



**NORTHAMPTON**  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

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# **Northampton Museums & Art Gallery Care of Collections and Conservation Policy**

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## Equality Impact Assessment

The Council strives to ensure equality of opportunity for all both as a major employer and as a service provider.

The Access Policy has been equality impact assessed to ensure fairness and consistency for all.

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Version 2		
Version 3		
Version 4		

# Northampton Museums and Art Gallery Care of Collections and Conservation Policy

## 1. Introduction

Caring for our collections appropriately is a fundamental duty of NMAG and is central to the Museums core purpose. Linked to our mission to become an audience focussed museum, collections care and associated knowledge is essential to enable engagement for our audiences. Best practise in collections care is essential to achieve the ambition of an international centre of excellence for shoe heritage as detailed in our vision.

**Vision:** To be a focus for Northampton's arts, heritage and culture and the international centre of excellence for shoe heritage, valued and enjoyed by all.

**Mission:** Using our collections, knowledge and expertise, we engage people with Northampton's rich history, culture, art and our world class shoe collection.

## 2. Scope

This policy covers all collections including accessioned and non-accessioned objects (including handling collections) and collections on loan. The standard of care may vary according to significance; irreplaceability; fragility, use, ethics and our audience access requirements. For loans owner requirements will define care. This policy covers collections in all buildings managed by NMAG and NMAG collections on loan to other organisations.

Collections include physical objects, archival material, reference material (including books) and digital material. Digital collections require a virtual and physical approach to ensure storage in particular is appropriate. The collections include the shoe collection which has Designated status from Arts Council England. Given the significance of this collection the scope includes the opportunity to develop research into best practise in shoe collections care.

## 3. Purpose

This policy defines and provides a framework for how we care for our collections with the aim of long term preservation through preventative and remedial means to ensure that the collections are accessible to staff/volunteers and our audiences. It does so by recognising barriers to care including financial resource, controlling the environment, and capacity and the need to achieve best value and prioritise across the physical and digital Museum. This policy defines the principles and minimum standard which apply to the care and conservation of objects underpinned by effective collections management procedures.

## 4. Definition of Terms

- **Preventative conservation**  
Covers the measures necessary to slow down or minimise deterioration of museum objects, and specimens and structures. This includes physical and

digital objects. This often involves passive conservation.

- **Remedial conservation**

Involves a treatment to an object to bring it to a more acceptable condition, to stabilise it or enhance some aspects of its cultural or scientific value. This also includes digital and conservation of a corrupt digital object.

## **5. Responsibility**

NMAG acknowledges that collections care and conservation crosses all service areas and everyone has responsibility to ensure good practise in collections care. All members of permanent, temporary and freelance staff, contractors and volunteers working for NMAG must be aware of and adhere to this policy. The development of staff/volunteer knowledge and skills is the responsibility of management.

NMAG may commission remedial conservation. The role of a conservator involves the examination, conservation and preservation of cultural heritage using methods that are proven in keeping objects in as close to an original condition as possible, for as long as possible. This will involve surveying and assessment with minimal intervention and use of appropriate reversible materials and methods reducing possible problems for future treatments, investigation and use. For digital this may also include copying existing digital files. Digital methods may also include collecting data on an object which may be stored to help future preservation or creation of a replica. There will be full documentation of all work undertaken and comprehensive consultation with NMAG throughout treatment.

## **6. Guiding Principles**

Caring for collections is a fundamental duty of all museums. NMAG will undertake the best possible care within the resources available.

Collections care is focussed on enabling and improving access to the collections.

NMAG will document all activities covered by the policy to the standards outlined in Spectrum. Spectrum is the UK collections management standard developed by the Collections Trust.

Conservation priorities are established based on the following criteria:

- An emergency situation
- Mitigating/minimizing risk
- Audience interests and public programming requirement
- Acquisition and loan requirement
- Required for a curatorial project, significant treatment or research

## **7. Preventative Conservation**

This section details NMAG's approach to preventative conservation.

### **7.1 Disaster Prevention and Response**

NMAG will maintain an emergency plan and procedure and mitigate risk through risk management.

## **7.2 Security**

Security is required at all levels for objects on display, in storage and in activity and collection holding areas and in digital folders and files. The provision of general site security and the security role of attendant staff is managed by NMAG. The provision of digital security and access is managed by ICT at NBC.

## **7.3 Environmental Monitoring and Control**

NMAG aims to provide environmental conditions in line with current recognized Accreditation standards in exhibition, secure holding and storage areas. All action will take into account the climate change emergency declared by NBC and the need to take a sustainable passive approach. To ensure that a co-ordinated approach to improvements is made all proposed alterations to any environmental service provision (heating, cooling, lighting, humidity, filtration) within museum buildings is discussed during the planning and development stage. Respect for the historical integrity of the buildings will be recognised when taking action. Digital original files will be maintained in a separate digital environment with restricted access.

Environmental monitoring of temperature, humidity and lux will be routinely carried out in all areas in which collections are housed including display and in storage. All records will be kept and this data will be used to achieve the conditions that promote the longevity of collections and in improvement activity. As a minimum, the normal climatic characteristics of buildings will be understood through recording over suitable periods of time. Original digital folders will be monitored to ensure corruption is minimal.

Light levels (Lux and UV Values) will also be routinely monitored and recorded in all collections areas, including stores and exhibition spaces, and will be adjusted as required. Lux hours will be recorded and used to manage light exposure. Loan conditions and monitoring/evidence gathering will be put in place to ensure management of external loans.

## **7.4 Handling and Use of Collections**

Even in acceptable environmental conditions the physical handling of objects can cause damage and issues of deterioration. Poor handling is one of the main causes for the need of remedial conservation. All staff and volunteers will be trained in handling practises and procedures. Trained staff and volunteers will manage object handling by audiences including risk assessing to minimise and avoid damage (to both objects and people). All staff will be trained in managing digital archival storage. Objects on display will be rotated where resources are available.

## **7.5 Transporting Collections**

When moving collections the risk of damage to objects is enhanced. Alongside poor handling, moving is one of the main causes for the need of remedial conservation. All staff and volunteers will be trained in moving practises and procedures which will take into consideration the size weight and type of packed object. This will include risk assessing to minimise and avoid damage (to both objects and people), assessing route and defining internal or external courier, insurance and where applicable lender requirements. All routes will be assessed in advance of moving.

## **7.6 Pest Management**

Biological agents of decay including insects, rodents, mould and fungi can seriously damage collections and affect our service provision. Besides damage, attacks have serious cost implications and reduce access to collections. For environmental and hazard (COSHH) reasons prevention through risk reduction is the most economic and sustainable option. Procedures for site monitoring will be re-introduced and a strategy for pest management developed.

Pests thrive in conditions where building maintenance and housekeeping are poor. All areas in museums, particularly those housing collections, require regular and thorough cleaning following the agreed guidelines. NMAG will keep the buildings and the contents clean and well maintained for the benefit of the collections as well as for our visitors and staff.

### **7.7 Condition Checking and Collections Conditions Overview**

The preservation of NMAG's cultural assets will be optimised by assessment and reduction of risks, with priorities decided in the light of their needs and significance. The Museum will check and record the condition of all items entering the collections in order to establish a planned programme of conservation work. If there is concern of infestation that could be spread within the collection the suspect item/s will be quarantined and treated. Individual and collection-wide condition surveys in line with best practise as defined by Benchmarks in Collections Care for Museums, Libraries and Archives Self-Assessment Checklist' and Reviewing Significance 3.0 will be carried out as necessary to prioritise and establish a planned programme of conservation work. Digital collections will be audited and condition checked as per The National Archive standards.

### **7.8 Housekeeping**

On the spot' issues regarding maintenance and cleaning are dealt with by staff. The Integrated Pest Management plan will be implemented in areas that are known to be at risk. Stores and public areas are regularly inspected and cleaned and objects on display are regularly checked. Collection and the facilities functions meet regularly to ensure that work undertaken is balanced against available budgets and time frames.

### **7.9 Displays and Exhibitions**

When new displays and exhibitions are planned, conservation implications will be considered at an early stage. Preventative conservation will be considered in all new exhibitions following guidance principles. Objects may have remedial conservation before they are put on display. All works once acquired by the Museum are photographed and given a full condition report before going on display or into store.

### **7.10 Building Maintenance**

Poor buildings maintenance causes poor display and storage environments. NMAG will seek to ensure that all collections are housed in buildings that meet agreed minimum standards of construction and condition.

Buildings managed by NBC and NMAG will work closely with colleagues in the Corporate Asset Management team, architects and builders to ensure that all building developments, repair programmes and changes of use are sustainable, cost-effective and benefit the collections. This includes involvement in planning of projects that may impact upon the collections.

Consideration should be undertaken in relation to repair activity to ensure external contractors work in a manner compliant with museum best practice.

NMAG recognises that the maintenance of a building's fabric and services is fundamental to the preservation of collections and will seek adequate funding to enable this. When planning new stores and buildings conservation guidance will be considered.

### **7.11 Acquisitions and Loans**

All proposed acquisitions will be assessed and if there are cost implications of conservation and long-term care then this may influence collecting decisions. In certain circumstances objects will not be accepted into the collection due to condition.

We will ensure that lenders' conservation requirements can be met before agreeing to borrow objects. An assessment of risk will be made before NMAG agrees to lend objects.

All objects that are either borrowed or sent out on loan are condition checked on exit and entry.

Loans out are condition checked every 3 years and loans into the Museum are checked according to lenders requirements or annually.

When a new work is commissioned, staff liaise with the commissioned artist/maker, ensuring that relevant information is obtained pertaining to the artistic process and materials used.

### **7.12 Insurance**

Objects within the permanent collection and on loan to the Museum are commercially insured with an 'all-risks' policy.

In the case of loans out the borrower must insure all objects on loan from NMAG and proof of insurance must be evidenced.

In the case of loans in the Museum will insure against loss and damage for the whole of the loan period including transit.

### **7.13 Public Profile and Volunteering**

NMAG will share and recognise our conservation and collections care practice by raising the profile of this activity where possible.

Where appropriate we will engage our audiences with behind the scenes activities.

Much of our collections care and conservation work is supported by volunteers and we aim to promote and share this. We aim to engage our communities in all our activity and will upskill volunteers engaging them in our collections care practise.

### **7.14 Digital Space and Maintenance**

It is important to preserve the original accessioned digital file. Digital objects will be maintained in both hard copy form such as a drive or DVD but also on digital servers which will be backed up by NBC. Original digital objects will be secured in such a way that they cannot be accessed or copied.

## **8. Remedial Conservation**

This section will detail the NMAG approach to remedial conservation.

NMAG will use external conservation expertise for remedial conservation work. Such staff will be ICON Accredited and have previous, relevant experience with a good working knowledge in their areas.

The remedial treatment of objects will be carried out following the agreed procedures for documentation and consultation prior to treatment.

All conservation work will be approved by staff and be defined by a clear brief.

All outside contractors will be expected to adhere to the standards and specifications laid down in the contract.

Where the need for remedial treatment has been identified the Museum will make every effort to carry out the necessary work as soon as funding and other priorities permit.

NMAG will document all activities covered by the policy to the standards outlined in Spectrum, making sure that all conservation information is accessible via the object number, and is up-to-date, with the name of the person who performed the work, the organisation to which they belong and the date on which it took place.

## **9. Relationship to Other Policies, Plans Standards and Ethics**

This policy should be considered alongside the Care and Collections Plan, Collections Development Policy, Documentation Policy, Documentation Plan and Emergency Plan, Collections Documentation Procedures Manual and Collections Documentation Process Catalogues.

The standards adopted by the service will be based on those noted below, but will be tailored to the requirements of our collection specifically the Designated Shoe collection where we will aim for best practice standards and develop standards in this area. Basic standards we must achieve for conservation and collection care include:

- BS EN 16893:2018 Conservation of Cultural Heritage
- BS5454/pd5454 'Recommendations for storage and exhibition of archival documents'
- Benchmarks in Collections Care,
- Spectrum procedures
- DCMS Guidance for the Care of Human Remains 2005
- PAS 197:2009 Code of practice for cultural collections management

- Arts Council England Accreditation
- International Council of Museum (ICOM) Conservation Standards, United Kingdom Institute for Conservation (now ICON) Code of Professional Practice
- Institute of Conservation Code of Conduct
- Institute of Conservation Professional Standards
- Museum Association Code of Ethics
- Health and Safety at work (1974)
- Control of Asbestos regulations (2012)
- COSHH regulations (2002)
- The National Archives Digital standards.

These standards are the minimum that we should aspire to. Conservation aims to raise standards above these levels where possible particularly in relation to the shoe collection and to assist in the development of new standards and measurable performance indicators for shoes.

## **10. Resources**

### **10.1 Resources and Expertise**

NMAG will balance the available resources of against the needs of the collections in the forward/business planning process.

NMAG aims to make sustainable use of resources contexts and where possible support local suppliers. Objects in our care often require specialist housing requirements, plus a knowledge of preservation requirement is needed for staff responsible for their care.

NMAG will employ qualified and experienced staff to implement the policy, training them as necessary in preventative and some remedial conservation.

NMAG will train volunteers enabling them to develop skills and experience in these areas. All staff have some basic training in handling objects and hanging paintings.

All volunteers involved in handling collections should be trained by supervising staff.

Contract conservators are used for all remedial conservation projects or specialist advice and where possible special provision should be made in a project budget.

Costs must be included in planning for permanent and temporary exhibitions if external specialists are required.

Digital advice is sought from ICT and external digital consultants.

Dedicated stores maintained to a specific environment are available for specific collections. We will aim to improve conditions and consolidate collections storage. NMAG will seek to obtain appropriate specialist advice, working with contractors where necessary, under the direction of staff.

### **10.2 Finance**

There are limited resources to cover ongoing preventative and remedial conservation costs including materials. Exhibition projects and site developments must include a budgetary provision for preventive and remedial conservation. This should also include consideration of mounting and supporting collections for display, safe movement and packaging materials and as noted above the potential use of external specialists.

Fundraising campaigns in partnership with our audiences may be instigated to support the conservation of specific elements of the collection. NMAG will seek external funding for specific conservation projects. When acquiring large collections, NMAG will seek endowments for their housing, care and conservation including a charge on archaeological archive.

### **10.3 Partnerships and Advice**

NMAG will seek to develop partnerships with organisations such as the Northamptonshire Record Office in the care of archives and other paper-based collections and seek advice accordingly. NMAG will seek to develop other appropriate partnerships around the conservation and care of collections and will also consult with audiences regarding prioritisation.