

Wirral Museums Service
Forward Plan 2011-2016

**Williamson Art Gallery & Museum
and
Birkenhead Priory & St. Mary's Tower**

Wirral Council, Technical Services Department



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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Mission statement:

To provide opportunities for all Wirral people and visitors to engage with our collections and temporary exhibitions for inspiration, learning and enjoyment.

1.2 Context

Wirral Museums Service is part of the Cultural Services division of the Department of Technical Services.

In 2009 Wirral Council made the decision to dispose of a number of building assets, which included Museums Service sites. The Council resolved:

That Wirral Museum be closed but that a new sustainable use which will secure the future of this iconic building be sought and expressions of interest invited.

That the Wirral Transport Museum be transferred to a Community Development Trust, given suitable terms and conditions, or, if interest is expressed by an operator in the whole Pacific Road/Tramshed site, that the specialist role of the Transport Museum be protected as far as possible.

Council Minute 109, 9 February 2009

The disposal process is still ongoing. A tender process is being undertaken to find a new operator for Wirral Transport Museum, the Heritage Tramway and Pacific Road Arts Centre. Until the tender process is complete the Museums Service is responsible for Wirral Transport Museum and the Heritage Tramway, including staff. The lease on Shore Road Pumping Station, housing the Grasshopper pump, has been returned to Network Rail and the building is no longer open to the public. No decision has been made about the disposal or future of Egerton Bridge, although it is no longer a functioning visitor attraction and is currently secured against vandalism. The Council's Asset Management team are developing alternative uses within Council ownership for the former Wirral Museum (Birkenhead Town Hall).

Now Wirral Museums Service is being restructured, centred on the Williamson Art Gallery & Museum and Birkenhead Priory, both of which are Accredited Museums under the current Museums Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) Museum Accreditation Scheme.

The service offered by the Museums Service, now and in the future, is governed by the requirements of the Museums Accreditation Scheme. The present scheme is under review, especially following the demise of the MLA nationally, but it is expected that Wirral Museums Service will aspire to retain Accredited Museum status.

Accreditation is important to the Wirral Museums Service because restrictions are placed on the dissemination of Government money through MLA (and in the future through Arts Council England who will be taking over many of MLA's responsibilities) and Accreditation is the minimum standard required to access that money. This applies to grant-aid for purchases, access to specialist advice and services, training and information. Failure to meet minimum Accreditation standards would reduce public confidence in the service and compromise access to external funding opportunities, like the Heritage Lottery Fund.

2.0 THE STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR THE MUSEUMS SERVICE

2.1 Wirral Museums Service core aims:

- To continue to be an Accredited museums service.
- To collect, conserve and exhibit items of local, regional, national and international importance to reflect Wirral's life and history, and to place that in a meaningful context.
- To encourage and enable access to activities within museums by all sections of society.
- To run an active exhibition programme bringing the best of work from other public and private collections to display.
- To ensure the ongoing development of the learning opportunities within the Museums Service.
- To continue to develop the sites and venues of the Museums Service through an on-going capital investment programme and to secure external investment.
- To attract visitors and tourists to the Borough through the promotion of the Museums Service.

2.2 Vision for Williamson Art Gallery & Museum:

By 2020 Williamson Art Gallery & Museum will be of an equal and complementary standing and profile as Lady Lever Art Gallery, the National Museums Liverpool site in Wirral.

2.3 Vision for Birkenhead Priory & St. Mary's Tower:

By 2020 Birkenhead Priory & St. Mary's Tower will no longer be on the Heritage at Risk Register and the fabric of the site will be properly maintained, conserved and interpreted to preserve it for future generations.

2.4 Links to the Corporate Plan and Technical Services Departmental Plan

Within the Corporate Plan for 2011 to 2014 Wirral Museums Service is referred to under the section 'Your NEIGHBOURHOOD'; specifically '... develop our museum service to increase visitors and make sure residents can benefit from the educational and leisure opportunities that can be offered.' This is translated into an action: 'Provide high quality, value for money leisure and cultural facilities for Wirral residents.' The focus for the first year is 'developing the museum service by implementing a marketing and promotions plan' and the target is to 'increase the number of visitors to the Williamson Art Gallery and Priory by 10% in 2011/12'.

Although the Museums Service is identified as contributing to the aims and objectives outlined in 'Your NEIGHBOURHOOD' the activity planned to achieve the target will also contribute to the achievement of other Council priorities:

Your FAMILY

- Improving outcomes for children in care and care leavers
- Improving provision, choice and outcomes for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and/or disabilities.
- Providing children and young people with access to a range of appropriate play and developmental opportunities which meet their needs.
- Working with the voluntary, community and faith sector to expand and communicate the support and guidance available to people in Wirral to maintain quality of life and maximum independence.

Your ECONOMY

- Supporting the Destination Marketing of Wirral as business and visitor location.

Your COUNCIL

- Ensuring every pound spent by the Council adds value to services or is returned to residents through its Council Tax requirement.
- Ensuring Council staff are supported at a time of rapid organisation change, well led and provided with the professional and personal development required to deliver outstanding customer service and the Council's agreed priorities.

2.5 Strategic aims:

In the next five years the Museums Service will:

- increase levels of engagement over both sites, measured by activity levels;
- be a key community hub embedded in its local neighbourhood, measured by usage levels;

- be a vibrant cultural resource enjoyed and valued by Wirral residents and visitors to the borough, measured by visitor surveys;

To achieve these aims, thereby contributing to the achievement of the Corporate Objectives, it is desirable to rearrange the way in which the Museums Service conducts its business. The Museums Service will be organised in terms of staffing and activity under three key headings which are linked and the necessity for close collaboration is paramount:

Collections & Exhibitions

– including the care & display of collections, documentation and exhibitions.

Visitor Services

– including building maintenance, the day-to-day operation of the sites, catering and retail.

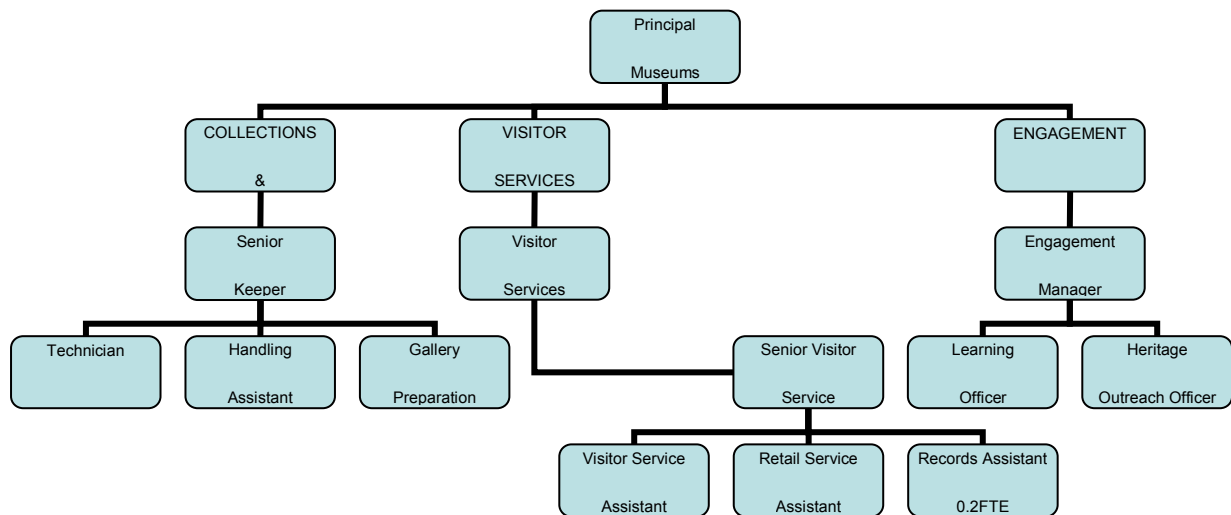
Engagement

– including formal and informal learning, community engagement, and development of funding & other opportunities.

This will require a staff restructure to match the skills and experience of the staff to the current and future needs of the Museums Service. It is unusual for a Museums Service of the size, and with collections of the importance, of Wirral's to operate with such a small staff base. There is now only one specialist museum professional, which limits the capacity to develop the collection, research into collection items, and preparation of exhibitions and displays. Monitoring conditions, documentation and conservation of collections and improving storage facilities are also of great importance as they have not been adequately addressed or budgeted for in recent years. Therefore, it is essential that there is a restructure to enable the most productive and effective use of the existing and future staff team. (The proposed staffing structure can be found on page 6.)

In addition, through the proposed Engagement function the Service will seek to:

- enhance the workforce by utilising internships, apprenticeships etc when they are available.
- seek external funding to enhance the staff team with project specific staff
- develop partnerships that support the achievement of the objectives.
- work with Higher Education Institutions to develop a programme of student placements that support the work of the Museums Service whilst providing valuable, 'real' work experience for the students.
- develop volunteer opportunities where appropriate.



Objective 2.5.1

Develop a Talent Management Plan to enable the best use of existing and future staff and any additional support engaged.

The management team of the Service is exploring ways of utilising new technology for interpretation and engagement. This has two elements:

Off-site

In the 21st Century it is increasingly important to have a substantial internet presence, as more people are deriving their information from this source. Museum collections are of interest to people across the world, as shown by the lending of objects for international exhibitions, but the organisation of loans or travelling is not possible for everyone. Remote access to museum collections and exhibitions gives a profile not achievable by other means and is a very cost effective and efficient way of distributing information and raising awareness.

At present, the Museums Service is seen in a couple of pages of the Wirral Council website and visitwirral.com, which provide basic information about the buildings and access. There is no provision for making this presence dynamic by giving up-to-date event, exhibition or display information, or for giving greater depth to the information provided. There is an aspiration, with the helpful cooperation of the Finance Department, to improve that by giving illustrated pages detailing collections and ultimately giving access to databases of collections. New documentation software will facilitate this type of access for research.

There is a Facebook page in the name of The Friends of the Williamson which has 296 followers and this type of visitor interaction is envisaged as an important route for the future, though its time-consuming nature will need to be balanced with the advantages of being involved.

On-site

The rapid developments in new technology, particularly Smartphones and other mobile internet-accessible devices, have created opportunities for interpretation and engagement, already in use in other galleries and heritage visitor attractions. Developments in technology enable visitors to access text and pictures, audio and video through their own mobile devices or on handsets provided by schools or the Museums Service. In addition for schools, teachers or museums staff can develop interactive tasks on site that can then be uploaded to a website for access when they return to school. The Museums Service can provide additional and supporting information on the website. One such provider already used in some Wirral schools and City Learning Centres is www.wildknowledge.co.uk.

This would potentially enable the Museums Service to provide self-guided tours at the sites, including much more detail than can be provided on a picture label, for example curator talks or video streams of the production process. This could also provide images of artefacts not usually displayed for conservation reasons. The technology would be particularly useful at Birkenhead Priory where the location of interpretation panels is problematic as the site is a Scheduled Ancient Monument and all the buildings are Listed by English Heritage.

It should be noted that website developments and provision of information for devices such as these are very time-consuming and require substantial knowledge to offer details at the right level.

Objective 2.5.2

Develop and agree a programme of implementation for new technologies for interpretation and engagement across the sites.

Secure external funding to implement the programme.

Finally the management team of the Museums Service will be working with the Corporate Communications Team to develop and implement bespoke marketing campaigns for the two sites:

- develop an active web presence for the Service and all it offers
- make better use of 'free' marketing opportunities presented by specialised and news web listings, social networking sites etc.
- identify and apply for awards every year.
- write and submit articles to the relevant journals and websites to promote the work being developed by the staff.

Objective 2.5.3

Develop and implement a marketing strategy.

3.0 THE BUILDINGS

3.1 Williamson Art Gallery & Museum

The purpose-built gallery was opened in 1928 to house the collections of Birkenhead Borough Council, previously displayed in a former library building. In 1974 Wirral Borough Council was created from five local authorities and the collections expanded slightly to absorb those held by the former councils. Now designated a Grade 2 listed building by English Heritage, the Williamson Art Gallery & Museum houses the Council's collection and has permanent collection displays and a varied exhibition programme. Some rooms are available for hire for meetings and performances, a concert standard Steinway grand piano was purchased for the gallery with Arts Council support in the 1970's.

The Williamson is Accredited under MLA Accreditation Scheme and has a VAQAS (Visitor Attraction Quality Assurance Scheme) Award. There is a small but active 'Friends' society, the Friends of the Williamson Art Gallery & Wirral Museums (Registered Charity no.514641) which also has interests in the whole Museums Service. The Gallery has close links with schools, local art societies and Wirral Art School, whose annual Degree Show is held at the Williamson.

The potential for built development at the gallery has been under discussion for many years, especially because of the internal quadrangles which allow expansion without affecting the outside appearance of the listed building. Beginning in 2011 the Council is investing in the region of £1.3m in capital development and refurbishment of the gallery. The work includes:

- overhauling the roof and replacement the roof lanterns, now complete
- improving ramped access to the front of the building,
- using the small quadrangle to create more storage space allowing existing galleries to be returned to public use,
- using a portion of the large quadrangle to provide more toilet facilities and additional office accommodation (remaining space allows some future development potential),
- creating a small kitchen and serving area in Gallery 14 to enable a shop and café to operate in the building,
- relocating the reception desk and improving the facilities for the Museums Assistants (Visitor Services Assistants),
- creating a Changing Place, with fully accessible provision,
- installing hidden kitchenettes in Galleries 11 and 12 so that they can be used as a Green Room for performances and an education and family learning or meeting space,
- installing glass doors between some of the galleries to help with environmental control and improve fire safety,
- creating ramped access at the rear of the building to create a loading bay, improve the movement of the collection throughout the building and improve fire safety evacuation.

3.2 Birkenhead Priory & St. Mary's Tower

Birkenhead Priory includes the oldest standing building on Merseyside, dating from about 1150. The entire site is a Scheduled Ancient Monument which includes buildings listed at Grade 1, Grade 2* and Grade 2. There are a number of attractions on the site including the Cloister, the Chapter House, the Undercroft and the Refectory and the Tower of the former St. Mary's Church, Birkenhead's first parish church. There are exhibitions relating to the history of the site and its surroundings and to the history of the Priory. From the top of the Tower there are panoramic views of Liverpool and the River Mersey. The Refectory can be hired for functions and events, though facilities are limited. The Priory Parish regularly uses the Chapter House as a place of worship and the Scriptorium is dedicated to HMS Conway as a chapel. Within St. Mary's Tower is a memorial to the lives lost in 1939 when the Royal Navy submarine Thetis, built at Lairds, sank during sea trials. Birkenhead Priory is Accredited under the MLA Accreditation Scheme and has a VAQAS award.

The Priory site is blighted by its location adjacent to run-down small-scale industrial units: the approach to the site is unappealing and unattractive. Access is difficult on foot, requiring negotiating the A41 and the Mersey Tunnel entrance, and signage is unclear. The limited parking area and street parking restrictions are a deterrent for event organisers. The car park at the rear of the area has never been used fully as it does not have ramped access to the site, but Church Street is an enclosed cul-de-sac and is often used by the local scrap merchants for wrecked cars, which worries visitors.

In 2009 the site was placed on the Heritage at Risk Register by English Heritage. Also in this year the Council commissioned, with support from English Heritage, a Conservation Management Plan (CMP) for the site.

Whilst the CMP was being developed the Council agreed around £730,000 of capital investment for the Priory. The work, based on a Condition Survey that formed part of the CMP, includes:

- refurbishment of St. Mary's Tower,
- resolving the drainage issues in the Cloister,
- improving the egress from the Refectory,
- installing a lift to provide access to the Refectory for those with buggies or ambulatory difficulties,
- refurbishing the toilets,
- repairing or removing all the railings on and around the site,
- clearing the car park,
- installing lift access from the car park to the site.

4.0 COLLECTIONS AND EXHIBITIONS

4.1 The Collections

The Wirral Museums collection housed at the Williamson Art Gallery & Museum largely comprises:

- Fine art, particularly 18th and 19th century watercolour paintings and drawings; work by regionally and locally important artists over three centuries; Philip Wilson Steer (born 1860 in Birkenhead)
- Maritime models and pictures, particularly vessels built at Cammell Laird and its predecessor shipyards, and the Mersey Ferries
- Ceramics – most noteworthy is the nationally important Della Robbia Pottery, made in Birkenhead 1894-1906; Liverpool porcelain and Seacombe Pottery
- Arthur H. Lee & Sons, a fascinating and unusually complete record of the 'Tapestry Works' of A.H. Lee & Sons, operating in Birkenhead 1908-1970, including designs and fabric samples
- Social history artefacts – particularly useful as educational tools and drawing on a wide range of ages and experiences
- Archaeology, a small local collection but also some important Cypriot artefacts, with Greek, Egyptian and Roman items
- Civic Silver, collections drawn from the constituent councils of Wirral pre-1974

This is by no means an exhaustive list of collections, which vary widely in importance. The Fine Art collections are considered probably among the best five in the North West. Very many of the items have been collected by donation or bequest from local people since 1912, when Birkenhead's first museum opened, in an effort to develop a relevant and interesting collection. It is still added to by the same means and by judicious but infrequent purchases. The value of the Fine Art collection is the most volatile of the collections as it is subject to market pressures and the dictates of fashion.

At Birkenhead Priory a selection of the archaeological finds from the site are on display in the Undercroft. There is also display space in the Refectory for views of the buildings at various times in the past or for temporary exhibitions. The HMS Conway collections in the Scriptorium belong to the Friends of HMS Conway and are not formally loaned to Wirral Museums Service.

Objective 4.1

Update valuation of Museum collection, with especial reference to the Fine Art collection.

4.2 Documentation

Owing to a severe shortage of professional staff time there is a backlog of documentation which is in need of addressing. A Documentation Plan was drawn up in 2008 with timetables subsequently revised (see Appendix 5) at the request of the Council's Risk Management division and updates have been reported to the Audit & Risk Management Committee, most recently on 30.06.2010 when it was stated that action needs to be taken to address the issue in a timely manner. A payment from the Risk Management Fund was previously agreed to enable the work to be undertaken.

The requirement is to purchase and license a new specialist software system (the most cost-effective and acknowledged industry standard is MODES) and, using short-term contract staff, produce documentation of artefacts received in recent years and transfer information on older collections to a new system. Most of the work is to be completed by December 2012, the final stages, including retrospective documentation by April 2016.

The expertise required is mostly available with existing staff, and with suitable training, much of the clerical work can be completed by junior staff, possibly as work-experience before beginning post-graduate training or taking up a professional museums post. Some additional specialist knowledge will require consultation with other museums, mostly local i.e. National Museums Liverpool and Grosvenor Museum, Chester.

Collection valuations have been undertaken periodically by the Principal Museums Officer using published and on-line sources, which was chosen as more cost-effective than commissioning professional valuations by an outside body. It is proposed that the resources be retained to enable continuation of this exercise. The historic value of the collections of paintings and other objects held in the Council's Art Galleries, Museums and Archives is considered incalculable due to their unique nature, but an indicative value of Community Assets is calculated for audit and insurance purposes, as approved by the Audit Commission. The current valuation of collections housed within the Wirral Museums Service (including loans in and excluding transport collections) is £11,639,990, but this is due for revision as a result of improved documentation.

Publication of collection details has been completed in various ways. In recent years a colour catalogue of 100 watercolour highlights from the collection was published when this selection of works formed an exhibition in Ravenna, Italy. A small illustrated booklet of work by Philip Wilson Steer and monographs on some local artists have been published. The most recent, in July 2010, is 'Hopps around Wallasey', with 60 paintings reproduced, a collaboration with Wallasey History Society and Bluecoat Press. Staff are currently working with graphic designers within Wirral Council to produce a souvenir booklet linked to A Textile Dynasty, the Tapestry Works exhibition.

In collaboration with the Public Catalogue Foundation (PCF), approximately 1400 oil paintings in Wirral's collection were photographed and they are now available on-line via the 'Your Paintings' section on the BBC website. Some of these are already visible on the website of The National Inventory of Continental European Paintings. In addition these paintings will be fully illustrated in colour and form the largest part of the PCF's first Merseyside volume of Oil Paintings in Public Collections when it is published in the near future.

Objective 4.2

Purchase MODES documentation software, install and train staff to operate, and clear documentation backlog.

Complete retrospective documentation using MODES software.

4.3 Exhibitions

A prime purpose of the Museums Service is to conserve and exhibit the collections in its care. In addition, a regular and varied exhibition programme both uses and complements the collection displays. It is the mixture of unique items in the collection and the changing exhibitions that brings in regular visitors. The exhibition programme embraces work by local artists, one of the most important exhibitions being the annual Wirral Spring Exhibition of Art & Photography, from which the gallery makes purchases for the permanent collection. This open exhibition gives all local people the opportunity to have their work shown, provided it meets certain quality standards, but in addition the Wirral Society of Arts, Oxton Artists and Wirral Art School are regular collaborators, and other organisations like Wallasey Amateur Photographic Society occasional ones. Solo exhibitions by selected artists intersperse the group shows and local history, archaeology and social subjects complete the variety of the programme. Collaborations with National Museums Liverpool (NML), the Museums Service of Cheshire West & Chester and Galleries outside Liverpool are regular and frequent.

Particular successes in recent years include A Textile Dynasty: Arthur H Lee & Sons, Birkenhead, which won the National Museums & Heritage Award in 2010 as the Industry's Favourite, and Above the Clouds: Mallory & Irvine and the Quest for Everest, which was Highly Commended in the Project on a Limited Budget section of the same national awards. For the A.H Lee & Sons exhibition the gallery was in receipt of substantial additional funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Esme Fairbairn Foundation.

Recently closed (October 2011) is an exhibition involving the Williamson Art Gallery and both the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, and the National Museum in Gdansk, Poland, to show work by Albert Lipczinski who was a prominent artist in early 20th century Merseyside. Further close collaborations, particularly with NML, are planned for the future, most notably a survey exhibition of the 19th century Liverpool School of Artists, as the Williamson and the Walker Art Galleries hold good complimentary collections and would be the principal lenders. Other possibilities include the work of Albert Richards and James Hamilton Hay.

Objective 4.3

Develop exhibitions in collaboration with National Museums Liverpool and other partners.

5.0 VISITOR SERVICES

5.1 Visitors and Users

Visitors to the gallery have not been analysed in detail recently, although visitor figures have previously been reported as performance indicators. A small postcode survey conducted in summer 2010 confirmed the results of the last survey several years ago, showing that 80-85% of visitors came from within 10 miles. However, it is believed that the profile of the Williamson has been enhanced in recent years and a larger sample will reveal that the constituency is now rather larger. The Williamson regularly draws between 30,000 and 35,000 visitors a year; the Priory between 12,000 and 15,000.

In 2006 Wirral Council's Citizen's Panel provided information directly related to museums. Four in ten (40.6%) of respondents said they visited the Williamson Art Gallery occasionally and nearly 9 in 10 (88.4%) of respondents were very or fairly satisfied, a figure supported by the 2009 Wirral Place Survey Findings. When the National Indicator on museums attendance (NI10) was first collected in 2008 Wirral had the highest participation rate of any Unitary Authority and the highest participation rate outside London. This high score was maintained for the following two years for which figures were gathered.

Since the 1970's the Williamson Art Gallery & Museum has operated as an arts centre; the purchase of a Steinway grand piano, with Arts Council support, allowed concert performances to take place in a gallery ambience, which continue to prove popular, especially in the free Sunday Serenades series organised by the Friends of the Williamson Art Gallery & Wirral Museums for past 25 years.

The gallery is currently used regularly by a large range of groups from the Wirral Society of Arts, NADFAS (National Association of Decorative and Fine Arts Society) and U3A (University of the Third Age), to Oxtou Floral Art Club and Birkenhead History Society. In addition, space at both the gallery and the Priory are hired out for occasional or private meetings and events.

The gallery works closely with Wirral Metropolitan College and the students from the Fine Art Degree course of Wirral Art School have the unique opportunity to exhibit their Final Degree shows in a public gallery. Each year the gallery also hosts a Fellowship exhibition with work from recent graduates.

Objective 5.1

Develop systems to better understand who the visitors and users are and why they come to the Gallery or Priory sites.

5.2 Catering

There have been discussions for many years about catering provision at the Williamson. Previously, during exceptional exhibitions, drawing more than usual visitors from outside the locality, a temporary café has been set up and for up to 10 years there had been a coin-operated drinks machine, provided by the Friends, which was not particularly successful owing to the poor product.

In early 2011 the Friends bought a better quality drinks machine, to be operated by staff, café-style tables and chairs and display units for pre-packaged cakes and biscuits. This has already proved its worth and the capital investment will enable an expansion of this service. Partners are currently being sought for partners to deliver an enhanced catering offer. There are currently no plans to provide a catering offer at the Priory. Catering for meetings and pre-arranged groups is, however, made available at both sites.

Objective 5.2

Have a partnership agreement in place to deliver an enhanced catering offer at the Gallery when it re-launches after the capital work is completed.

5.3 Retail

Both the Williamson and the Priory currently carry a small stock of for-sale items; although the Priory's range is more limited than the Gallery's, both offer site-branded pocket-money ranges. In addition the gallery offers books, postcards and some higher priced items. The Priory has a short guide to the site available for purchase, but as part of the site improvements it is anticipated a colour souvenir brochure will be designed. Most of the exhibitions at the Williamson have catalogues available to buy and, where appropriate, the gallery sources relevant books to offer for sale. The capital investment at the gallery will enable an improvement of the retail offer at this site.

Objective 5.3

Develop the retail offer at Williamson Art Gallery so that it gains a reputation for selling good quality local arts and crafts.

6.0 ENGAGEMENT

6.1 Formal learning

Following the retirement of the Education Officer in June 2010 there has been an opportunity to reappraise the requirements of education within the Museums Service. The previous post-holder successfully coordinated a series of tours and school visits over 15 years, especially employing services from Wirral Transport Museum which were subsidised to encourage the

participation of local schools. The changes prompted by the Strategic Asset Review mean that some sites and services are no longer available and the service will be refocused on the Williamson Art Gallery and the Priory. School visitor numbers have declined over the last 10 years from approximately 8000 per year to less than 2000, owing to changes in curriculum and school priorities, as well as depletion of the service offered to schools.

As a result of a management review, the Education Officer role has been redefined and split into two part-time posts with complementary emphases. The first of the new Learning Officers will be a secondary education art specialist who will be expected to develop and deliver cross-curricular and key/functional skills programmes. The second, a primary education specialist who will be expected to develop cross-curricular and key/functional skills programmes, and to respond proactively to the topic work undertaken in neighbourhood schools. There will be an initial focus on schools that will not experience transport difficulties in travelling to the Museums Service sites, by being close enough to walk, willing to use public transport or being able to access funding to facilitate bus transport.

Objectives 6.1

Write a formal learning strategy.

Significantly increase the number of school visits and improve the number of return visits.

6.2 Informal learning

Over recent years the Museums Service has begun to develop more informal learning activities. The Principal Museums Officer has regularly been available to give talks both within and outside the museums buildings, including contributing to an occasional Sunday afternoon lecture programme hosted by the Friends of the Williamson Art Gallery & Wirral Museums. A talk & tour programme was arranged during the recent Albert Lipczinski exhibition.

Each year the Gallery participates in The Big Draw, a national drawing initiative in October, with the support of volunteers and coordinated by Oxton Artists. In 2011 additional support has come from the Wirral branch of the National Association of Decorative & Fine Arts Society and the Wirral Society of Arts.

A free Saturday morning Art Club has been run very successfully for a number of years. However, in recent years this was funded exclusively by the Friends of the Williamson Art Gallery & Wirral Museums since a project grant ceased and it has proved unsustainable. The Club has not operated since summer 2010 and the possibility of reinstatement of this provision will be considered in the review of the informal learning provided within the Gallery and at the Priory.

In addition, a volunteer has begun running a monthly family fun day at the gallery, under the VIDA charitable banner, which began with an exhibition in 2008 dedicated to a young Tranmere artist, Emma Burrows, who died a few years ago. The Service is keen to continue this offer and is supporting the volunteer with other initiatives.

A five-week Summer Holiday children's project has run for the last 10 years, supported by the Friends, and in recent years by the Wirral Methodist Housing Association. This has proved very successful and has each year been followed by an exhibition of work, which has often featured in the WMHA Annual Report. In 2009, for the first time, a small adult's project was added for WMHA residents. In 2011 the programme started with a week of outreach work, supported by Arts Council England.

Funding has been secured from Aiming Higher for Disabled Children to pilot Family Fun Days targeted at families with disabled children. In addition a capital bid to provide height adjustable tables and other more inclusive equipment has been secured. A partnership with a voluntary organisation is being developed to explore ways of continuing this area of work.

There has been a development of young people's activities within the Gallery and the Priory. These include trails and colouring in sheets but it is the intention to continue to expand these resources as appropriate to each site: for example, jigsaws for the Gallery and outdoor building blocks for the Priory. To support this development a focus group of childminders has been initiated to inform the development of other materials and encourage childminders to use the Museums Service sites more regularly.

Staff and artists that are contracted regularly have been given training in disability awareness as the Service attempts to make the universal offer more inclusive. This is being supported by bids to Aiming High for Disabled Children.

Objective 6.2

Develop and implement an Informal Learning Strategy, identifying potential partners, with an underpinning funding plan.

6.3 Links with Initial Teacher Training (ITT) Providers

The Service Development Manager (Participation and Engagement Manager) has been developing links with Initial Teacher Training providers to develop learning outside the classroom placements and promote the Museum sites as learning destinations for the trainee teachers to inform their future practice. At the moment there are links with Chester University BEd programme and Liverpool Hope Performing Arts PGCE.

Objective 6.3

Review the ITT placements that have previously been hosted and agree terms of reference for future placements in terms of focus, number and supervision.

6.4 Community Engagement

Over the years the Museums Service has worked with a diverse range of groups from Looked After Children to under 5s. This has been largely responsive. As part of the new Engagement function it is intended to be much more proactive in this area, developing projects that target specific community groups, for example isolated elders or young carers, to encourage non-traditional users to visit the gallery. As part of this process a Community Engagement plan is under development. Much of this work is reliant on external funding so this is underpinned by a funding plan.

Objective 6.4

Increase the number of community engagement projects by 50% year on year for the next three years.

APPENDIX 1 ACCREDITATION APPLICATION SWOT ANALYSIS

At the time of the Accreditation application, March 2009, a SWOT analysis was undertaken:

<p>STRENGTHS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purpose-built gallery • Broad collection with important works • Loyal core audience • Large Friends group • Good relationships with Primary schools • Repeat visits by Primary schools • Parking at sites • Subsidised bus service 	<p>WEAKNESSES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for capital investment in buildings • Majority of collection unavailable for display • Shortage of professional staff • Lack of financial resources • No café or catering facilities • Poor retail offer • Poor family offer • Developmentally passive Friend's group
<p>OPPORTUNITIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnerships with NML • Development of local history resource via the Council's Heritage Fund • Development of relationships with Secondary schools • Changing Primary curriculum • External funding for capital developments 	<p>THREATS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Future of subsidised bus service following transfer to community ownership • No increase in revenue funding • Decrease in revenue funding • No increase in staff team

In the following 18 months, work has been undertaken to address the identified weaknesses. The educational and family experiences are under development and partnerships with appropriate organisations are being explored to promote this offer. The Council has agreed to invest £2m of capital funding in the sites which will help to address the gallery environment and the catering and retail offer at the Williamson, and both facility and structural difficulties at the Priory. However, other changes are also manifest which are reflected in the renewed SWOT analysis at Appendix 2.

APPENDIX 2 BUSINESS PLANNING SWOT ANALYSIS

Compiled spring/summer 2011

<p>STRENGTHS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £2m capital investment across both sites • WAG: purpose-built gallery • Large gallery spaces • Priory: oldest standing building on Merseyside – ‘a gem’ • Loyal core audience • Friends group • Good relationships with local primary schools • Repeat visits by local primary schools • VAQAS accreditation for both sites • MLA accreditation for both sites • Parking on both sites • Important permanent collections • Existing relationships with regional museums services 	<p>WEAKNESSES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Much of collection in need of conservation • Shortage of professional staff • Lack of revenue • Staff capacity • Developmentally passive Friends group • Reduction in training budget • Accessioning backlog • Poor building maintenance • Poor environmental control
<p>OPPORTUNITIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnerships with NML • Partnerships with sub-regional and regional Higher Educational Institutions • Changing primary curriculum • Changed secondary curriculum • Partnerships with local secondary schools • Improved catering and retail provision at WAG • Job market means that more museum graduates will be looking for work experience/volunteer opportunities • The work of the Heritage Outreach Officer and Arts Development Officer developing new audiences • Working with the Borough’s Childminders to develop new audiences 	<p>THREATS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduction in staff making current provision or future development unachievable • Budget reductions • Deterioration of collections owing to inadequate conservation

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External funding for engagement/ development • Developing family offer 	
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APPENDIX 3 RISK ASSESSMENT

RISK	IMPACT	LIKELIHOOD
On-going destabilisation of the budget	Undermining forward planning ability and implementation	Medium
Loss of necessary skills and experience through EVR/severance	Undermining the ability of the Service to deliver Council objectives	High
Unsustainable staff losses	Significant reduction in opening hours	High
Failure to secure external funding	The loss of opportunity to more widely engage with the public and develop relationships with non-traditional users	Medium
Obstruction in developing an appropriate staff structure	Inability to create a staff team that can take the Museums Service forward	Medium

APPENDIX 4 ACTION PLAN 2011/12

Corporate Objective/ Departmental Target	Functional Lead	Detailed Actions & Outputs	Lead Officer & Partners	Review Date/ Milestones	Progress To Date	On Target R .A .G	Next Steps/ Corrective Actions
Increase the numbers of visitors to the Williamson Art Gallery and Priory by 10% in 2011/12	Management Team	2.5.1 Develop a Talent Management Plan.	Engagement Manager (EM)	April 2012			
	Management Team	2.5.2 Develop and agree a programme of implementation for new technologies for interpretation and engagement across the sites.	EM/ Principal Museums Officer (PMO)	January 2012			
	Management Team	Secure external funding to implement the above programme.	EM	On-going			
	Management Team	5.1 Develop systems to better understand who the visitors and users are and why they come to the Gallery or Priory sites.	EM/ Corporate Marketing				
	Management Team	5.2 Have a partnership agreement in place to deliver an enhanced catering offer and the Gallery when it re-launches after the capital work is completed.	EM/ Visitor Services Manager (VSM)				
	Management Team	2.5.3 Develop and implement a marketing strategy	PMO/ Corporate Marketing Team				
	Curatorial	4.1 Update valuation of Museum collection, with especial reference to the Fine Art collection.	PMO				
	Curatorial	4.2 Purchase MODES documentation software, install and train staff to operate, and clear documentation backlog.	PMO/ Insurance Team	December 2012			

	Curatorial	Complete retrospective documentation using software, so that complete collection is recorded in the same way. At this stage it is the intention to achieve this within existing resources.	Senior Keeper	April 2016			
	Curatorial	4.3 Develop exhibition in collaboration with National Museums Liverpool and other partners of the 19th century Liverpool School of Artists.	PMO/ NML				
	Visitor Services	5.3 Develop the retail offer at Williamson Art Gallery so that it gains a reputation for selling good quality local arts and crafts.	EM/ VSM				
	Engagement	6.1 Write a Formal Learning Strategy	EM				
	Engagement	Significantly increase the number of school visits and improve the number of return visits.	EM/ Learning Officers				
	Engagement	6.2 Develop and implement an Informal Learning Strategy, identifying potential partners, with an underpinning funding plan.	EM/ VSM/ Learning Officers/ Handling Assistant	April 2012			
	Engagement	6.3 Review the ITT placements that have previously been hosted and agree terms of reference for future placements in terms of focus, number and supervision.	EM				
	Engagement	6.4 Increase the number of community engagement projects by 50% year on year for the next three years.	EM				