

RAMM Forward Plan 2026-29

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Contents

Introduction.....	3
Executive summary	4
Background	6
About the museum	6
Partnerships	7
Environment and context.....	8
Museum review	8
Vision.....	10
Statement of purpose	10
Values	10
Brand.....	10
Alignment with corporate priorities and national strategies	12
Exeter City Council plans	12
Exeter City Council corporate plan.....	12
City centre strategy.....	12
Cultural strategy	13
Exeter Plan.....	13
Local Government Reorganisation	14
Let's Create.....	14
Accreditation	15
RAMM's Aims 2026-29	16
Aim 1 – We will deliver ambitious and enjoyable in person and digital experiences for our audiences.....	17
Current situation.....	17
Key actions for Aim 1	19
Outcomes of Aim 1.....	19

Aim 2 – We will care for the museum’s world class collection, and make it better known and better understood	20
Current situation	20
Key Actions for Aim 2	21
Outcomes of Aim 2	21
Aim 3 – We will aim to foster a sense of civic pride, belonging and community cohesion	22
Current situation	22
Key Actions for Aim 3	23
Outcomes of Aim 3	23
Aim 4 – We will strive to ensure the museum is welcoming for everyone and our audiences, staff and volunteers are representative and reflective of our local population	24
Current situation	24
Key Actions for Aim 4	25
Outcomes of Aim 4	25
Aim 5 – We will adopt a strategic approach to improving the museum’s long-term financial and environmental sustainability	26
Current situation	26
Funding and income generation	26
Building and environmental sustainability	27
Key actions for Aim 5	29
Outcomes of Aim 5	29
Activity plans and policies	30
Finances	30
Staffing	33
Key actions for staffing	34
Monitoring	34
Appendices	34

Introduction

RAMM (Royal Albert Memorial Museum & Art Gallery) is regarded as a cultural flagship for the city of Exeter. It is regularly cited as one of Britain's best regional museums with collections of regional, national and international importance, two of which are Designated. It is an Exeter City Council (ECC) service.

RAMM has been at the heart of the city and region's cultural life for over 150 years enriching people's lives, forging the bonds that create community and creating a sense of place through shared experience and understanding. The museum plays an important social and economic role in the city. It is both a vibrant public space that instils a sense of local identity and pride and drives footfall to the city centre promoting economic growth by encouraging people and businesses to come to Exeter.

This document sets out RAMM's Forward Plan for the period 2026-29. It has been written in an environment of significant uncertainty (see external analysis in Appendix 1) reflected in its two largest funders, ECC and Arts Council England (ACE). Local Government Reorganisation is underway and RAMM will soon become a service of a unitary authority and Baroness Hodge is carrying out an independent review of ACE, the results of which will be published in early 2026.

Several assumptions have been made in writing this plan:

- ▶ RAMM continues to be a council service
- ▶ RAMM continues to receive ACE National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) funding at a broadly similar level to its current allocation
- ▶ Staffing levels at the museum remain roughly the same. (A restructuring of the museum team is underway at the time of writing. This plan is based on the current structure.)

If these assumptions change significantly then the plan will need to be reformulated.

Following a recent review of the museum by an external consultant, it was agreed that a five-year strategic roadmap for the cultural services in Exeter will be developed to support the council's aim of reducing its investment in the museum. The development of the Strategic Roadmap is one of the actions set out under Aim 5 of this plan and will run in parallel with its delivery:

- ▶ **Three-year Forward Plan:** covers the museum's work with collections, programming and audiences and adopts people-based outcomes.
- ▶ **Five-year Strategic Roadmap:** focuses on how to reduce the museum's reliance on council funding. It will be completed by the end of 2025-26 and will

cover commercial and income-generating activity and consider the consolidated portfolio of cultural services including the Underground Passages, Custom House, Historic Guildhall and Corn Exchange.

Executive summary

This plan sets out RAMM's Forward Plan for 2026-29 and shows how the museum will achieve its vision to enhance people's quality of life through being a place of discovery which encourages everyone to be curious. It shows how it will use its local and global collections to connect people to the world and inspire them to shape a better future.

The plan has been written in an environment that is sometimes described as 'VUCA' (volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous). This is particularly the case for RAMM's two largest funders, ECC and ACE. Local Government Reorganisation is underway and RAMM will become a service of a unitary authority, currently thought to be by 2028. Baroness Hodge is carrying out an independent review of ACE, the results of which will be published in early 2026.

RAMM's Forward Plan supports ECC's Corporate Plan in the following ways:

Local Economy: RAMM is a driver of the local economy, driving footfall to the city centre, creating a cultural environment which encourages tourists to visit and businesses and people to move to the area.

People: RAMM supports the health and wellbeing of residents through its community engagement projects, often focusing on under-served audiences. It works with community groups to promote inclusion and community cohesion. Through its vibrant public programme, it is contributing to a thriving city with great things to see and do for everyone.

Sustainable environment: RAMM's programme of exhibitions and events shine a light on the action that people can take to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change. RAMM has a decarbonisation plan and an environmental forum for action team.

The aims of RAMM's Forward Plan 2026-29 are as follows:

1. We will deliver ambitious and enjoyable in person and digital experiences for our audiences

2. We will care for the museum's world class collection, and make it better known and better understood
3. We will aim to foster a sense of civic pride, belonging and community cohesion
4. We will strive to ensure the museum is welcoming for everyone, whatever their background, and our audiences, staff and volunteers are representative and reflective of our local population.
5. We will adopt a strategic approach to improving the museum's financial and environmental sustainability

Under each of these aims, this plan considers the background situation and the high-level actions for the next three years.

The plan sets out the budget for the 2025-26 and the indicative budget for 2026-27. It also shows the staff structure needed to deliver the plan and shows how the plan will be monitored.

Finally, this plan has been written with RAMM's existing staffing structure in place. The redesign of ECC's cultural services and consolidation of its other heritage and cultural assets under a centralised management structure will mean that there may be changes to the way RAMM operates in the future. The work on the 5-year Strategic Roadmap will consider the wider portfolio of consolidated cultural services and the Forward Plan will be updated to reflect this if necessary.

Background

About the museum

In 2024/25 RAMM attracted 213,900 visits, 6,990 attendees at events and 615,337 page views of its websites. Since 2024 there have been over 6 million views of its images on Wikimedia. The museum contributed £6.8 million to the local economy. It is managed as part of ECC's cultural services and since 2023 an Oversight Panel has taken responsibility for overseeing the museum's NPO programme. RAMM has two independent supporting charities, the RAMM Development Trust and the Friends of RAMM.

RAMM originates in a public campaign to create a memorial in Exeter to the Prince Consort, Albert, who died in 1861. Under the leadership of Sir Stafford Northcote, a campaign raised funds to build the Devon and Exeter Albert Memorial which opened in 1868 in a Neo-Gothic building on Queen Street. The Memorial included the museum, the Exeter School of Art, a library and later a college run by a board of trustees.

In 1870 the Albert Memorial Museum, School of Art and Free Library was conveyed to the Corporation of Exeter 'upon trust for the benefit of the City of Exeter under the Public Libraries Act, 1855'. This arrangement allowed the city to raise extra local taxation as a way of supporting the Albert Memorial. Under the city council from the 1870s, governance was through a Museum Sub-Committee reporting to a General Committee which was subsequently known as the Royal Albert Governors. This was discontinued in 1947 when governance was established through a Museum and Library Committee. The provision of Museums is Part III of the Exeter City Council Act 1987.

Over the course of the 19th and 20th centuries the original constituents of the Albert Memorial established themselves elsewhere in the city, such as Exeter Library, University of Exeter and Exeter School of Art, allowing the museum to fully occupy the Queen Street building which was greatly extended in the 1880s and 1890s. Following the opening of a new wing in 1899, the museum was granted the authority to add 'Royal' to its name. By the late 20th century, the complex phases of Victorian rebuilding were causing structural issues and the galleries and visitor facilities required refurbishment and refreshment. In the early 2000s, a project to redevelop the museum was initiated and following an investment of £24 million from ECC and the NLHF the new RAMM opened in 2011 after four years of closure. In 2012, it won the Art Fund prize for Museum of the Year.

Since re-opening after its major redevelopment, RAMM has regularly featured in polls of Britain's best regional museums. Since 2020 it has received numerous

awards and accolades including Gold in Ethical, Responsible and Sustainable Tourism at the Devon Tourism Awards (2021); Gold in Accessible and Inclusive Tourism at Devon Tourism Awards (2022); Tripadvisor Travellers' Choice (2023); Bronze in Large Visitor Attraction of the Year at Devon Tourism Awards (2023) and Shortlisted for Accessibility Award at Museums + Heritage Awards (2025). In May 2025 RAMM passed its Visit England visitor attraction Quality Rating assessment with a score of 87%.

Partnerships

Through its partnerships with educational institutions, such as the University of Exeter (UoE) and Exeter College, RAMM promotes skills development and is a catalyst for the local creative economy. In the last decade RAMM has developed a close working relationship with the university; however, its last Memoranda of Understanding was signed in 2019. Museum staff frequently collaborate with academics in the Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS) and the Arts and Culture team, often partnering on Arts & Humanities Research Council-funded projects that result in public programmes such as exhibitions, events and artist commissions. These collaborations give RAMM greater audience depth and reach, and increased profile, and the university gains access to RAMM's audiences and visibility in the city centre, furthering its impact aims. Additionally, RAMM works with UoE to offer student work placements and internships which provide life-changing experiences for young people and additional human resource for RAMM.

RAMM has a network of city-based partners, for example through the Exeter Partnership, as part of its Connected Culture strand, Exeter Heritage Partnership in volunteering and Heritage Open Days. RAMM contributes to the Exeter City of Literature partnership and collaborates with the other NPOs in the city.

The museum offers community groups a safe space and is a trusted partner for wellbeing activities, for example working with Wellbeing Exeter and its associated partners, community connectors and builders; engaging older people through Age UK Exeter, Franklyn Hospital and care homes; supporting people's mental health together with Youth Arts for Health, Wellbeing Exeter and disabled people through disability charities CEDA, Pelican Project and others. It works with community groups such as Hikmat, Inclusive Exeter, Refugee Support Devon, the Beacon Centre, and Exeter Food Bank.

RAMM works with national museums such as the British Museum, the National Gallery and Tate, in both loans and audience development programmes. It is part of national networks such as the National Museum Directors Council, the English Civic Museums Network and the MAGNET exhibition touring group. It participates in national projects such as Towards a National Collection/N-RICH and Time Odyssey. RAMM also operates in an international context, regularly attracting

interns from overseas to its conservation studio, loaning works abroad and, through its university partnerships, collaborating on international heritage-based research projects, such as the recent GLAM-E Lab.

Environment and context

A summary of the PESTLE and SWOT analysis carried out can be found in Appendix 1.

Museum review

Exeter City Council has recently restructured to create a Directorate dedicated to 'Place.' RAMM is part of the Place Directorate as one element of a wider culture and leisure service which has been brought together for Exeter. ECC is currently developing and consulting on an updated Cultural Strategy.

It was within this context that in spring 2025, ECC commissioned a review of RAMM's operating model with a view to identify whether there are opportunities to transform the current funding, operating and management model to improve the museum's efficiency and financial sustainability and maximise income generation while balancing its socio-economic impact and encouraging engagement with RAMM's offer among Exeter's residents, especially in priority neighbourhoods.

This Delivery Model Assessment used an established process to: frame the challenge, define the different possible service delivery models (retain in-house as is; in-house plus; merge with other regional entity; move to trust; transfer to existing not-for-profit provider; cease and mothball and cease and dispose); establish the strategic and operational evaluation criteria (both financial and non-financial) and then evaluate the different delivery models against these criteria.

The outcome of the review was that retaining in-house with changes was the preferred option.

"The desire of the Council and other key stakeholders to ensure that RAMM continues to be a key attraction in the city and continues to play a pivotal role in wider cultural, economic, and strategic outcomes means that continuing to provide the offer in-house is still the preferred delivery option for the Council. However, the need to seek to reduce the reliance on Council funding into RAMM requires an approach that will focus on increasing alternative funding sources and in particular increasing the museums commercial acumen and income generating capabilities without diluting its reputation for cultural and heritage expertise."

The review made the following recommendations that will be developed into a 5-Year Strategic Plan (Roadmap) for the museum to help improve its financial resilience. This is included in aim 5 of this plan.

1. Investigate the financial benefits of establishing a trading company for the museum's income-generating activities, including the potential net benefit of accessing the Museums & Galleries Exhibition Tax Relief scheme (MGETR).
2. Ensure that any future capital investments include a clear plan and associated financial forecasts targeted at increasing income generation.
3. Create a consolidated portfolio across the wider cultural service, extending skills and capabilities to include other historic sites/offers in the city.
4. Create a 5-year business plan (Strategic Roadmap) to ensure the on-going operation of the museum/heritage portfolio is clearly understood; offers further resilience regardless of the outcomes of LGR; and sets out expected returns (financial, social, economic, educational, etc.)
5. Seek to re-negotiate the terms of engagement with key partners.
6. Evaluate the effectiveness and future relevance of RAMM's current co-leadership model and consider the re-establishment of a single leadership position for the museum with clear responsibilities and targets to balance museum and commercial activities to achieve the items listed above.

Vision

RAMM will enhance people's quality of life. RAMM is a place of discovery which encourages everyone to be curious. The museum uses its local and global collections to connect people to the world and inspires them to shape a better future.

Statement of purpose

The Royal Albert Memorial Museum & Art Gallery (RAMM) is a service of Exeter City Council. It exists to enrich the lives of people living, working in and visiting Exeter by providing them with opportunities to be inspired, informed and entertained. The City's world-class collections are placed at the heart of everything the museum does. RAMM will acquire collections that document the natural and cultural history of Exeter set within its regional and national context as well as those that represent the city and region's connections across the world. The museum holds collections in trust for present and future generations, managing their care and security for the public benefit.

RAMM's manifesto sets out how it will achieve its mission:

<https://rammuseum.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/RAMM-Vision-and-Manifesto-for-website.pdf>

Values

- ▶ We are friendly and welcoming to everyone
- ▶ We are enthusiastic about our museum
- ▶ We are ambitious in our work
- ▶ We are responsive to new ideas and views
- ▶ We embrace our responsibilities to society and to the environment
- ▶ We work with our community to make a positive impact on people's lives

Brand

RAMM's current brand was established after its redevelopment in 2011 which revealed the Victorian building and juxtaposed it with high-quality contemporary design and re-presented the collections based on enchantment, visual stimulus

and personal discovery. With a range of spaces from theatrical to contemplative, RAMM's displays represent a 'curiosity-style' museum, which were characteristic of the early 21st century. The approach features object-rich displays, visually stunning arrays and large-scale cases. When in 2012 RAMM won the Art Fund 'Museum of the Year' award, the galleries were described as 'some of the most intelligently considered displays on view in any museum in the UK'.

RAMM's personality is eclectic, quirky, and playful; it brings a sense of gravitas but with an unexpected twist or a surprising detail. The museum's communications strive to be warm, conversational, accessible and thoughtful. The brand is expressed through RAMM's visual identity which was last refreshed in 2021/22. RAMM has an in-house designer who is responsible for exhibition design, signage in the museum, gallery interpretation and the design of printed and promotional materials.

Caring for collections with strong links to the British Empire, RAMM is often discussed in the context of decolonisation. The museum is progressive in terms of its ethical approach to collections and through ECC has been repatriating human remains and sacred artefacts since the 1990s, long before this was widespread. Since 2022 it was involved in high-profile repatriations of First Nations artefacts to Canada. It is likely that the politically charged issues of repatriation and restitution will remain of relevance over the next three years.

Alignment with corporate priorities and national strategies

Exeter City Council plans

Exeter City Council corporate plan

This plan supports the [Exeter City Council corporate plan 2025-28](#) in the following areas:

Local Economy: RAMM is a driver of the local economy, driving footfall to the city centre, creating a cultural environment which encourages businesses and people to move to the area. Alongside the Cathedral, RAMM is the city's main visitor attraction. It is a source of information for tourists wanting historical and contextual information on the city. RAMM's economic value work shows the museum contributes £6.8M to the local economy (See Appendix 2).

People: RAMM supports the health and wellbeing of local residents through its community engagement projects such as Museum Meet Up with Wellbeing Exeter, Dartmoor Frame of Mind with Youth Arts for Health and its dementia-friendly programme. It works with community groups to promote inclusion and community cohesion. It is focused on reaching under-served audiences through its outreach work and schools' programme. Through its exhibition and event programme, evening events such as Lates, and its schools' programme it is contributing to a thriving city with great things to see and do for everyone.

Sustainable environment: RAMM's programme of exhibitions and events shine a light on the action that people can take to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change. RAMM has a decarbonisation plan and an environmental forum for action team.

City centre strategy

ECC is currently engaging with key stakeholders to develop a City Centre Strategy – vision and action plan. A draft strategy will be consulted on in February 2026 and adopted by the Council in the summer. One of the key 'pillars' of the emerging strategy is the "Destination Offer" - with the City Centre recognised nationally and globally as a place that successfully combines its natural, built environment and heritage assets with the international strengths of its key institutions, including RAMM.

Cultural strategy

ECC is leading the development of an ambitious place-based Culture Strategy for Exeter. The new Strategy will:

- ▶ establish a clear vision and mission that aligns with the needs of Exeter's residents and communities.
- ▶ reflect Exeter's current cultural, social and economic landscape, identifying existing cultural assets, community needs and opportunities for cultural development.
- ▶ reflect the importance of culture as a catalyst to connect communities to Exeter's unique natural environment, heritage, literacy and learning and ensure that cultural growth is at the heart of cultural placemaking in Exeter.

This work is in parallel with the City Centre Strategy, and running to the same timescale, Key stakeholders have been engaged, combined with Connected Culture strand of the Exeter Partnership. An online residents survey has also been undertaken, gathering information and points of view to understand Exeter and its culture. RAMM will be contributing to this strategy. A draft is expected to be completed and consulted on in February 2026.

This work aligns with Exeter's ambition to be recognised nationally and internationally as a 'City of Culture' as set in Exeter's 2040 Vision. ECC has agreed to submit an Expression of Interest to be UK City of Culture 2029. A successful bid will place culture at the centre of city development, raise ambition and can-do attitude across the city, repositioning the city and creating a new national and international outlook. It will enable cross-sectoral working / learning and engaging citizens in new and valuable ways.

Exeter Plan

The Exeter Plan will shape the future of Exeter for the next twenty years and will be the basis for how the city continues to evolve and meet the needs of the community. It will be the main planning policy document for Exeter, setting out where development should take place and providing the policies which will be used in making decisions on planning applications. History and heritage and culture and tourism are important themes in this plan.

Liveable Exeter

Liveable Exeter is the Council's bold initiative to regenerate large brownfield sites in the city, build at least 12,000 homes and create inclusive, healthy and sustainable new neighbourhoods. Culture is one of the key principles which underpins this programme, aiming to deliver a diverse and accessible cultural

offering connecting our world leading climate science, arts and literature, heritage, learning and innovation.

Local Government Reorganisation

In December 2024, the Government published the English Devolution White Paper: Power and Partnerships – Foundation for Growth. This set out a long-term plan for simpler council structures and the end of two-tier local government in areas like Devon.

In response to this, Exeter City Council and Plymouth City Council have submitted a single, shared proposal to Government for local government reorganisation (LGR) in Devon. This proposal is ambitious and evidence-driven, shaped by extensive engagement with partners and communities across Devon. It is a plan for a simpler, stronger, and more coherent system of local government - one that works for cities, towns, coastal communities, and rural areas alike.

The proposed model creates four councils that reflect Devon's real-world geography - its travel patterns, labour markets, housing pressures, environmental context and community identity, including an Expanded Exeter Unitary Council.

A unitary council for Exeter and the surrounding area would be well placed to coordinate cultural investment and strengthen Exeter's role as a place where people come together to learn, celebrate, and express shared identity. Culture, sport, and placemaking will play a key role in supporting wellbeing, attracting talent, and sustaining a vibrant, inclusive area for future generations. Cultural and heritage services will be delivered in each area, with models adapted to the needs of urban and rural populations and making best use of available assets, like RAMM. Using established locality-based working that is rooted in communities and already part of the voluntary and community sector network, they will continue to grow community capacity and a sustainable cultural offer that is flexible, modern and relevant to the communities being served.

The new unitary councils will come into being on 1 April 2028 and it is fully expected that RAMM's Forward Plan 2026-29 will need to be adapted to take account of the evolving environment. In the meantime, RAMM's leadership team will continue horizon-scanning and preparing for LGR by continuing to be flexible and fleet of foot and building relationships with other cultural services in neighbouring authorities.

Let's Create

'Let's Create' is Arts Council England's Strategy 2020-2030. The intended outcomes of the strategy are:

- ▶ Creative People – Everyone can develop and express creativity throughout their life.
- ▶ Cultural Communities – Villages, towns and cities thrive through a collaborative approach to culture.
- ▶ A Creative and Cultural Country – England’s cultural sector is innovative, collaborative and international.

ACE’s outcomes are to be achieved through four Investment Principles for cultural organisations:

- ▶ Ambition and Quality – they are committed to improving the quality of their work.
- ▶ Inclusivity and Relevance – England’s diversity is fully reflected in the organisations and individuals ACE supports and in the culture they produce.
- ▶ Dynamism – they are dynamic and able to respond to new challenges.
- ▶ Environmental Responsibility – they lead the way in their approach to environmental responsibility.

Accreditation

The Museum Accreditation Scheme, run by ACE, is the UK industry standard for the governance and operation of museums and galleries. The scheme applies to museums of all sizes with organisations assessed according to size and type, with standards and commitments scaled accordingly. To achieve Accreditation, museums and galleries must meet minimum standards in:

- ▶ Organisational Health
- ▶ Managing Collections
- ▶ Users and their Experiences

Each area contains minimum requirements which organisations must meet on how they are run, how they manage collections and how they engage with users. The principles ensure an ethical framework to build public confidence in how museums manage collections in trust for society, and how they manage public resources.

While the scheme is voluntary, it is a mandatory condition for museums in receipt of grant aid from major funders that they are Accredited Museums. This is reflected in specific grant terms for ACE’s NPOs, for example. Those in receipt of Museums Estate and Development (MEND) funding, such as ECC, must abide by an additional commitment for Accreditation for up to 15 years. Similar conditions apply with other national funders, such as National Lottery Heritage Fund, and all major funders have published a statement confirming that loss of Accreditation status through unethical disposal, or in the event of closure purely for financial

means, can result in the ejection from the Accreditation Scheme and result in clawback of any grants made on condition of that status being maintained.

RAMM's Aims 2026-29

1. We will deliver ambitious and enjoyable in person and digital experiences for our audiences
2. We will care for the museum's world class collection, and make it better known and better understood
3. We will aim to foster a sense of civic pride, belonging and community cohesion
4. We will strive to ensure the museum is welcoming for everyone, whatever their background, and our audiences, staff and volunteers are representative and reflective of our local population.
5. We will adopt a strategic approach to improving the museum's financial and environmental sustainability

Aim 1 – We will deliver ambitious and enjoyable in person and digital experiences for our audiences

Current situation

RAMM's collections are presented through a suite of permanent galleries. The displays were created in the redevelopment project (2011) and played a significant part in RAMM winning the Art Fund prize. RAMM's collections are also heavily featured in temporary displays and exhibitions which, alongside loans, commissioned artworks, touring exhibitions and an extensive schedule of related talks, workshops and events form an ambitious and diverse public programme. Highlights of recent in-house curated exhibitions include 'In Plain Sight: Transatlantic slavery and Devon' (2022); 'Gatekeepers to Heaven' (2023) including medieval manuscripts loaned from the Bodleian Library; and 'Dartmoor: A Radical Landscape' featuring new commissions and art created on Dartmoor since the 1960s.

RAMM has gained a reputation for the excellence of its visitor experience, with its cased displays punctuated by interactive experiences through object handling, opportunities for play and screen-based content. It has an active focus on accessibility, making the museum more welcoming for people who face barriers.

The museum collections are at the heart of RAMM's interpretation and are used to inspire learning, creativity, enjoyment and wellbeing through its public programme. The museum team develops and co-creates ambitious events and activities alongside people of all ages and backgrounds, inside the museum and around the city.

Since 2015, RAMM has developed an evolving set of themes to inform its extensive programme of exhibitions, events and contemporary art commissions. Themes have been developed in conjunction with staff, RAMM's community and youth panels and volunteers, and for the period 2026-29 will be as follows:

Highlighting untold stories

Stories that have been marginalised in the past. This encompasses the suppression of minority and disenfranchised voices in Britain and in cultures represented by RAMM's international collections and connections. Strategically, it

aligns with ECC's EDI initiatives and ACE's Inclusivity and Relevance Investment Principle.

Deepening a sense of belonging

The grounding of visitors within a geographical or cultural space. Most obviously, RAMM's place in Exeter, Devon and SW England, but extends to worldwide connections represented in RAMM's international collections. Aligns with 'sense of place' concept utilised by ECC and other local place-shapers.

Raising awareness of environmental challenges

Content that addresses the challenge of climate change and habitat loss which impacts our planet and the natural world. The theme aligns with ECC's decarbonisation of the city and ACE's Environment Investment Principle.

Enhancing wellbeing

Provide programming that stimulates visitor interaction, boosts wellbeing and helps relieve feelings of isolation and despair. The theme aligns with one of the central tenets of ACE's 'Let's Create' strategy which places creativity and engagement in creative activities as critical to a healthy society and ECC's corporate priority of People and their wellbeing.

RAMM has a rich formal and informal learning offer for children and young people. This includes a schools' programme offering museum-led and teacher-led visits and online resources; Time Odyssey, a national learning programme for 7- to 11-year-olds from schools with high pupil premium numbers and those in isolated rural areas; Youth Panel; Future Skills programme and work placements. A review of RAMM's learning offer is currently underway.

In 2024-25 across RAMM's websites there were almost 440,000 page views and 144,000 views of video content. RAMM's primary site (rammuseum.org.uk) saw an impressive engagement rate of over 70%. In 2025 RAMM launched a digital guide on Bloomberg Connects which offers additional content, improved accessibility and increased international reach.

Key actions for Aim 1

To achieve this aim, we will:

1. Ensure we have excellent and accessible museum galleries and websites that are well known by and well used by our audiences.
2. Build on our outstanding visitor engagement so everyone feels welcome at RAMM
3. Continue to deliver and evaluate a dynamic programme of temporary exhibitions, displays and contemporary art based on agreed programming themes
4. Further develop our inspiring, inclusive and enjoyable public programme of events
5. Implement the findings of our learning review to improve our formal and informal learning opportunities
6. Deliver the museum's NPO activity plan and Ambition & Quality plan.
7. Work with partners, collaborators and communities to ensure the programme is rich and relevant to our audiences
8. Take a data-driven approach to audience development

Outcomes of Aim 1

- ▶ Museum visitors will have memorable experiences
- ▶ There will be new things to see and do each time people visit
- ▶ Children and young people will be inspired by high quality learning experiences
- ▶ Tourists will be attracted to Exeter to visit RAMM
- ▶ People will feel entertained and have fun
- ▶ Visitors and participants will feel a sense of enjoyment, creativity and improved wellbeing
- ▶ People will feel that they have gained new insight and knowledge and that their curiosity has been sparked
- ▶ People will feel emotionally engaged by the content

Aim 2 – We will care for the museum's world class collection, and make it better known and better understood

Current situation

RAMM's reputation as one of England's best regional museums rests on the breadth and quality of its collections. From its beginnings in the 1860s, the museum received internationally significant ethnographic artefacts and natural science specimens, as well as local antiquities and art. The character of these collections reflects the colonial, military and naval links of Devon and the South West in the Victorian period. RAMM cares for over a million individual objects classified within the categories of Antiquities (Archaeology), Contemporary Art, Costume and Textiles, Decorative Art, Ethnography (World Cultures), Fine Art, Natural Sciences, Numismatics and Photography. Since 1998 the entire World Cultures collection has been Designated due to its international importance and in 2020 part of the Natural Sciences collection was Designed: Montagu's shells are considered some of the most significant of the 19th century. (More information on RAMM's collection can be found in the Collections Development Policy 2026-30.)

Apart from the World Cultures collection and a selection of mixed collections configured to allow public access and engagement, the bulk of the museum's collection is housed off site in rented accommodation and at a purpose-built, ECC-owned collections store known as The Ark, which was built in 2006-07, uses an innovative construction technique that provides maximum thermal mass through solid wall masonry and super insulation; it reduces the energy required to maintain the environmental conditions within the parameters set for collections storage. It provides about 1000 square metres of collections storage plus office space, freezer, quarantine room and rest room. The basis for all collections management tasks is a comprehensive FileMaker Pro database of about 250,000 records. About 20,000 object records are available online with about 1500 RAMM images on Wikimedia Commons.

Key Actions for Aim 2

To achieve this aim, we will:

1. Proactively maintain the museum's high standards of collections management and conservation
2. Follow an agreed policy that articulates what RAMM collects and cares for
3. Provide increased online access to the collection including associated content produced by our communities
4. Provide physical access to the collection facilitated by suitably qualified staff
5. Facilitate object loans to other organisations
6. Provide open access to collection images when possible
7. Strive to produce content that promotes an understanding of complexity and nuance, especially when addressing British and colonial history.

Outcomes of Aim 2

- ▶ Residents and donors trust RAMM to safeguard Exeter's collection
- ▶ The museum acquires objects that are important to the people of Exeter and Devon
- ▶ Beyond Exeter, people know about RAMM and its collection and have access to knowledge on it
- ▶ Local communities feel that their histories are represented in our collection
- ▶ Users build their knowledge of the collection which RAMM holds on their behalf
- ▶ People will feel they have gained new insight and that their curiosity has been sparked

Aim 3 – We will aim to foster a sense of civic pride, belonging and community cohesion

Current situation

The UK is currently facing increased social and political polarisation. Exeter and Devon, like many other parts of the country, have seen tensions over migration and identity surface in protests and counter protests.

We believe museums can play a role in helping to establish a shared concept of belonging. Pride in place is a core strength of social cohesion in Britain and RAMM is well-placed to respond to this challenge. [Recent research by More in Common for the National Trust](#) has identified that history and heritage are key sources of local pride for people across the political spectrum. Four in five Britons want to see local authorities support their local museums and they want these museums to celebrate their local history.

RAMM's 'Belonging' programming theme and its inclusive community engagement programmes give people a sense of pride in their local area. The museum is a space where people can connect with each other and their shared history, through topics with which we all identify (Home Sweet Home, Tastes Like Home/Food: Beyond the Plate). Its learning programme exposes children to other cultures and artistic practice in schools where teachers have expressed concern about the rise of racism and misogyny amongst pupils. In 2023 RAMM established a Community Panel to help shape its practice and it works with communities to make the museum a welcoming and accessible space for all.

Throughout the duration of this plan, RAMM will reach out to people who do not usually visit the museum. We will aim to be welcoming of everyone, providing ways for our audiences to share their comments and reflections. We will encourage new perspectives and stories by building links with our communities and encouraging respectful debate and thought-provoking discussions. We will try to talk to people in terms they understand, not in museum jargon.

Key Actions for Aim 3

To achieve this aim, we will:

1. Maintain and celebrate RAMM as Exeter's cultural flagship, a landmark building and service which attracts 200,000 visits each year
2. Connect people to Exeter and Devon's stories through collections, artists' commissions and exhibitions that are distinctive to Exeter and its surrounding area
3. Co-develop and deliver accessible and inclusive engagement, exhibition and learning programmes to reach priority neighbourhoods.
4. Provide fun, narrative-driven, hands-on experiences highlighting local history in the galleries.
5. Provide a space for ideas to be explored and discussed

Outcomes of Aim 3

- ▶ People feel more connected with their city and with each other
- ▶ People have a shared sense of pride in Exeter, its museum and the programmes it offers
- ▶ People feel a sense of belonging to their local area
- ▶ Users of the museum enjoy improved wellbeing
- ▶ People feel more resilient
- ▶ The business community understand how RAMM helps boost the local economy
- ▶ People can express themselves and feel listened to

Aim 4 – We will strive to ensure the museum is welcoming for everyone and our audiences, staff and volunteers are representative and reflective of our local population

Current situation

Since 2018, RAMM has adopted a data-driven approach to activity planning to ensure it understands its audiences and can make informed choices based on this intelligence. It has collected audience data using the Illuminate and independent surveys, the Culture Counts Impact & Insight Toolkit and data from event booking. This has given the organisation a strong sense of the demographics of its audiences and how they reflect the local population in terms of gender, age, ethnicity, disability (medical and social models) and socioeconomic status (see demographics report, Appendix 3). It also asks visitors if they have experienced any barriers to accessing the museum. This information is used to inform the museum's work to ensure that the programme is accessible and enjoyable for its varied audiences.

This data has identified that RAMM's audiences, staff and volunteers are broadly representative of the local population in terms of protected characteristics. In fact, it is over-representative in some areas (for example, 21% of RAMM's volunteers currently identify as LGBTQ+ and 30% have declared a disability). Amongst audiences, the percentage of people declaring a disability is slightly lower than the local population. There is a slight disparity in socio-economic status with people from lower socio-economic groups slightly under-represented in visitors and the workforce, although the profile of visitors when looking at household income, is broadly similar to the local population.

RAMM is attempting to diversify its workforce through its skills development programmes and inclusive hiring practices. Staff receive various forms of diversity training and RAMM works with its community and youth panels to ensure that local people of all ages have an opportunity to shape the museum's work.

Key Actions for Aim 4

To achieve this aim, we will:

1. Develop, implement and evaluate a plan to enable access for all and deliver the NPO Inclusivity & Relevance plan
2. Provide interesting and rewarding opportunities for volunteering
3. Evolve RAMM's skills development programme to encourage people from more diverse backgrounds to participate
4. Provide opportunities for people to influence and shape RAMM's work via the Community Panel and Youth Panel
5. Embed inclusive recruitment strategies
6. Ensure all our staff and volunteers have access to diversity training

Outcomes of Aim 4

- ▶ Local people feel more involved with RAMM
- ▶ RAMM benefits from the richness of experience of a diverse range of audiences, partners and staff
- ▶ People gain transferable skills which they can use in the wider world
- ▶ Volunteers and participants feel positive and connected and that their contribution is valued
- ▶ Local people can get closer to the museum
- ▶ Job applicants feel that RAMM is committed to removing barriers so that people from lots of different backgrounds can work at RAMM
- ▶ Staff feel empowered and supported

Aim 5 – We will adopt a strategic approach to improving the museum’s long-term financial and environmental sustainability

Current situation

Funding and income generation

The breakdown of RAMM’s sources of funding (using 2024-25 actual expenditure) is as follows:

Exeter City Council – 73%

Arts Council England – 15%

Other grants from trusts and foundations - 5%

Earned income through commercial activities - 7%

RAMM’s major funder is ECC; its investment in the museum in 2024-25 was £3,369,341 (£3,658,967 minus commercial income of £289,626).

Investment by ECC supports the fixed costs associated with occupying the historic, landmark Queen Street building (utilities, maintenance and operations) as well as foundational, operational and functional roles: security, visitor safety and services, building operations, collections care and stewardship, volunteer coordination, events and community engagement, shop, management and administration.

The museum has a long-standing relationship with ACE: the museum has been an NPO since 2018 and prior to that was a Major Partner Museum. Using ECC’s core funding as leverage, successive rounds of ACE investment (most recently 2023-27) have increased the value of local authority expenditure, built museum capacity and profile, and delivered innovation and creative programmes.

Investment provided to RAMM by ACE through its current NPO programme amounts to £618,363 per annum. Broadly, ACE investment has funded staff and resources to build capacity in RAMM to successfully deliver the outcomes of its activity plan, and developmental activities including marketing and fundraising. Performance is closely monitored against agreed targets on a quarterly basis.

In addition to the ACE NPO investment, RAMM regularly draws in external funding from charitable trusts and foundations. This is restricted funding, ring-fenced to

support acquisitions and projects that fall within the parameters of the funders' objectives. It is usual for these to exclude museum core costs. RAMM's two supporting charities, the RAMM Development Trust and the Friends of RAMM, enable RAMM to apply for external grants which a local authority would not be able to apply for and provide match funding for these grant applications. Donations to the museum are drawn down by the two supporting charities to enable this.

Recent grants awarded to RAMM include:

- ▶ MEND Museum Estate and Development Fund (ACE) - £498,000
- ▶ Dynamic Collections (National Lottery Heritage Fund) - £247,708
- ▶ Museum Meet Up (National Lottery Communities Fund) - £13,375
- ▶ Museum Renewal Fund (ACE) - £114,202

Through working with UoE and other higher education institutions, the museum accesses funding for joint projects that further academic research and deliver social impact, a prerequisite for HE funding. RAMM's recent GLAM E-Lab project is an example of this, with a research assistant being employed by ECC but funded via the project. RAMM also received funding from UoE in the early stages of Creative Arc to run a series of pilot projects, now completed.

Other income comes from RAMM's commercial activities: shop, café, venue hire, ticket sales for events, exhibitions, and school activities etc. The team is using funds from the recent Museum Renewal Fund to help improve these income-generating activities.

ECC, like most councils in the country, is experiencing financial pressures and is looking to reduce its investment in the museum. Since there is little discretionary budget (£187K p.a.), any reductions in core funding from ECC will need to be matched by income generation from other sources and a Strategic Roadmap for addressing this is in development.

Building and environmental sustainability

The museum's buildings are designed to provide safe, secure and controlled environments for nationally and internationally important collections and to accommodate the activities of staff, freelancers and volunteers delivering a wide-ranging programme to the public.

The RIBA award-winning, Grade II listed Queen Street building with its contemporary additions is a prominent heritage and architectural asset within the historic and cultural landscape of the city. As shown by the recently built 'UK first' Passivhaus leisure centre, St Sidwell's Point, ECC is ambitious in investing in important community assets within the city. The museum team works closely with

wider council service areas to contribute to placemaking and sustaining the important heritage aspects of the museum set within its wider environs.

RAMM represents a success story in consistent carbon reduction and ongoing developments towards long-term sustainability. This can be evidenced in the annual returns to 'Julie's Bicycle - Creative Climate Tools', a platform used by ACE to track and benchmark environmental impact and carbon emissions. Since 2012 (the first available year after RAMM's redevelopment) consistent annual reductions have equated to an annual total carbon footprint reduction of 52%. In energy consumption alone, usage was reduced by 59% or approximately 392 tonnes CO₂e per annum, a saving equivalent to the average energy consumption of 98 UK households per annum. Reducing the museum's dependence on fossil fuels and the high associated cost, is one of the keys to ensuring the continuity and sustainability of the museum.

Although successful in applying for the government's public sector decarbonisation funding in 2023/24, unforeseen complexities meant ECC was required to return the funding. However, in response to this outcome, a heating and infrastructure decarbonisation survey was commissioned. This detailed report informs the future priorities and investment potential for RAMM.

In the past two years, the museum has sourced and invested substantial funds to replace historic roof structures at RAMM; the project included raising roofing levels to incorporate extensive insulation and to anchor new solar arrays to increase photovoltaic generation.

As important as our plans for built infrastructure and heat decarbonisation are, equal emphasis is placed on operational sustainability and investment into staff and public awareness of climate change. 60% of all museum staff are carbon literate trained. In 2024 RAMM launched its 'Environmental Forum for Action' bringing together key staff to support policy development, initiatives and projects helping further sustainability and awareness.

Key actions for Aim 5

To achieve this aim, we will:

1. Develop, implement and monitor a 5-year Strategic Roadmap for RAMM covering:
 - Fundraising
 - Amalgamation of Exeter's cultural services to achieve efficiencies
 - Commercial income generation strategies
 - Museums & Galleries Exhibition Tax Relief (MGETR)
 - A plan for renewing and forging partnerships with key stakeholders
2. Invest in marketing and communications to attract visitors to the museum
3. Continue to develop, deliver and evaluate a carbon reduction plan for the museum, delivering the NPO Environmental Responsibility plan.
4. To work with colleagues at ECC to ensure RAMM and its satellite sites are maintained to a level that reflects a high-quality visitor experience and meets the security and conservation needs of the collection.

Outcomes of Aim 5

- ▶ People will feel attracted to come to the museum
- ▶ Future generations will have access to a world-class museum
- ▶ People will experience more ambitious projects made possible by new partnerships
- ▶ Donors understand that RAMM is a cause worthy of their support
- ▶ Staff understand the need to generate more income through fundraising and commercial activities and know how they can contribute
- ▶ People will feel reassured that the museum is playing its part in addressing the climate emergency

Activity plans and policies

For detailed activity plans which support this forward plan, see:

2025-26 NPO plan: Activity Plan and Investment Principles plan

2026-29 Audience Development Plan

Access Statement

2025-28 Access Plan

Collections Development Policy 2026-30

Collections Information and Access Policy

Documentation Procedural Manual

Collections Care and Conservation Policy and Plan

Emergency Plan

Finances

2025-26 budget summary:

Budget April 2025-March 2026	Total
INCOME	
Local Authority income	£ 2,785,740
Arts Council - NPO	£ 618,363
Direct activity income (Day Admissions)	£ 10,800
Heading only: OTHER EARNED INCOME	£ -
<i>Museum Shop Sales</i>	£ 279,930
<i>Rent Income</i>	£ 23,280
<i>Other Earned Income</i>	£ 52,770
<i>Solar Panel Electricity Income</i>	£ 7,010
TOTAL INCOME: £ 3,777,893	

EXPENDITURE	
<u>Staff Costs</u>	
National Insurance	£ 64,945
Pension	£ 97,634
Salaries	£ 534,909
Temp Staff	£ 20,100

Direct Activity Costs

Artistic and Cultural Spend	£	36,690
Programme Costs: Exhibitions	£	47,590
Programme Costs: Events	£	12,600
Programme Costs: Freelancers:	£	6,000
Ed & Out: Staffing Costs	£	261,530
Ed & Out: Volunteer/Student	£	4,300
Ed & Out: Other Education and Outreach Costs	£	21,900
Staffing: Other Direct Activity	£	979,782
Other Costs: Other Direct Activity	£	63,320

Overheads

Advertising & Promotion	£	24,000
Bank fees & charges	£	3,250
Consultant fees & subscriptions	£	10,010
Depreciation	£	535,390
Earned Income Costs	£	136,580
Insurance	£	109,910
Equipment purchase	£	9,030
Other costs (not elsewhere specified)	£	1,450
Other office expenses	£	19,640
Rates	£	63,610
Travel	£	12,870
Utilities	£	545,280

Other Overheads

<i>Access costs</i>	£	151,620
<i>Training</i>	£	3,953

TOTAL EXPENDITURE £ 3,777,893

Income against Expenditure: £ -

2026-27 budget summary

The 2026-27 budget has not been ratified by Council. However, based on our current assumptions, we believe that the budget for next year will remain roughly the same, with a 3% increase in staff costs. Utilities will be reduced to reflect more realistic energy prices (Electricity by 30% and Gas by 24%). All other budget lines are expected to remain the roughly the same (NPO activity budgets will be reduced to balance the increase in salaries).

Budget April 2026-March 2027**Total****INCOME**

Local Authority income	£	2,671,038
Arts Council - NPO	£	618,363
Direct activity income (Day Admissions)	£	10,800
Heading only: OTHER EARNED INCOME	£	-
<i>Museum Shop Sales</i>	£	279,930
<i>Rent Income</i>	£	-
<i>Other Earned Income</i>	£	99,280
<i>Solar Panel Electricity Income</i>	£	7,010

TOTAL INCOME: £ 3,686,421

EXPENDITURE**Staff Costs**

<i>National Insurance</i>	£	66,035
<i>Pension</i>	£	100,817
<i>Salaries</i>	£	546,434
<i>Temp Staff</i>	£	44,630

Direct Activity Costs

Artistic and Cultural Spend	£	37,208
Programme Costs: Exhibitions	£	46,780
Programme Costs: Events	£	10,899
Programme Costs: Freelancers:	£	5,190
<i>Ed & Out: Staffing Costs</i>	£	272,341
Ed & Out: Volunteer/Student	£	4,300
Ed & Out: Other Education and Outreach Costs	£	18,944
<i>Staffing: Other Direct Activity</i>	£	1,010,733
Other Costs: Other Direct Activity	£	58,595

Overheads

Advertising & Promotion	£	21,696
Bank fees & charges	£	3,250
Consultant fees & subscriptions	£	14,760
Depreciation	£	535,390
Earned Income Costs	£	136,580
Insurance	£	109,910

Equipment purchase	£	9,030
Other costs (not elsewhere specified)	£	1,450
Other office expenses	£	13,610
Rates	£	63,610
Travel	£	12,870
Utilities	£	386,279
Other Overheads		
<i>Access costs</i>	£	151,620
<i>Training</i>	£	3,460
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	£	3,686,421
Income against Expenditure:	£	-

Staffing

RAMM currently has 51 members of staff, which equates to 42 full time equivalent positions.

A full organisational chart can be found in Appendix 4. In summary (as of October 2025), there are three teams: Collections, Audience Development and Operations. A reorganisation of the culture management team is currently underway, with the outcome to be finalised during the early part of 2026. This transformation is in response to rising financial pressures, evolving community needs, and a shifting cultural landscape, and commits to ensuring that Exeter's cultural services remain vibrant, inclusive and accessible. Through modernising the structure of cultural services and aligning resources more effectively ECC is not only responding to financial pressures but embracing an opportunity to reimagine how culture can enrich the lives of our residents and visitors.

RAMM's teams are highly-skilled and motivated and benefit from training provided through ACE funding. Staff turnover is extremely low in its collections and audience development teams. In the visitor services team, turnover is 18% (11% when retail and cleaning are taken into account), which is considerably lower than the industry average of 25% turnover for arts, entertainment and recreation.

RAMM's workforce is largely representative of its local population in terms of protected characteristics, but like most other museums in the UK, it is not representative when it comes to socioeconomic status, with fewer people from working-class backgrounds in museum roles.

Key actions for staffing

1. Implement the reorganisation of the museum's management team
2. Following the management team reorganisation a further reorganisation of the wider museum team will be required

Monitoring

The museum has robust processes in place to monitor performance against its aims and objectives.

- ▶ Performance against the KPIs of the ACE NPO plan (Activity Plan and Investment Principles plan) is reported at quarterly Oversight Panel meetings
- ▶ Quarterly finance meetings with the ECC finance officer ensure finances are on track
- ▶ RAMM's risk register is reviewed and updated quarterly and presented to the Oversight Panel – see Appendix 5 for most recent version
- ▶ Externally funded projects have targets which are reported to the funders
- ▶ Exhibitions, events, community engagement projects are evaluated using the Impact and Insight Toolkit and other methods
- ▶ Audience, staff, freelancer/artist and volunteer data is monitored through regular surveys.

Appendices

1. Environmental analysis (PESTLE and SWOT)
2. Economic value report
3. Audience demographics report
4. Current organisation chart
5. Risk register

Written by: Helen Hartstein (Audience Development Manager), Julien Parsons (Collections and Content Manager), ECC

Approved by: Exeter City Council

Date: 13 January 2026

Review date: September 2028, or sooner if the stated assumptions change.

