

Councillors' Information Bulletin: 19 January 2026

Title of Update: RAMM Highlights Report 2025-26 (Q3)

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1. What is the update about?

This is the quarterly highlights report for the Royal Albert Memorial Museum & Art Gallery, showing museum activity for the period October to December 2025.

2. Background

The quarterly highlights report, along with other reports showing activity against targets, is taken to RAMM's Oversight Panel and reported to Arts Council England as part of its National Portfolio Organisation funding agreement. The oversight panel consists of six councillors and two external representatives.

3. Current position

Organisational Update

- Accreditation: RAMM's Forward Plan for 2026-2029 and Collections Development Policy were agreed by Executive (16 December) and are due to be approved by Council on 13 January 2026.
- The implementation stage of the Culture Redesign is due to be completed in Q4.
- RAMM has received confirmation of its 2026-27 NPO funding. The funding award for the period 1 April 2026 to 31 March 2027 will be £659,735 which includes a 5% inflationary uplift.

Activity plan

Visitor Experience (Activity 1)

- The RAMM Cafe recruited an in-house Cafe Manager in December. This brings the overall command of the operation into RAMM and relieves pressure on Leisure colleagues. They have already made a positive impact in terms of visitor experience/interaction with the cafe.
- Work has progressed on the Visitor Welcome Point project with Stratum Marquetry – many revisions and iterations have been made during this quarter, with a close-to-final design being moved towards in late December.

Exhibitions and Events (Activity 2)

- Throughout Q3, RAMM's major exhibition was 'Wild' - a Manchester Museum partnership exhibition exploring humanity's relationship with the natural world and how people across the globe are creating, rebuilding and repairing connections with nature. This closed on 4 January 2026.
- The exhibition 'A Feast for the Eyes' continues in Gallery 20 with visitors exploring a selection of over 30 prints, paintings, photographs and sketches showing how food has transformed the countryside, influenced the development of towns and played a central role in genres such as still life and botanical art. Showing until 22 March 2026.
- 'Recording nature' (Viewpoint) and 'Staplers' (What do you Collect? case) continued throughout Q3. Showing until 25 January 2026.
- We welcomed author and TV personality Frances Tophill to RAMM to talk about rewilding in your garden. This was a sell-out event.
- October half term saw children taking part in immersive workshops where they experienced the drama, discipline, and daily life of Ancient Greeks, Romans and Egyptians.
- RAMM Lates at the end of November welcomed 300 adults to an evening of Wild-themed entertainment including a Bird Rave, talks on rewilding and animal conservation, a climate café and more.
- Families were invited to join in with a Bird Rave of their own the next day – with time spent designing their own bird headdresses, spotting birds around the museum and a wild dance within the gallery along to 90s rave music – it was a fun day for all who came along.
- At our Night of Winter Wonders event, families wandered through twinkling galleries after dark, torch in hand, as the museum transformed into a glowing treasure trove of surprises. Including the chance to meet Father Christmas and listen to winter tales from around the world.

- Deeper engagement with the Second World War in Devon has been achieved through the inclusion of content and material from RAF Exeter in our gallery hands-on interpretation.

Digital (Activity 3)

- Work commenced on the two digital projects funded by the Museum Renewal Fund. The first is an integration of Spektrix with Lightspeed, the EPOS system used by the shop. This will allow us to identify loyal, high-value shop customers and fill a significant gap of customer data in the CRM. The second is updates to the Spektrix purchase path on the main website. It will replace the iframes with an integrated interface for a much more user-friendly experience. Both projects are on schedule to be completed by the end of January 2026.
- RAMM commissioned Shelley Boden, a Digital Accessibility Consultant, to perform user access testing of RAMM's collections sites for the first time (rammcollections.org.uk and swcollectionsexplorer.org.uk). Four access users, including screen reader users and neurodivergent users, tested the sites over four two-hour sessions.
- Google Pay was configured for the shop site which simplifies the checkout process for customers and is proven to increase conversion rate.
- RAMM arranged an Introduction to Copilot and AI session delivered by Strata on 11 November. There was a high level of attendance.
- Online captions were updated to match the gallery labels.
- RAMM created a test account on All In, ACE's accessibility platform which is currently in the pilot phase.

Contemporary Art (Activity 4)

- Throughout Q3, 'Wild' featured new commissioned pieces by Sarah Gillespie who worked closely with a tiger moth specimen in RAMM's collection and created large-scale drawings that highlight its recent, rapid population decline. Until 4 January 2026.
- Carolyn Lefley's video Ancient Sea is on display until 25 January 2026. It explores the geology of Ham Hill in Somerset, combining footage filmed by Lefley in the water with animated fossils and drone imagery of Ham Hill.
- On 22 October, RAMM's Contemporary Art Curator and Programmer, Lara Goodband, spoke at the Creative Museums Summit 2025 on 'Commissioning Creativity: Contemporary artists in museums.'
- Acclaimed British artist Charmaine Watkiss has completed her commission for RAMM. 'From the ones who came before...' comprises a watercolour drawing and mask that will be displayed in the World Cultures gallery from 10 February.
- In Q3, curation and development work continued on 'Living Labyrinths: Art & Fungi' which will open in autumn 2026 featuring two new works commissioned by RAMM.

Children and Young people (Activity 5)

- The initial stage of the RAMM Learning Review research project has been completed. Extensive desk-based research has been carried out. Conversations have taken place with staff, volunteers, teachers and other museum professionals. RAMM's two engagement officers have visited other museums and the findings presented at a meeting attended by members of the audience development and collections teams. Some clear themes have emerged, and these will be incorporated into a new learning strategy.
- Following the successful trial of Time Odyssey for Families during August 2025, we have agreed with Art Explora a programme of delivery during the summer and easter holidays up until Easter 2028. The programme aims to provide a new way for families to explore the museum, encourage new and repeat visits as well as provide a dynamic interactive museum experience.
- Two artists have been commissioned to work with young people from the 100 Club Youth Centre in Exeter and the Deaf Academy in Exmouth. The groups visited the museum at the beginning of November for inspiration on the theme of colour and are currently taking part in a series of creative workshops with the artists in the lead up to a cafe display in the spring.
- A pilot Drawing Club for home educated children aged 8 – 16 focusing on themes linking to RAMM's natural history collection proved a huge success. The five sessions were particularly welcomed by young people with SEN due to their quiet and reflective atmosphere. More are planned for 2026.
- A new pilot interactive world music session was launched in October with great feedback. These will now form part of RAMM's regular home education offer.
- Students for Exeter College's Video and Film A level course created video wall projections inspired by their visit to the Wild exhibition. The showreel was displayed for two weeks in the lead up to Christmas.
- 46 Exeter College Dance students choreographed and performed at the November Lates event after visiting and being inspired by the Wild exhibition.

Individual Creativity (Activity 6)

- Dementia-friendly outreach object-handling reached 22 care home residents in this period. In the museum, a delightful, moving dementia-friendly winter event in partnership with the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra invited a primary school choir to perform to older visitors. Musicians evoked a cosy, fireside atmosphere and led choir and audience in singing together.
- Lottery funding for a monthly wellbeing programme for over-50s culminated with an Apple Day-themed talk about the social history of apples in Devon, accompanied by apple varieties, handling objects and apple cake. The Museum Meet-Up programme continued to reach 8-30 people each month with a behind-the-scenes view of newly acquired Saxon coin, and a hosted social session using self-led trails.

- RAMM collaborated with social prescribers at a GP surgery to invite children and young people struggling with mental health and school attendance to an artist-led game-making workshop in a community cafe.
- RAMM provided funded Wild exhibition tickets through partners to reach newly arrived children seeking asylum, volunteer ESOL teachers, groups supporting people with complex disabilities and mental health challenges, and adult learners.
- The engagement officer attended a men's wellbeing event at Exeter City Football Club to support its research and aims to reach more men with hands-on craft activities.

Skills Development (Activity 7)

- We recruited the 2026 Future Skills programme and Youth Panel Members. We received over 45 applicants for Future Skills.
- Through the supported work placement scheme, we provided five places for young people with disabilities to learn about the key functions of the museum, including Visitor Services, Retail, Engagement, Conservation and Collections.
- The Skills Development web content was enhanced for usability and visual appeal by incorporating stronger imagery, reducing text-heavy content, and optimising the overall user experience making it more appealing and accessible to potential users.

Dynamic Collections (Activity 8)

- A major aspect of NLHF funded Dynamic Collections project was delivered in October, when the [South West Collections Explorer \(SWCE\)](#) website went live. It includes collections from smaller museums and collections from across South West England.
- Artist Aga Wanowicz ran textiles workshops with participants from Mixed Families Together community group.
- Two workshops were delivered with RAMM's Future Skills groups, linked to the Wild exhibition and encouraging reflection and discussion regarding local species and biodiversity. The first of these was in collaboration with the Woodland Trust; the group created blog posts which will be available on RAMM website. The second was in collaboration with Aga Wanowicz resulting in the creation of 'wild corner' collaged artworks.
- Blog posts from project interns, cases studies and the project page were updated/uploaded to RAMM website to share the project more widely.
- In discussion with Strata, ECC's IT service, RAMM will be using OpenText software to create a new Digital Asset Management System as part of the Dynamic Collections project.

Community engagement and university collaboration (Activity 9)

- Term 1 of the University of Exeter Aspiring Teachers programme at RAMM has been successfully completed with all seven students reporting improvements in their skills and knowledge with delivering KS2 museum learning to local primary schools.
- We worked with two artists with protected characteristics - neurodiversity and/or sexuality in the case of Scotty Gillespie and Catriona Smith - in creating materials and informing the direction of Make project of hands-on creativity inspired by traditional crafts.
- We held the first meeting of the new community panel in November. They considered content and focuses of a potential upcoming exhibition.
- RAMM co-hosted the festival of Ganesh Chaturthi with Exeter Hindu Cultural Association, attended by 100 members of South Asian diaspora heritage. Conservation staff oversaw the movement of a 19th century alabaster figure of Ganesh and offerings to him. Celebrations included a decorated copy of RAMM's Ganesh made from biodegradable clay by a community member, children dancing and storytelling, and singing by community members – many of whom are NHS professionals or university students. Audience ranged from one month old to 89 years.
- RAMM's museum cafe voucher scheme for wellbeing partners reached 41 visitors in this quarter, a flexible way to support social prescribers and welcome people with wellbeing needs because of caring roles, seeking asylum or coping with low mood/anxiety and/or disability.
- A short film has been created to showcase the diverse and impactful work that the RAMM engagement team do with our local communities. The film will be shown permanently on RAMM's Communities webpage and shared on social media channels.

Investment principles plan

Ambition & Quality

- RAMM's revised Programming Strands have been agreed and included as part of the museum's Forward Plan 2026-29.
- Ambition and quality have been placed at the heart of RAMM's new Forward Plan. Aim 1 is 'We will deliver ambitious and enjoyable in person and digital experiences for our audiences'.
- The museum held its regular Programming Team meeting in November to consider new proposals for exhibitions. The agreed 2026-27 schedule now includes: 'Grayson Perry: Aspects of myself' (Jan to May) 'Colour' (May to Sept) and 'Living Labyrinths: Art & Fungi' (Oct to Jan 2027).
- A pilot engagement evaluation format has been drafted and is currently in the design phase. This new evaluation format will be compatible with various audiences

across our engagement programme and will provide a more consistent approach to recording feedback.

Inclusivity & Relevance

- The museum has been awarded the National Autistic Society's Autism Friendly Award, which supports businesses to be more inclusive for autistic people through providing accessible customer services, information and environments.
- The museum hosted two Relaxed Opening sessions designed to provide an accessible and enjoyable visit for anyone with anxiety, sensory differences or other needs. Both had reasonable responses (free spaces were limited to 30; each had 8-15 visitors) and feedback was extremely positive.
- RAMM has part-funded one of RAMM's Retail Assistants to attend a 15-week intensive course in British Sign Language Levels 1 and 2. This is part of the UK Government Skills Bootcamps programme.

Environmental Responsibility

- Our Mechanical & Electrical consultant's work continues, having very nearly reached a critical milestone by the end of the quarter. This ensures long-term resilience in our environmental controls and cost-saving efficiencies. The cumulative total of financial savings made through the M&E work, as of end December 2025, are c.£199,866 (approx. £20,000 delivered this quarter), with further savings/energy reductions to come.
- Similarly, our M&E consultant has reported in this quarter that we are extremely close to national electrical energy usage benchmarks as reported by Chartered Institute of Buildings Services Engineers (Cibse). The benchmark requires museums to have a carbon footprint of no more than 41.22kgCO₂e/m² (specifically for electrical energy) in 2025; we are (as of Q3 2025) reporting usage of 41.93kgCO₂e/m². For further context, this is down from 52kgCO₂e/m² in the previous reporting year, and 81kgCO₂e/m² in 2023.
- RAMM continues to use its platform as a public fronted environmentally responsible organisation – and has continued to engage its visitors directly with this concept – as the 'Wild' exhibition has run into this quarter. There has been a small but notable upturn in visits in this quarter, particularly towards the end of the exhibition's run.
- On 11 December Exeter City Council launched its Net Zero Board, a collection of senior leaders to oversee and support the delivery of our carbon reduction plan plans. Leadership from RAMM is represented on this board. The carbon reduction plans are developed and monitored in partnership with specialist resource and support from the University of Exeter. Work is commencing to align development needs and targets with service business plans.
- Ongoing issues with the MEND funded new photovoltaic array infrastructure have finally been resolved, allowing for final reporting to take place and moving the project to completion.

Dynamism

- The Museum Renewal Fund projects are all nearing completion (Museums & Galleries Exhibition Tax Relief project (complete); Christmas marketing campaign (complete); Online shop (complete); integration of Spektrix with Lightspeed (on schedule) Spektrix purchase path on the main website (on schedule)). The only planned project which is not due to be complete by the end of January is the café project which has been delayed due to challenges in appointing the café consultant and lack of capacity within the café team to operate the extended opening hours pilot. RAMM has communicated this delay to ACE.
- The marketing campaign to promote the RAMM shop at Christmas resulted in the best-performing December on record in the RAMM shop, with a 20% increase in shop takings and seven-fold increase in online sales. The campaign included late-night openings on Thursdays in December, to align with the city-wide Christmas shopping.
- In November RAMM hosted a partnership event with Bonhams. The event celebrated the rehang of the fine art exhibition 'A Feast for the Eyes'. 50 guests were invited to join Assistant Curator Sally Ayres and Head of Conservation Sarah Klopff to get up close to some of the newly displayed artworks. Guests included current supporters and new faces found through RAMM's prospect research project.
- RAMM hosted a visit from the Bishop and Dean of Exeter in October. It was agreed to keep in touch for future collaboration.
- RAMM has been working collaboratively with fellow Devon NPO, MAKE SouthWest. RAMM shared knowledge about its volunteering programme and how it collects, analyses data and uses the insight to drive future activity.

4. Future position

n/a

5. Are there any other options?

n/a

6. Conclusion

RAMM continues to deliver a varied, inclusive and ambitious programme of activities to its audiences in the city and further afield. It is performing well against its targets and KPIs