

EXETER CITY COUNCIL

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - COMMUNITY 6 NOVEMBER 2012

EXECUTIVE 20 NOVEMBER 2012

PROPOSAL TO DE-ACCESSION ITEMS FROM RAMM'S COLLECTION

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report sets out proposals to de-accession selected items from RAMM's permanent collection. As RAMM's governing body, Exeter City Council must formally approve de-accessions. This report summarises the context, reasons and outcomes sought in de-accessioning these items.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Museum collections are held in trust for the community. Once an object is accessioned (formally accepted) into a museum collection, a museum has legal and ethical responsibilities in relation to the object. De-accessioning is the process by which museums permanently remove items from their collections. De-accessioned items may or may not be physically disposed of. Sometimes they are transferred to other institutions or to a different use.
- 2.2 Disposals and de-accessions are only normally undertaken under exceptional circumstances and are governed by the Museums Association's Code of Ethics. In 2007 the Museums Association changed its Code of Ethics to permit responsible, curatorially-motivated de-accessions as part of a museum's long-term collections policy, in order to maximise the public benefit derived from museum collections generally.
- 2.3. A Museum's approach to collecting and disposing of items from its collections is determined by its Acquisitions and Disposals Policy. In May 2012 Scrutiny Committee granted an extension of RAMM's Acquisitions and Disposal Policy 2005-2010 until December 2013, while a wholesale, strategic review of the collections is carried out. This review is progressing well and will provide an in depth assessment of the collections' strengths, weaknesses, gaps and potential.
- 2.4 An early outcome of the Collections Review has been the identification of certain material which falls outside the scope of the Acquisitions and Disposals Policy. In addition, there is little public benefit in these items remaining a legal part of RAMM's collections.
- 2.5 In recommending these items for de-accession, RAMM has identified a number of desired outcomes. These include improved public access to the items and improved context for them by relocating some objects to more relevant collections. In other instances the long-term storage, management and conservation needs of the items has also been balanced against the public benefit of retention. De-accessioning selected items from the collection is intended to free up resources for improved curation and usage of the majority of RAMM's collection.
- 2.6 In making these recommendations, RAMM has considered any risk to the public reputation of museums and adjudged the risk to be minimal.
- 2.7 RAMM has confirmed its legal ownership of the items proposed for de-accession.

3 CURRENT POSITION

3.1 230 items are recommended for disposal. These have been determined collectively by the curatorial team in accordance with the Museums Association's Code of Ethics. The 230 items are listed in Appendix I. In summary, they comprise:

- 159 birds eggs of unknown species. These unidentified specimens lack provenance and are damaged beyond the Museum's reasonable ability to repair. It is proposed that these are transferred to RAMM's handling collection or disposed of.
- Four commonly available antiquarian books which are outside the scope of RAMM's Acquisitions and Disposals Policy and were accessioned in error by previous staff members. It is proposed that these are transferred to RAMM's curatorial reference library.
- 44 reference books which are outside the scope of RAMM's Acquisitions and Disposals Policy and were accessioned in error by previous staff members. It is proposed that these are transferred to RAMM's curatorial reference library.
- 23 items relating to Iceland and the Victorian artist and writer William Morris. These items are not rare and are outside the scope of RAMM's Acquisitions and Disposals Policy. They are unlikely to be used by RAMM. It is proposed that these items are transferred to the William Morris Gallery, London.

3.2 It is anticipated that further de-accessions and disposals will be proposed as the Collections Review progresses.

3.3 For the future, the process of consideration and approval of de-accession could be streamlined by delegating it to the Assistant Director Economy in consultation with the Portfolio Holder responsible for the Museum unless the item concerned is of a significant nature or monetary value.

4 PROPOSAL

4.1 It is proposed to de-accession 230 items from RAMM's collection, these items being those listed in Appendix I.

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The purpose of the current collections review, and the new Collections Development Policy which will result, is to re-examine the nature, extent and sustainability of our collecting activity. This exercise along with RAMM's approach to disposals and de-accessions is being undertaken with a very specific awareness of the long-term responsibilities and resource implications involved in housing, management, care and conservation of material now and in the future.

6 RECOMMENDED

- 1) That Committee Members approve the de-accessioning of the items listed.
- 2) That Executive be requested to approve the proposal that future recommendations and approval of items for de-accession be delegated to the Assistant Director Economy in consultation with the Portfolio Holder responsible for the Museum.

RICHARD BALL - ASSISTANT DIRECTOR ECONOMY

S:PA/LP/Cttee/1112SCC2
29.10.12

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1972 (as amended)

Background papers used in compiling this report:- None