals or institutions, using entry/exit forms as the minimum documentation standard. More detailed records will be maintained in the case of long-term loans. In the case of loans from other museums and galleries, the museum will conform to the documentation procedures of the lending institution, in addition to its own internal documentation. Long-term loans to the museum will be for specified periods, and will be governed by the criteria and procedures set out in the Collections Development Policy.

The museum will maintain records of all objects loaned from the museum, using loan forms signed by both parties as the minimum documentation standard. Such loans will be for a fixed period only, renewable by mutual agreement. Information regarding loans out will be added to the computerised object catalogue, and in addition a spreadsheet will be maintained giving an overview of all loans out and when they are due to be returned or renewed.
4 Collections care and conservation

4.1 Introduction

Tunbridge Wells Museum recognises that the quality of its services and the fulfilment of its role as a heritage custodian are dependent upon the adequate long-term care and preservation of its collections. The museum equally accepts that preservation of objects is not an end in itself but takes place with a view to the widest possible public access to and enjoyment of the collections. The museum seeks to maintain a balanced and flexible policy which combines high standards of collections care with the provision of a wide range of opportunities for the public to engage with the collections. The museum is prepared to accept a certain degree of risk to certain objects in the interests of access, and in view of the special quality of the experience of engagement with real objects, e.g. their use in schools outreach work. Collections care decisions will normally be weighted in favour of access, and in the interests of access it is understood that the details of the following policy will be interpreted in a flexible fashion. Within the framework of these general considerations, the museum’s policy on collections care aims to maintain at least the basic relevant standards set out in the checklist Benchmarks in Collection Care, while aspiring in any future development to meet that document’s standards for best practice. The order of topics discussed below follows the Benchmarks model.

4.2 Training and awareness

Staff training needs in the field of collection care will be assessed regularly, and training, whether in-house or externally provided, is offered as appropriate. Specifically, all new staff will receive training in the handling and transportation of collections, and in awareness of the risks to the collection from inappropriate environmental conditions, as part of their induction training.

All members of staff will be made aware of security procedures and guidelines, and the Museum’s emergency planning arrangements.

Museum objects, and storage areas where there is open access to collections, will only be cleaned by staff or volunteers who have received appropriate training.

4.3 Housekeeping and buildings maintenance

The Museum service recognises the importance of good housekeeping and buildings maintenance programmes to minimise risks to the well-being of collections. A schedule for the routine maintenance of buildings and utilities is in place. Areas used to house collections are regularly inspected, and any potential threats to collections are identified and assessed. In the event of a serious problem occurring, immediate remedial action will be taken. Plant and equipment is inspected periodically by staff or appropriate external contractors. Collections care issues are taken into account as a priority in the event of contractors working on site.
Display areas and the exterior of display furniture are cleaned on a daily basis as part of the regular cleaning contract for the Museum premises as a whole. A programme is in place for the periodic cleaning by museum staff of the interiors of showcases and of the secure storage areas which are outside the regular cleaning contract.

The display and storage areas are monitored with insect traps as part of the regular regime of environmental monitoring. Trapped insects are identified. Records will be kept, collated and preserved with other environmental records. Records will be kept of any resultant treatment, should the presence of pests be discovered.

All new acquisitions arriving at the Museum will be checked for signs of insect infestation, mould, etc., and any susceptible items will be quarantined away from stored or displayed collections. Condition monitoring of displayed and stored objects will include looking out for signs of pests. Any items in existing storage or display which show signs of pest infestation will be kept isolated from the rest of the collection until treated. Any pesticide treatment carried out will comply with the relevant health and safety legislation.

The Museum will seek to reduce the risk of pest infestation occurring in existing collections by keeping storage and display areas clean, and so far as possible at reasonably low humidities and temperatures. Since all organic objects in store are housed in boxes, bags or other enclosures, this also helps protect against the spread of infestation.

4.4 Storage

Storage of collections is typically seen as a ‘behind the scenes’ element of a museum. Although this is the case to a large extent in the facility as existing, the Museum aspires to provide greater access to material not on display in exhibition areas through the principle of open storage particularly of 3D objects, and through digital or surrogate access which is especially relevant for 2D material. Storage is therefore seen as having two functions – to care for the collections and to give access to them. Seen in relation to users, storage should provide:

- Access to study more of something from the displays or other experiences
- Access to see something not on display
- Access to construct their own tales or contribute to the museum through contact with the collections
- ‘Behind the scenes’ experience of collections and their management
- Reassurance that ‘their’ collections are being cared for, for the future
- For internal users, staff and volunteers, knowing where things are, being able to find them and being able to work with them with ease

4.5 Storage enclosures

Supplies of archival quality packaging – e.g. polyester sleeves / envelopes, acid-free cardboard boxes, solander boxes – will be readily available in a variety of sizes. There is a packaging programme to provide storage enclosures for collections and/or individual items identified as requiring physical protection. There is a continuing programme to replace non-archival quality folders and boxes with archival quality enclosures if required.
Containers used for physical protection will be strong enough to withstand handling and the weight of the items they contain. Boxes and folders will fit the items they contain, and documents are not folded or otherwise modified to fit their enclosure. Small objects such as natural history specimens, archaeological finds or coins will be contained in boxes, trays or bags, as appropriate. All objects, regardless of format, will receive appropriate physical protection. Boxes, bags and folders will be clearly marked to indicate their contents.

4.6 Environmental monitoring and control

The Museum recognises the need for reliable and consistent monitoring and recording of environmental conditions in areas used for display and storage of objects, and in work or study areas where objects may be temporarily held. The programme currently established to measure and record relative humidity, temperature and levels of visible and ultraviolet light in display and storage areas of the museum will be maintained. Environmental monitoring equipment will be stored and calibrated as recommended by the manufacturer, and records of calibration and maintenance will be kept. Records will be kept of all environmental monitoring, collated monthly and retained for a minimum of five years. Records will be examined periodically and summary reports prepared, which will be used to inform decisions about current display and storage. Action will be taken to mitigate or, if possible, remedy conditions that may be detrimental to objects. Monitoring and control regimes will be reviewed as part of the periodic review of this policy.

The Museum has determined the level of control of the environment in terms of temperature, relative humidity, light and pollutants that it wishes to achieve for all areas housing collections, and these will be taken into account in any proposals for the improvement of display and storage areas.

Locations for outreach exhibitions outside the Museum premises will be assessed according to the same criteria, which will inform decisions as to which objects may safely be displayed in off-site locations and for how long.

4.6.1 Temperature and relative humidity

Relative humidity in display and storage areas should be within the range 35-70% (40-65% where possible) with fluctuations of no more than 10% within these limits in any 24 hour period. Temperature should be within the range 16-28°C (16-24°C where possible) with no more than a 5°C variation within these limits in any 24 hour period. These conditions should be maintained for 95% of the time.

In any future development, the opportunity would be taken to reduce the current degree of fluctuation in temperature and humidity within the display areas, while maintaining the present more stable environment within the stores. Decisions on the exacts limits aspired to would be taken with due regard to issues of energy efficiency and environmental sustainability, in the light of the Council’s overall Environment Strategy.
4.6.2 Light

For the preservation of objects, light levels should be set at 50 lux for the long-term display of sensitive objects e.g. textiles, watercolour paintings, natural history specimens, 150 lux for the long-term display of oil paintings etc, and at a maximum of 300 lux for the long term display of other objects. However, light levels can be 25 or 50 lux higher for short-term (i.e. 6 or 12 month) display. UV levels should be as low as possible and certainly less than 15µW for light sensitive objects and 75µW for all other objects. Objects made from light-sensitive materials will only be displayed in conditions where lighting levels can be maintained at the appropriate levels.

4.6.3 Pollutants

It is not considered that airborne pollutants from the external environment other than dust currently constitute a threat to the Museum collection, but this issue will continue to be monitored. All windows and doors can be closed, and there are no external doors or windows (other than two that are permanently screened) in the Museum galleries so that the building itself provides considerable protection.

Items in store will be protected from excessive dust, and the Museum will seek to ensure similar protection for items on display. However, many of the older museum showcases are not properly sealed against dust, which penetrates through ill-fitting doors and glazing, and these are therefore in need of replacement. It is envisaged that future display and storage furniture will offer much greater protection.

Any future developments to the Museum premises will take into account the more detailed specifications provided by Benchmarks for addressing the issue of pollutants.

4.7 Condition monitoring

Checks are made on the condition of objects in store as part of on-going collections management procedures. Use is made of the opportunities offered by the use of objects for temporary displays, outreach work and research, which in practice mean that no part of the collection is left unexamined for long periods.

Newly acquired objects are examined when they first enter the Museum to assess their condition, and this information is included in their initial documentation record.

4.8 Handling and use of collections

All staff – or volunteers, where relevant – will receive appropriate guidance on the safe handling, packing and transport of objects. A summary of in-house guidelines has been drawn up to serve as a reminder. Handling guidance is also incorporated in the Museum’s Volunteer Handbook.

Before any object movement is carried out, appropriate consideration will be given to the object’s condition, size, weight or vulnerability, and the protection it may require, in order to minimise the risk of damage. Suitable equipment will be made available for gaining access to and moving heavy, bulky or less accessible items. Large or
heavy objects will not be moved without sufficient resources of staff or equipment, and health and safety requirements for manual handling will be taken into account. In-house guidelines for manual handling of objects have been drawn up.

Protective enclosures such as folders or boxes will be used when moving vulnerable objects or groups of objects within the Museum, Library or Town Hall premises. All objects taken off the premises, or being transported to other locations, will be appropriately protected, and suitable packaging material will be made available for this purpose. An assessment will be made by museum staff as to whether the level of security is appropriate for any item to be transported or housed off-site.

Packing or movement of objects will normally only be carried out by or under the supervision of museum staff, or by appropriately trained or qualified volunteers, contractors, or employees of another museum, library, archive or similar institution. The Museum will seek to ensure that items sent off-site are handled, transported and housed in a manner and under conditions that meet the same standards as are applied in-house. Objects in outreach displays, as opposed to loans to museums and related institutions, will be housed in locked cabinets to which access is available only to museum staff as appropriate.

Handling of objects by museum users, e.g. school students, researchers or photographers, will normally take place under the supervision of museum staff, or of appropriately trained or qualified volunteers, contractors, or staff of other museums, libraries, archives, schools or similar institutions. The suitability of objects for handling, and the level of care required, will be appropriately assessed in each instance with a view to avoiding unnecessary risks. Gloves will be provided where necessary for handling vulnerable objects. Researchers will be required to use pencils for note-taking when working with any objects where ink could cause damage. Appropriate work surfaces will be made available for researchers.

A system is in place for recording damage to collections reported by staff or users. Records will be kept of all serious accidents resulting in damage to collections. In such cases, appropriate amendments will be made to the primary database record of the object affected.

### 4.9 Display of collections

The condition of objects is monitored before display, and any changes are noted afterwards. Open display will be avoided for vulnerable objects. A programme is in place for routine checking of all items on display.

Display cases will be robust, secure and constructed from materials that will not harm their contents. The weight of all items on display will be supported evenly. If displays are not being set up by collections management staff, those staff will monitor and advise on the techniques and materials to be used to ensure that these do not constitute a risk to the objects.

Physical access by staff to items on display will be kept as simple as possible without compromising security.
As new display furniture is acquired, the Museum will ensure that it conforms to the advice given in *Benchmarks*, e.g. having light fittings that can be reached without the need for access via the interior of the display case.

### 4.10 Remedial conservation

Audits have been carried out by external appropriately qualified conservators to assess the preventative and remedial conservation needs of particular collections, and to establish conservation priorities within these categories. These condition assessments, supplemented where appropriate by in-house assessments of newly acquired objects, will be used to inform an on-going conservation programme, which will also take into account requirements for display, outreach and other forms of public access. The Museum’s current Conservation Plan was drawn up in 2008, setting out a ten year programme, and will be reviewed in 2013. The Museum will seek to ensure that its conservation programme is based on the best currently available knowledge and practice, and is kept up to date in relation to changing views and fresh information. In general, where objects are in a stable condition, public access requirements will determine priorities for conservation treatment.

Any superficial cleaning or minor repair of robust objects – if it is judged that such work may safely be done in-house – will be carried out only by appropriately trained staff, or under their instruction. In the absence of in-house conservators, any more significant remedial work on such objects, or any work involving fragile or vulnerable objects, will be carried out by external conservators.

Where in-house knowledge is unavailable or limited, the museum will seek advice from a conservator or collections care adviser on all aspects of their collection care activities. The Museum will seek to ensure that those who are employed or contracted to conserve collections have been trained in conservation practices and are aware of up-to-date conservation techniques. Any conservator or conservation practice that is contracted to provide advice or services should normally be included on the Conservation Register and, where available, a professionally accredited conservator is used.

Any commercial conservation company undertaking conservation services will be provided with written specifications and a contract. Work undertaken by commercial conservation contractors will be evaluated by museum staff, as appropriate. Conservators will be required to supply written reports of work carried out on objects. In the case of museum objects these reports will be permanently preserved as part of the documentation for that object, linked with the museum’s main cataloguing scheme, and the condition report on the museum’s object database will be updated accordingly. Records of inspections or surveys of collections will also be preserved. Records will also be kept of in-house collections care programmes and activities. In the case of museum objects, documentation records for condition-checking, conservation or other relevant procedures will conform to the MDA’s SPECTRUM minimum standard.

### 4.11 Surrogate copies

The Museum recognises the importance of making preservation copies of fragile or heavily used material, has assessed appropriate techniques and equipment for this...
purpose, and will keep abreast of developing technology. This activity will be set within the wider context of the Museum’s current programme of creating digital images of objects to increase access to the whole collection, both on-site and remotely. Within that overall context, the prioritisation of objects or collections will take into account an assessment of the level of current and potential use. Fragile items will be assessed by collections management staff before copies are made, and the process will not be undertaken if this is likely to cause damage to original material. In such cases, preparatory conservation work will be included as part of the copying programme. The existence of surrogate copies will be indicated by the Museum’s documentation system.

For digital copies, information will be maintained regarding all necessary details of the material’s content, layout, format, mode and density of recording and other technical information essential to its present and future accessibility.

4.12 Photocopying

Photocopying of museum objects will only be carried out by museum staff or volunteers who have been trained in safe handling practices. Photocopying will not be carried out if the process is likely to result in damage to the object, and qualified staff will be consulted in all cases.

In the case of the museum collection, current policy is that original objects will not be photocopied to meet requests from outside users. Such requests will be met through the production of digital images, supplied according to an appropriate scale of charges based on whether the object has already been scanned or photographed as part of the museum’s own digitisation programme.

4.13 Loans out

Subject to its own display, outreach or other internal needs, the Museum will be prepared to loan objects for exhibition or research purposes to other accredited museums and art galleries, or to other institutions which can demonstrate that they conform to the same high standards of care, security and display as accredited museums. In general terms, the borrowing institution should meet the standards of the Museum’s own Collections Management Policy. The borrowing institution would normally be expected to provide a facilities report, including details of handling and security in transit, and arrangements for environmental and light control, security and fire detection and suppression at the exhibition site and any temporary storage areas.

Although objects may be exhibited at other locations not falling within this definition, these will be organised as outreach exhibitions under the entire control of museum staff, who alone will be responsible for handling objects and will have sole access to objects in display cases. The Museum may also loan suitable objects to schools and other institutions and organisations in connection with its outreach programme, as for example in the form of ‘school loan boxes’, and in such cases the criteria and procedures set out here will be simplified while retaining the essential principles of proper documentation and appropriate care on the part of the borrower.

All loans from the Museum will be for a fixed period of time to a maximum of five years agreed in advance with the borrowing institution. Permanent loans will not be
made, but existing loans may be renewed for successive periods, as in cases where an object forms part of the ‘permanent’ displays of another institution.

All loans out will be covered by written loan agreements, which will specify the conditions under which it should be handled, transported, displayed and stored. All costs associated with a loan, including insurance and any special framing or mounting, will normally be met by the borrower.

Only objects in a stable condition will be loaned out, and the suitability of an object for loan will be assessed before the loan is agreed. If an object requires conservation treatment in order to make a loan possible, the cost may be required from the borrower. The condition of an object will be checked before leaving the museum or library to go on loan and on returning, and the results of these inspections will be recorded and retained as part of the loan documentation. If a photographic image of an object to be loaned does not currently exist, one will be made before the object leaves the museum/library building.

Appropriate arrangements for packing and transport will be made before the object or objects leave the building to protect them from damage in transit. The borrowing institution will normally be responsible for arranging transport of the object in both directions to an appropriate standard, and for any specialist packing requirements. Transport should always take place under secure conditions, to a degree appropriate to the nature of the object. In most cases, this will be carried out either by staff of the lending or borrowing institution or by specialist object movers.

The borrowing institution must confirm in advance that the objects being borrowed are insured by them for the entire period that they are away from the Museum, including whilst they are in transit, against all risks to the values stipulated by museum staff.

All loan requests from suitable institutions will be assessed on their individual merits, bearing in mind the public benefit of exhibition or research elsewhere, the interests of the Museum’s local users, the condition of the object, the Museum’s own current and likely requirements, the time and effort involved in arranging a loan, and the inherent risks in allowing an object to leave the Museum’s care.

Before a loan is agreed, the proposals will be checked against existing commitments to ensure that they will not conflict with internal operations, such as planned exhibitions, research, education and outreach programmes or conservation schedules.

All loans of museum objects will be documented according to SPECTRUM minimum standards, and this documentation will be retained and linked to the Museum’s object documentation system.

4.14 Loans in

The Museum may accept objects on loan from institutions, organisations or private individuals for display, research or reproduction. The criteria for acceptance are set out in the Collection Development Policy above. All new loans, and any subsequent renewals, will be agreed in writing between the owner and the museum, including
details of responsibilities for insurance and transport, if applicable. Objects will not be borrowed without the resources to properly care for them.

In the case of Art Gallery exhibitions of contemporary art and craft, touring exhibitions, and some displays organised in connection with the Museum’s outreach service, the criteria and procedures set out here may be simplified while retaining the essential principles of proper documentation and appropriate care.

The condition of an object on loan will be checked and recorded on arrival and on departure. Conservation work on borrowed objects will only be arranged and paid for in exceptional circumstances, and in full consultation with the owner. Objects on loan to the Museum will be afforded the same standards of care, security and display as are applied to the Museum’s own collections.

All loans to the Museum will be documented according to SPECTRUM minimum standards, and this documentation will be retained and linked to the Museum’s object documentation system.
5 Security and emergency planning

5.1 Introduction

The Museum is very aware of the need to identify and limit risks to the collections from theft and vandalism. One of a museum’s principal objectives, given its remit to preserve its collections in perpetuity, is to protect those collections on display and in store, and to protect the associated displays and information for the benefit of visitors. The museum’s policy on security aims to maintain the standard for best practice as set out in the checklist *Benchmarks in Collection Care for Museums, Archives and Libraries*. The order of topics discussed below follows the *Benchmarks* model.

Security in museums must protect against both theft and vandalism. The majority of thefts in museums are carried out during opening hours, but a proportion, particularly of a professional nature, take place out of opening hours. The interactive nature of the Museum necessitates a balance between offering our visitors the fullest possible access to collections, including in appropriate cases object handling, whilst concurrently securing these items from damage and theft.

5.2 Security procedures

The Museum seeks, through its established security procedures and guidelines, to minimise the risk of theft or damage to collections, whether these are displayed on or off site, being used in outreach work, or in store. These procedures and guidelines are reviewed from time to time in the light of experience and changing circumstances, but have in fact served to protect the collections from all but two very minor thefts since the mid-1970s.

The Museum has a 24 hour CCTV system recording all of the public areas of the Museum and the public access route from the front entrance. Although primarily intended to deter, detect and document any criminal activity during opening hours, the system would also record any out of hours intrusion. The system records constantly onto its hard drive, retaining footage for 30 days before overwriting, and offers sufficient resolution to identify persons for prosecution. Footage can be transferred to DVD or other digital media for longer term storage if required. Video output is constantly displayed on monitors in the main office and above the reception area.

The Museum is never opened to the public without adequate staff cover to ensure the security of the building and collections. Under normal circumstances, the aim is to have one person on duty at the reception desk, monitoring the public areas, with back-up in the museum office. The minimum staff complement is two persons. At weekend lunchtimes, one person may be on their own for no more than an hour covering front of house: this is on the understanding that they are not alone in the building, as Library staff are also present on the first floor. Should the Library (or the Reference Library alone) be closed at such a time, the Museum should also be closed or staff should opt not to leave the premises.
Security and an awareness of its importance is an important factor both in the employment of staff and when dealing with access by outside service personnel and contractors.

The Museum's daytime and intruder alarm systems are serviced annually, and engineers are on call for immediate response in the event of activation or breakdown. Library areas of the building, which an intruder might well break into first, are protected by a separate intruder alarm system. The archive vault, which is in a staff-only zone, is protected during the day by the Town Hall's card entry system and its locked steel door, and out of hours by the Town Hall's intruder alarm system.

Access to storage areas is restricted to relevant Museum staff and other authorised persons accompanied by them. Contractors, casual visitors and researchers who need to access the stores are supervised by staff at all times. Only long-term volunteers who have been appropriately vetted and are regarded as voluntary staff working under the terms of the Museum’s Volunteer Handbook will be permitted to work in the museum stores unsupervised. Volunteers are required to submit an application form including names of two referees. Specialist contractors, such as conservators, who need to spend a long period in storage areas may, having been appropriately vetted, also be permitted to work there without permanent supervision. Similar procedures will apply to the archive vault, with the proviso that researchers with appropriate and verifiable academic or other credentials may be permitted to work there unsupervised at the discretion of a senior member of the museum team, while being escorted in and out by museum staff and signing in/out at the Town Hall reception desk.

Direct access, including handling, by researchers and other interested visitors to displayed or stored objects in the Museum collection will take place only under controlled conditions, with due attention to any risk of theft this may present. Currently such access is by appointment, with an appropriate working area being provided for the visitor in the Museum office. In the future, selected 2D local studies material may also be made available on request for research in a shared facility with the Library. The visitor will be supervised at all times. The Museum’s current procedure for dealing with requests to view or study objects in this fashion is set out in written guidelines. Similar guidelines will be developed for any future joint local studies room before it comes into operation.

Access to keys and security codes enabling entry to the Museum and its secure storage areas is strictly controlled. Alarm codes are not divulged to any other person. Keys giving out-of-hours access to the Museum, or access to Museum stores, are never lent to any other person, and such access never takes place in the absence of Museum staff. Similar restrictions apply in relation to the archive vault and out-of-hours access to the Town Hall. Display cabinet keys, and keys to store rooms and the archive vault, are held in locked cabinets in the main office – which is itself an automatically locking secure area – which are accessible only to full-time staff. Keys are always returned to the cabinets after use.

Arrangements exist for maintaining appropriate levels of security while external contractors are working on site, especially outside normal office hours. The Museum’s code of conduct for contractors specifies forward planning so that work in secure areas can take place at times when staff are on site and available to supervise, or – if staff supervision is impracticable or unsafe – vulnerable objects can be moved out of the affected area.
5.2.1 Loans out

Objects will not be loaned to other institutions unless it can be demonstrated that they will be displayed, stored or handled under conditions that are no less secure than those under which they would be held or used in the Museum. In practice, this means that the security conditions will be appropriate to the nature of the object, thus allowing e.g. for the use of school loans boxes. The security of objects in transit will be ensured by their being transported only by appropriate museum staff, or staff of the borrowing institution, or by carriers with demonstrable experience in handling museum objects. At no point should objects be left unsupervised in an unsecured location.

5.3 Security assessments

A security assessment is made at regular intervals (at least every five years) and all risks, particularly to the perimeter of the building, are noted. Such assessments have informed, and will continue to inform, the Museum’s decision making on security procedures and equipment.

The Accreditation standard requires that the museum must obtain expert security advice for stored and exhibited collections and that security arrangements should be reviewed at least every five years. In May 2007, to supplement in-house expertise and advice from the Museum’s security alarm contractors, Kent Police carried out an external security survey which affirmed the existing arrangements and made no recommendations for further improvements. The National Security Advisor assessed the premises in 2010, as a result of which additional measures were put in place to bring the Museum up to Government Indemnity guidelines.

5.4 Intruder alarms

An intruder detection system is in place and in operation whenever the Museum is unstaffed. The system is linked to a central monitoring station which will automatically alert the police and museum staff in the event of activation. Disruption of the telephone link will also trigger a response. In the interests of personal safety, the staff member contacted by the monitoring station will seek to contact another colleague to join them in attending the premises.

The equipment is subject to a maintenance contract with annual inspections by the installing company. Additions and alterations to the system are made according to the recommendations following these inspections, or according to the changing needs of the Museum.

5.5 Storage and display security

The Museum and Library building conforms to the security guidelines established in Benchmarks. All access points to the building, such as doors, staircases, skylights and windows, can be made secure. All doors with access to storage areas are strongly constructed, close-fitting and equipped with locks for which the issue of keys
can be controlled. Doors leading out of closed-access areas are fitted with locks that may be opened from the inside without a key, but can be opened from the outside only with a key. The doors to the three museum object stores are alarmed to detect tampering with the lock or physical damage.

Only large and robust objects will be placed on permanent open display. Borderline cases such as small pieces of furniture will have alarms that will detect their movement. All other 3D objects will normally be displayed only in secure cabinets. Exceptions may be made for temporary exhibitions in the Art Gallery, e.g. costume on mannequins displayed behind barriers, or small low-value objects in exhibitions that are invigilated. Framed pictures and other 2D objects will always be screwed to the wall, unless they are very large and heavy, in which case chains may be used.

All display cabinets are lockable, with controlled access to the keys, and all fixed display cases are alarmed. Off-site display cases are also lockable, with access restricted to Museum staff, and where permanently fixed will have independent alarms. The content and location of off-site displays will be carefully reviewed in each instance to assess potential risks of theft or damage. In general, off-site displays will only be placed in buildings that themselves have appropriate levels of security including intruder alarms, and rare or valuable objects will not be displayed in unalarmed cases.

5.6 CCTV system

Among the primary purposes of the Museum’s CCTV system are to deter day-time criminal activity, to enable staff to spot suspicious behaviour or tampering with displayed objects, to record such activity and to enable identification of the perpetrator of any crime. The Museum’s staffing procedures ensure that there is always someone with sight of a monitor during opening hours.

5.7 Emergency preparedness

The Museum’s current Emergency Plan combines daytime emergency procedures, focussing on the safety of staff and the public, with disaster planning, including strategies for disaster prevention or mitigation and the salvage of collections. The disaster planning component is a risk management tool concerned primarily with safeguarding the collections. From a collections management perspective, the purpose of the Emergency Plan is to provide guidance to Museum staff who may have to respond to an emergency during working hours, or who may be called out in response to a disaster, and to establish an orderly framework for immediate and short-term response to events which threaten or result in damage to the collections.

The Emergency Plan provides guidelines on liaison with emergency services when reporting to the disaster scene, actions to mitigate secondary damage to objects when the immediate disaster is over, and salvage instructions relating to different categories of objects. It offers a prioritised list for salvage of collections on display or in store, identifies on or off-site secure storage areas for salvaged objects, and notes where off-site storage and movement equipment can be found. In the event of a disaster affecting the entire building, areas of the Town Hall including the Museum’s equipment store and Archive Vault have been designated as locations for rescued
material, and the Emergency Plan gives instructions on how the Town Hall can be accessed out of hours: Museum staff have the necessary keys and security codes.

Responsibility for implementing the plan is shared among the entire Museum permanent staff team, but the out of hours contact list is prioritised according to closeness to the site. All staff possess copies of the plan and are aware of their responsibilities through in-house training. The plan will feature in induction training for new staff.

Although primarily concerned with objects held in the Museum and Library building, the plan also covers those parts of the museum collection including the Borough Archives which are held in the Town Hall.

The Emergency Plan will also serve to inform Library and Town Hall staff, who may be the first to become aware of a disaster outside Museum opening hours, of which Museum staff should be notified and in which order of priority, and of the Museum’s response procedures and priorities.

The Emergency Plan identifies all relevant contacts which might need to be made in the immediate aftermath of a disaster. These include Library and Town Hall staff, utilities, security alarm companies, insurers, contractors, conservators and specialists in emergency retrieval and storage of collections.

Two primary copies of the Emergency Plan, with photographs to help identify objects on the list of salvage priorities, are held in the Museum office and the Archive vault in the Town Hall. Text copies are held by Museum staff on the contact list, by the Library, and by relevant Town Hall staff. Floor plans are available which identify the key features of the building and its contents.

The Emergency plan is designed be reviewed at least every two years, or sooner in the event of significant alterations to the layout or usage of areas currently occupied by collections.

### 5.7.1 Assessment of risks

Risk assessments have been made of hazards from e.g. water pipes, drains and inflammable materials, and priorities have been acted upon. This process links in inspections by TWBC and KCC building services staff in connection with the preparation of the building’s planned maintenance programme. It also links with the building’s fire safety regime, overseen by KCC, and TWBC’s health and safety inspection regime.

In any future development of the building, the opportunity would be taken to renew the building’s fabric, infrastructure and services in such a way as to further reduce such risks. In the meantime, interim repairs have been carried out to mitigate risks from roof leaks and leaks from heating and water supply pipes.

In any future development plans, close attention would be paid to the recommendation in Benchmarks that materials, paints and coatings used for interior decoration or storage furniture are of a standard that will minimise the emission of harmful substances, including soot and smoke, in the event of fire.
The main types of disaster envisaged in the Museum’s emergency planning are fire – including attendant water damage – and flood, i.e. burst pipes, etc, but the plan is applicable to any event which compromises the integrity of areas where collections are displayed or stored – e.g. storm damage, structural failure, or forcible entry. The nature of the building with its solid 1930s construction and its geographical location on a hill in a town which is in any case on high ground indicate that natural disasters are not a major threat, amounting at worst to minor water penetration through the flat roof, and that fire, water damage from fire control or damage to pipework, or human agency are the major threats to be considered.

5.7.2 Fire and power failure precautions

The Museum and Library building is fitted with an integral system of emergency lighting which operates in the event of power failure. This is maintained and tested regularly. The building’s intruder and fire alarm systems are also designed to switch to battery operation in the event of power failure.

Fire extinguishers are fitted at locations throughout the building, including collections display and storage areas, and staff are trained in their use. There is also a series of points at which the building’s fire alarm system can be activated, including the main display and storage areas.

The Museum and Library building has an integrated fire detection system, designed to be sensitive to a rapid burning fire that produces less smoke. These devices cover all areas of the building where collections are housed. An automated response system is in place. The fire detection system and the fire alarms are tested regularly.

5.8 Business continuity

Business continuity, following a major disaster that puts all or a large part of the Museum and Library building out of action, has much wider dimensions than collections management. Nonetheless, in a collections management context attention needs to be given to ways in which the Museum’s core role of sharing collections through display, access to stored objects, remote access, enquiries and outreach can be continued under circumstances in which display and/or storage areas and their contents may be damaged, destroyed, relocated or otherwise rendered inaccessible or unusable for an extended period.

Under such circumstances, the Museum benefits from being part of a wider local government service (TWBC) rather than autonomous units. Computerised records, including object catalogues and digital images of objects, are backed up on a regular basis and can be immediately accessed from offices outside the Museum and Library building. It is easy to envisage the possibility of Museum staff working on an emergency short-term basis from work stations in the Town Hall while longer term temporary office accommodation is sought and fitted out elsewhere.

From such a temporary base, many Museum functions could be carried out without delays other than those inevitably associated with the involvement of staff in arranging conservation of damaged material, seeking replacements for lost material, and planning for the restoration of the Museum and Library building and its facilities. The enquiry service could continue. Remote access would be unaffected. The
Borough Archives, being held in a separate building, would be unaffected, and access would be subject only to constraints on study space in any temporary office accommodation or any issues surrounding movement if such accommodation was distant from the Town Hall. There would be some continued scope for off-site displays such as those in the Town Hall or – subject to availability of display cases – at branch libraries or public spaces like the Camden Centre, using objects unaffected by the disaster – at a minimum those stored in the Archive Vault or otherwise off-site at the time of the disaster. There would also be possibilities for using Cranbrook Museum for temporary displays and outreach events, and that museum would continue to offer a service to the eastern end of the borough.

Those aspects of the Museum’s outreach service which involve going out to schools or other venues, or which happen in off-site locations such as parks, would also be able to continue from a temporary base. The collections dimension of adult talks relies mainly on projected images rather than actual objects. Outreach to schools relies mainly on a relatively small core of objects from the collections: since some of these are housed in the Town Hall, this area of activity would be able to continue in an adapted form even if such objects held at the Museum were lost or inaccessible. Outreach activities involving collections that would normally take place in the Museum and Library building could take place in branch libraries or TWBC facilities such as the Camden Centre or town centre church halls which are readily available for hire.

In the longer term, both the Museum and Library building and their contents including the collections are adequately insured. Thus finance would be available to reconstruct the building and its fittings, to conserve damaged objects, to replace lost material, and generally to reconstitute the service as far as possible to its pre-disaster state.

### 5.9 Insurance

The Museum collections are, and will continue to be, adequately insured. Insurance will be based on the replacement values of the objects in question, which means the prospective cost based on the most accurate and up to date information readily available of purchasing an identical object, where applicable, or the closest possible equivalent.

The insurance values of the Museum collections including objects on loan are tabulated in a list which specifies individual items over a threshold figure agreed from time to time with TWBC’s insurers, and amalgamates the collective values of other objects according to subject categories. Valuations are variously based on in-house or bought-in expertise, and are reviewed annually. The overall insurance value of the collections is updated each year in line with inflation, and particular collections are reviewed from time to time as resources allow.
6 Access

6.1 Introduction

Tunbridge Wells Museum & Art Gallery is committed to providing the widest possible public access to its collections, both on-site and remotely. The collection, documentation and preservation of objects, which form the subject of the rest of this policy, are not ends in themselves. These processes take place with a view to facilitating a high standard of physical and intellectual access to and enjoyment of the collections. Means of access may be taken to include on-site displays and exhibitions, outreach displays, open storage, learning and outreach events and digital media. Consideration of access issues links collections management with the Museum's Learning Policy and Audience Development Plan.

The current Accreditation standard for museums requires a commitment to:
- Good quality, stimulating services for users and potential users, in order to get the best out of its collections, resources and local area
- A welcoming and accessible environment, and appropriate services and facilities
- Use of collections and associated information for exhibitions and learning opportunities.

This section of the Collections Management Plan sets out ways in which the Museum seeks to fulfil these requirement within the context of the current building, while also looking to the additional possibilities that could be offered by a future improved facility where the infrastructure can better match the aspirations of the service.

6.2 Physical access

Issues regarding physical access to the Museum and Library building, including areas where collections are displayed and stored, and where they can be studied or otherwise accessed, are considered in the Museum’s Access Plan. This was based upon an Access Audit carried out by the Centre for Accessible Environments, which recommended a programme of improvements. An initial set of improvements to the building took place in 2006. These included ramping to the front of the building and improvements to the width and movement of doors to provide full access to the ground floor. A new lift to the first floor is being installed in 2012/13.

6.3 Orientation

The Museum believes that clear orientation, including signage, forms an important part of facilitating access to the collections. Issues of orientation both externally and internally have been monitored and reviewed over the years, and improvements have been made from time to time. The Museum’s Access Audit considers orientation in its widest sense as part of the overall package of issues under review and puts forward recommendations for improvements. The implementation of these has been scheduled as part of the Access Plan.

The comfort and enjoyment of a visit is greatly enhanced by a visitor being given the information to make choices about the composition of their visit coupled with the
good directional information which allows them to carry out those choices. Orientation for the building begins with the marketing tools – principally print – which the visitor will use at their moment of decision and of departure. The physical orientation begins at their arrival points, which will include the station, various bus and coach stops, and the roads and car parks in Tunbridge Wells. The Museum has contributed to TWBC’s signage strategy and is indicated on tourist signs at the approaches to and within the town.

The current building has an information panel for the Museum on the exterior, and banners which specifically mark out the Museum. These are visible from a distance and play a significant part in helping people to locate the building, which can otherwise be ‘lost’ as part of the overall Civic Centre complex. Inside, there are directional signs for the various parts of the Museum and Library service. The Museum has a system of internal signage which marks out and directs people to particular broad sections within the displays, and there is an orientation display at the entrance. Improvements to internal signage throughout the building will be included in planned refurbishment works following the installation of a new lift in 2013.

6.4 Displays

The Museum will provide access to its collections and associated knowledge through interpreted displays which for most visitors will supply the primary introduction and ‘shop window’ to its resources. Display involves access to real things, in an environment where collections can be shared within a controlled and secure environment and in which the story of the people of Tunbridge Wells can be told.

What makes museums different and special is their collections. But traditionally many museums have treated collections as if they were a self-contained entity that sits alongside real life. They were interpreted from a purely curatorial point of view, categorised and shared in ways which reflected the curator’s ordering of their collections. But this is not why collections were originally begun. Material culture was and is collected because it is what remains of people and their lives. It is not everything of a person or a community, but it is a tangible thing that can be shared by others to begin to give an insight into its own owner or user.

Opportunities have been taken in recent years, through changing displays and temporary exhibitions to present collections in a way that better corresponds to that people-centred approach. Any future redisplay of the Museum as a whole would be designed from that perspective.

6.4.1 Rotation of collections

It is recognised that the rotation of collections on display is, and will continue to be, an important part of providing access to the Museum’s object resources. Currently there are a number of showcases in the Museum, the shared first floor landing, and in the Town Hall which provide opportunities for regularly changing displays. The ability to easily change displays to facilitate rotation will form an important part of any future development.
Changing displays will also offer opportunities to provide access to material held by partner organisations such as local history societies, or material held by individuals which in some cases may result in acquisitions to the permanent collection.

### 6.5 Special exhibitions

The Museum will provide access to its collections and associated knowledge through special exhibitions of a more expansive and ambitious nature than individual changing displays. Special exhibitions may also provide access to material held by partner organisations such as local history societies, or material held by individuals which in some cases may result in accessions to the permanent collection. Currently such exhibitions take place in the Art Gallery space, although they may be supplemented by subsidiary displays in the museum area, the interconnecting landing, or library spaces. The Art Gallery is a multi-purpose temporary exhibitions area, which may also show touring exhibitions, community-centred shows based around collecting projects or artists working with local groups, work by contemporary artists or groups, or contemporary art and craft shows curated by the Museum.

The Museum’s Exhibitions Policy, first drawn up in 2003, established a regime of high-quality Art Gallery exhibitions running for two months each, and proposed that a significant proportion of these should be in-house shows presenting objects from the Museum collection. This policy has been successfully implemented over subsequent years. The Exhibitions Policy was rewritten in 2012, in consultation with users, retaining a commitment to collections-based exhibitions around historic, art or natural history themes, and establishing that ‘half the exhibitions in the two year cycle will have a local relevance, where local is defined as the High Weald area. The Exhibitions Policy will continue to inform the display of Museum collections in the Art Gallery.

### 6.6 Outreach displays

The Museum recognises the importance of taking collections out into the community so that they become visible to people who might not otherwise come into contact with or be aware of the resources that are on offer. Such outreach displays will help to raise the profile of the Museum and encourage visits in person. In recent years, the use of demountable showcases has enabled temporary displays to be installed in a number of community facilities, including the Camden Centre, the St John’s Sports Centre, and branch libraries. There are also two display cases permanently installed in the Town Hall, which are used for a programme of changing exhibitions. In 2010/11 the Museum hosted the externally funded Kentish Delights project which took objects from museum collections throughout Kent into non-traditional venues, interpreting them by means of an innovative take-away magazine. The current three year Arts Council funded Hoodwink project builds on this success.

In the future, the Museum will continue with its programme of satellite displays at venues such as those mentioned, and to pursue opportunities for partnership working and external funding, building on the success of projects such as Kentish Delights. The selection of locations for outreach displays, and the choice of objects to be included in them, will take into account the environmental conditions in each instance and issues of security.
6.7 Open storage

In the current Museum facility, there is little in the way of a half-way house between primary public displays and stored collections. The latter, except when used in changing displays or outreach work, are only accessible by appointment for research or through occasional guided tours of the storage areas, or in some instances remotely through the Museum's website. The lack of a facility for browsing the stored collections has been a motivation behind the currently rather dense nature of the Museum displays.

In any future development of the Museum service, secondary access to collections through open storage would be an important feature. Although storage of collections is typically seen as a ‘behind the scenes’ element of a museum, efforts would be made to maximise public access. Although increased virtual access has an important role, this is not to be regarded as a substitute for increasing access to the real things.

Any future development of open storage should meet the following user needs:
- Access to study more of something from the displays or other experiences
- Access to see something not in the main displays or other public areas
- Access to construct their own tales or contribute to the Project through contact with the collections
- ‘Behind the scenes’ experience of collections and their management
- Reassurance that ‘their’ collections are being cared for and safeguarded for the future
- For internal users, staff and volunteers, knowing where things are, being able to find them and being able to work with them with ease

6.8 Study access

The Museum will provide study access to its collections and associated knowledge. This involves opportunities to examine objects on display, to study material in store, to learn more about specific objects, to access background information about the Tunbridge Wells area and the types of objects covered by the collections, and to study primary and secondary sources for local studies.

At present, the Museum offers researchers the opportunity to look at objects on display more closely, e.g. to see how a Tunbridge ware object is made, to examine additional objects from the collections in store, and to consult background information in the Museum’s object catalogue and documentation files. Individuals or groups are able to take advantage of this offer by appointment. The Museum may also organise study days, guided tours or other specialist outreach events. There is also a growing amount of information, and images of objects, available on the Museum’s website. Access to the Borough archives is managed in a similar fashion to the museum object collection. Background information on local studies and generic categories of objects, e.g. secondary sources on Tunbridge ware, costume, toys, etc. is also available.

Currently, direct study access to museum objects is limited somewhat by logistical considerations, as the Museum has no dedicated reading room or study area,
necessitating the use of multi-purpose spaces. The Museum will explore opportunities for joint working with the Reference Library’s local studies service. Improved study access would be a priority in any future development of the Museum, and this could effectively be combined with the provision of open storage.

Study access will be mediated by Museum staff as necessary to ensure the safety of objects and to enable the visitor to make best use of the resources available. Study access is supported by an enquiry service whereby straightforward queries can be answered by staff either on the spot or according to their availability. Staff are not able to conduct time consuming research on behalf of individuals, but in such cases will endeavour to point the enquirer to the resources, whether on site or elsewhere, that will provide the information required.

Staff will from time to time be involved in collections and local studies research work, particularly as preparation for exhibitions and outreach. Information resulting from the research process will be made available to the general public in an appropriate format e.g. information sheets, publications, website.

6.9 Education and outreach service

The Museum will offer access to its collections and associated information through a programme of outreach events for all ages. Such access may involve the objects themselves – e.g. in handling sessions on-site or in schools, or as features of story-telling sessions, or as inspiration for art and craft activities – or information about or images of them. Information and images may be mediated directly – as in talks illustrated with pictures of objects – or accessed remotely – as in web-based resources prepared for schools use.

The current very successful education and outreach service was initiated by the Museum in 2000. It is completely integrated with the rest of the Museum’s activities though its use of collections and its relationship to exhibitions and events, and has often led or originated projects in these areas. One of the three main aims of the service when established was to provide greater access to the collections, temporary displays and exhibitions. The use of collections, images and information off-site will continue to be a crucial part of an integrated approach to collections access.

The education and outreach service incorporates a wide and varied range of activities which are all linked to the collections, including:

- an outreach service to schools, closely linked to the requirements of the National Curriculum
- on-site workshops for schools, closely linked to the requirements of the National Curriculum
- holiday happenings for family audiences during every school holiday
- evening talks for adults, linked to changing exhibitions (individuals and groups)
- family nature walks and mini-beast safaris, with associated on-site activities
- talks to local groups illustrated by objects in the collections
- object-handling and reminiscence sessions for residential/retirement homes

The service will be a vital means of broadening the Museum’s range of users, as set out in its Audience Development Plan.
In many museums there has traditionally been a separation between collections and education departments, with little staff crossover and separate education or handling collections. It is a principle of the Museum's method of working that all objects are in principle available for educational use, decisions being taken on an individual basis in relation to the object's relative vulnerability and suitability for particular kinds of access activities – e.g. handling only by staff, or controlled handling by users – or for particular age groups etc. Some objects that are regularly used educationally – e.g. selections made to illustrate particular topics or curriculum areas – will be stored with educational resources rather than in the regular collections store, but all such objects will have the same status as other museum objects and will be subject to the same acquisition, documentation and collections care regime. Objects may be acquired with the primary aim of being used in outreach.

6.10 Loans out

The Museum will provide off-site access to objects through loans for display to accredited museums and galleries and other institutions that can provide an appropriate level of security and collections care. Loans may be for temporary exhibitions or for more permanent display purposes. Short and long term loans allow objects not normally on display in the permanent galleries to be shown to the public elsewhere in the UK and internationally. Such loans also allow objects to be displayed in different contexts and alongside objects from other collections. Loans may be requested by the borrowing institution, or the Museum may offer loans as part of a reciprocal arrangement, e.g. in the case of a joint exhibition of material shared between Tunbridge Wells and another venue.

The Museum at one time supported a county-wide school loans service which was run by Kent County Council. As an alternative to creating its own loan boxes, which it used to send out in the pre-1970 period, the Museum made available a substantial amount of material from its stored collections to help set up the county-wide service in the first instance. When the county-wide service ceased, the loan boxes containing Tunbridge Wells material were returned to the Museum. Although the Museum's outreach programme favours mediated access to collections – and many objects from the former school loans service are being regularly used in work with schools – the option of using loan boxes will be retained.

6.11 Digital access and surrogacy

The Museum will provide digital access to its collections and associated knowledge, both on-site and remotely. For example the Museum's object catalogue with associated images is currently available as a means of answering enquiries, but should in future be accessible in some form at terminals in public areas of the building and via the Museum's website. The object catalogue will continue to be developed with the aim of giving greater access to the collections and providing further layers of information about them this aim in view. A programme of digitising Museum objects has been in progress for a number of years, and this will continue to be reviewed to best fit in with developing priorities.

Much local studies material lends itself to digitisation or surrogacy. Such material includes photographs, drawings, prints, postcards, maps and ephemera. This would allow the more popular local history sources to be browsed and explored in a way
that is not subject to the security and conservation restraints involved in access to the real things, that meets the needs of the majority of users, and that is more convenient for those users.

6.12 Publications

The Museum will provide access to collections and associated information through publications, whether physical or digital. Publications (including electronic media) provide a means of making extended information about the collections available to the public, which includes those unable to visit the Museum or able to visit only infrequently. The Museum has produced a number of publications on local history and natural history topics, ranging from books to small pamphlets. These have been variously based on research carried out by museum staff, volunteers and other users. Such material has also been made available through the Museum’s website, e.g. histories of Tunbridge ware and local parks. The Museum has also collaborated with local societies and external publishers in producing books that showcase objects and images from their collections, e.g. illustrated histories of the town and books on Tunbridge ware. Museum staff have also published articles relating to the collections in the newsletters and journals of local and national societies, and in more general publications.

6.13 Interpretation

The Museum will provide intellectual access to its collections by offering interpretation at a variety of levels. Text used in displays and exhibitions will be concise, informative, accurate, clear, and matched to the needs of visitors of all ages and abilities. Interpretation will follow a consistent house style, established in written guidelines which cover font, structure and content. Other means such as on-site digital resources, web resources, publications and staff mediation will be used to provide interpretation to visitors and other users.

The Museum aspires to use the full range of means of interpretation, using all the senses of the visitor and prioritising those means which place the real thing first and interpret clearly rather than intrude. Those means of interpretation may include:

- The Collections themselves. Wherever possible, real things should interpret themselves or other real things.
- Photographic and other graphic illustrations, both those which are objects in their own right and illustrative material. Most importantly they can show real people and places, breaking the boundaries of the objects.
- Text and written interpretation
- Moving images.
- Sound and music, including oral history recordings.
- Manual interactivity, handling and tactile experiences.
- Multimedia and digital experiences and interaction. Multimedia can create opportunities for different levels of knowledge and for different ways of discovering or learning. It can therefore be used both in general displays and for study access, and for the two together. Multimedia provides an opportunity to provide more detailed information in a ‘hidden’ format, rather than an open one, such as text panels. It provides opportunities for users to choose their
routes and learning experiences and can be a solution to needs for providing information in different languages.

- Live interpretation. Live interpretation of the collections can be both part of the welcome to customers, and as part of specific programmes. It can involve visitor services staff, curators and access officers, users, the community, artists, actors, specialists.