

**WIRRAL MUSEUMS SERVICE STRATEGY 2022-2025**

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**FOREWORD**

Museums can increase our sense of wellbeing, help us feel proud of where we have come from, can inspire, challenge and stimulate us, and make us feel healthier.

David Fleming  
Director, National Museums Liverpool  
President, Museums Association 2017

Wirral Museums are free to enter and open to all. In the last ten years our sites have transformed into vibrant community hubs, offering high quality cultural experiences for residents and visitors alike.

The next decade will be equally transformational. We will continue to offer high quality cultural experiences, contributing to the growth of the visitor economy and the positive health and well-being of Wirral residents. We will embed the work we do with communities in the plans and strategies of partners and collaborators, responding strategically to the needs of our most vulnerable residents and communities.

Our plans for the Priory are ambitious – improving the visitor facilities and generating significant growth in visitor numbers. The site is at the heart of the emerging Priory Quarter and the opportunities for collaboration and joint working with other organisations in the area are exciting.

At the Williamson we will work more strategically to support emerging and established artists and craftspeople living and working in Wirral. We are developing a model of co-creation within our exhibition programme, working with groups of residents to tell their stories with our collections and we are increasing access to our collections using digital technologies.

We will complete the community asset transfer for Wirral Transport Museum and embed this and the Heritage Tramway into the tourism infrastructure.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Wirral Museums Service is responsible for the management and operation of the Williamson Art Gallery & Museum and Birkenhead Priory and the care of Wirral's art and museum collections. In addition, the Service carries the council's legal responsibility for the operation and infrastructure of the Birkenhead Heritage Tramway and for Wirral Transport Museum.

The Williamson Art Gallery & Museum and Birkenhead Priory are both Accredited Museums, which ensures that museums management and collections care meet agreed national standards and gives access to national funding streams. The Williamson is a Grade II Listed building. The Priory is a Scheduled Monument (subject to exactly the same protections as other monuments, like Stonehenge for instance) and has Grade I, Grade II\* and Grade II Listed buildings on the site. The Chapter House at the heart of the Priory site, dating to about 1150 and the oldest standing building in Merseyside, is owned by the Church of England and is an active chapel. The Friends of HMS Conway occupy the first floor of this building and have a museum of Conway artefacts in this room.

Arts Council England is the national regulatory agency for museums and Historic England is the regulatory body for the parts of Birkenhead Priory in Council ownership. The Museums Development Network is the development agency for museums.

## **WHAT WE KNOW**

### **Data – a snapshot of 2019**

#### Birkenhead Priory

- 14000 visitors
- 7248 visitors to Priory events
- 1660 art class participants
- 595 to watch theatre
- 500 visitors for Heritage Open Days
- 100 school children
- 2 exhibitions

#### Williamson Art Gallery & Museum

- 50,000 visitors
- £18,000 in shop sales
- 1800 children watching theatre
- 1500 people listening to 29 talks
- 1294 attendances at art classes
- 71 meetings for community groups
- 57 business meetings
- 50+ local artists and makers in the Gallery shop
- 45 school visits
- 41 concerts
- 2 weddings

#### Collections & exhibitions

- 22 exhibitions
- 5 art works on loan

### **2020 – A year of digital engagement**

#### Birkenhead Priory

Website      the virtual tour has had almost 2000 views this year

Facebook     followers grew from 2922 in March to 4285 in December

#### Williamson Art Gallery & Museum

Website      15000 visitors to online exhibitions since March

Facebook     followers grew from 3299 in March to 3989 in December

#### Wirral Museums Service

Instagram    as of December 1100 followers

Twitter       as of December 3393 followers

### **WIDER STRATEGIC CONTEXT**

- Wirral 2020 Pledges:
  - *Leisure and cultural opportunities for all*

We will encourage more people to enjoy the wide range of leisure, culture and sporting opportunities on offer across Wirral. We will listen to residents' ideas and requests, and by 2020, will have increased access to events and activities to all our residents, regardless of age or income.

- *Vibrant tourism economy*  
We are proud of our home and will work to promote and grow the borough's tourism offer, making Wirral a place even more people enjoy visiting.
- The emerging Wirral 2025 plan.
- The emerging Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy.
- The ambition to make better use of the River Mersey as a key asset for the visitor economy is supported by the Priory as visitor destination.
- Birkenhead Regeneration Framework.
- Birkenhead Priory is an anchor destination in the development of the waterfront.
- Birkenhead Priory and Wirral Transport Museum are located near to jumping off points of the Green Corridor proposals in the Town Deal.
- Williamson Art Gallery & Museum, Birkenhead Priory and Wirral Transport Museum and Birkenhead Heritage Tramway all support the cultural offer integral to the Town Investment Plan.
- The Priory is a key component of the emergent Priory Quarter.
- Children's Services.
- Working with colleagues to support vulnerable children and young people to become active and engaged citizens.
- Library Strategy.
- Working in partnership with Library colleagues to deliver programmes to support people living with dementia and their carers, and adults from deprived communities to develop functional skills and improve employability.
- Adult Services.
- Supporting colleagues in the development of strength-base practice, using local assets to support the care of vulnerable adults.
- Sport and Physical Activity Strategy

## **THE 2025 STRATEGY**

### **Birkenhead Priory**

#### *Mission Statement*

Birkenhead Priory will tell the story of the Christian heritage of the site and the history of faith practice in Wirral; teach visitors about the history of Birkenhead; tend the site and its buildings to preserve them for future generations; transform the visitor experience by providing opportunities for contemplation and reflection; and treasure the environment by promoting sustainable living.

#### *2030 Vision*

Our ambition is to enhance the programme of events, exhibitions and commissions, create opportunities for personal reflection and contemplation; look back to the history of the site, its town and the changing religious practice across Wirral; promote sustainable living and respect for the environment. This will be achieved within the constraints of the site as a Scheduled Monument with Listed Buildings, protecting the site for future generations.

*Vision aims and objectives*

Upgrade the visitor facilities.

Objectives

- Create a visitor centre with catering offer, learning and retail space
- Refresh the museum displays and interpretation

Work in partnership with the Diocese and Parish to support the refurbishment of the Chapter House

Objectives:

- Identify funding opportunities
- Support funding applications
- Work with them to develop new interpretation for the building

Contribute to the regeneration of Birkenhead through the development of an exciting programme of events in line with the Mission Statement, delivered in partnership with other organisations in the Priory Quarter.

Objectives

- Grow the emergent events programme
- Programme contemporary arts exhibitions/installation

**Williamson Art Gallery & Museum**

*Mission Statement*

Williamson Art Gallery & Museum will show the best of Wirral's historic and contemporary artists and makers; celebrate Wirral's history and create high quality cultural experiences for residents and visitors. We will be relevant to, and engaged with, all of Wirral's communities and be a vibrant part of Wirral's day-to-day life and its tourism offer, bringing a range of exhibitions and events to its unique spaces.

*2030 Vision*

During the next decade, the Williamson will expand its role as a vibrant community cultural hub using the art and museum collections to empower Wirral's communities. Staff time and expertise will be used proactively to support and celebrate existing and emerging artists and makers of Wirral and its diaspora.

*Vision aims and objectives*

Contribute to the growth of the visitor economy by delivering an exciting programme of exhibitions and events.

Objectives:

- work with groups of Wirral residents to develop co-curated displays,
- bring more of our arts, crafts, and history collections onto display,
- continue to attract exhibitions from nationally and internationally renowned artists and makers.

Deliver economic development opportunities for Wirral's artists and makers.

Objectives:

- offering space and support for established and emerging artists to exhibit work for sale,
- development of an online shop available to Wirral artists and craftspeople,
- a programme of advice, support and training for Wirral artists and makers.

Grow the income generated by the café.

Objectives

- develop an evening offer,
- create an in-house wedding catering offer.

### **Collections and Exhibitions**

Increase collections accessibility using digital content and new technology.

Objectives:

- develop a new online collection search function on our website,
- development and deployment of an online schools offer,
- development and delivery of an online offer for care settings.

Share more stories from our permanent collection.

Objectives:

- Bring more of our diverse permanent collections onto display, including our history collections,
- Develop the collection pages of our website and social media to share stories, research, and images of our collections,
- Develop new interpretation panels and blended displays that help visitors learn more about the history, culture, and crafts of the Wirral.

Improve the storage and documentation of our collections, to preserve them for future generations.

Objectives:

- Audit and document our history and object collections,
- Digitize our fine art collections and make them publicly accessible online,

## **Wirral Transport Museum and Birkenhead Heritage Tramway**

### *Mission Statement*

Wirral Transport Museum will celebrate the pioneering place Birkenhead had in the development of public transport in Britain and reflect the history of public transport in the area. Vehicles will be kept in working order and restoration and conservation will take place in public view with an effort to pass skills to the next generation.

### *2030 Vision*

By 2030 Wirral Transport Museum and Birkenhead Heritage Tramway will be operated by a third sector organisation, supported by the Council:

- to meet the requirements under law for the operation of a heritage tramway
- by providing relevant museum's collections on long term loan
- to provide advice and guidance on the care of these collections.

Merseyside Tramway Preservation Society will have their own priorities and objectives for the operation of the museum and tramway. The priorities below are the priorities of the Museums Service for the site.

### *Vision aims*

Maximise the opportunities presented by the public investment in Birkenhead.

Complete the Community Asset Transfer of the site to Merseyside Tramway Preservation Society or a similar organisation.

Secure appropriate support for the management and operation of the museum and tramway.

Secure appropriate support, guidance and advice for care of the transport collections.

## **MEASURES OF SUCCESS**

- Annual visitor survey
- Collection of visitor numbers:
  - for Birkenhead Priory
  - for Williamson Art Gallery & Museum
  - for Wirral Transport Museum and Birkenhead Heritage Tramway
  - for Priory website
  - for Gallery website
  - for events
  - for school vis
- Conversion of browsing to sales in the online shop
- Outreach visits
- Participants in outreach visits

- Evaluations of individual programmes
- Annual stakeholder survey
- The Museum Service embedded in strategic and delivery plans of other council services.
- To be recognised across the Liverpool City Region and beyond as a vital part of the cultural landscape.

## **WIRRAL COUNCIL VALUES**

### **In Wirral Museums Service we are...**

#### *Customer Focused*

- We are responsive to our customers' needs and listen to their feedback on the work we do.
- We work hard to make our sites and what happens within them accessible to all.

#### *Accountable*

- We are proud of our Service and what we provide for residents and visitors.
- We take responsibility when things go wrong and continually strive to improve.
- We recognise our responsibilities as Council officers to respond quickly and effectively to senior officers and elected members.

#### *Professional*

- We treat members of our team with respect and acknowledge their contribution to the delivery of a customer-focused service.
- We treat colleagues across the council with respect and aim to respond efficiently and effectively to all requests.

#### *Ambitious*

- We are ambitious for our service and make every effort to continually improve.
- We support the continuing personal and professional development of all staff.

## **INFORMATION AVAILABLE ON REQUEST**

Item 1	Historical background
Item 2	SWOT Analysis
Item 3	Location Map – Williamson Art Gallery & Museum
Item 4	Location Map – Birkenhead Priory
Item 5	Collections overview

## **REFERENCE DOCUMENTS**

Museums Change Lives  
Wirral Plan 2020  
Museums Accreditation Scheme