

Copeland Borough Council – The Beacon Museum



Collections Care & Conservation Policy

2016 – 2021

Version 3: approved 5/4/2016



Proud of our past. Energised for our future.

Name of museum: The Beacon Museum, Whitehaven

Name of governing body: Copeland Borough Council

Date on which this policy was approved by governing body: 5/4/2016

Policy review procedure: The Collections Care and Conservation Policy will be published and reviewed from time to time, at least once every five years.

Date at which this policy is due for review: March 2021

1.0 Introduction

This Collections Care & Conservation Policy supports the Beacon's mission by providing the best possible collections care within the available resources. In line with the national standards required of a fully Accredited Museum, adoption of its aims, and delivery of its objectives will help the Beacon and the Borough Council achieve their ambitions for the transformation and prosperity of Copeland. This will be realised through increased access to collections for both leisure and lifelong learning and reflects the Borough's cultural and regeneration priorities. This increased access will be enabled through the care and conservation of the museum collection.

Providing for the care of the collection is a fundamental duty for the museum and this requires a combination of preventative measures - providing the best possible environment for preserving the collection - as well as remedial conservation treatments where the damage has already been done.

1.1 Statement of Purpose

"To enable everyone to explore Copeland's unique history by collecting, preserving, interpreting and displaying artefacts for inspiration, learning and enjoyment."

This policy fits with our mission and will help us to deliver access to our collections for the inspiration, learning and enjoyment of all users by preserving the Beacon's collections.

1.2 Relationship to other policies, plans and procedures

The Beacon's Collections Care and Conservation Plan 2016 – 2021 will help us deliver the statements in this policy. This policy must be also considered in conjunction with The Beacon's Forward Plan 2016 – 2018, Collections Development Policy, Emergency Plan and Documentation Manual, and in the strategic context of Copeland Borough Council's Corporate Strategy vision:-

"Copeland is a commercially focused organisation with a national reputation for high quality services."

Within the Council's Corporate Strategy 2016-2020, this policy especially relates to the ambitions and objectives:

Ambition 1: Town Centre Regeneration

Strategic Outcome 1: For our towns, villages and streets to reflect the prosperity of the area.

Ambition 2: Commercialisation

Strategic outcome 2: Grow the commercial activity of the Council to benefit the people of Copeland, ensuring the wealth generated in Copeland stays in Copeland.

Ambition 3: Employment, Skills and Social Wellbeing

Strategic Outcome 3a: Attract businesses, professionals and entrepreneurs to Copeland and retain our talented young people.

Strategic Outcome 3b: Work with partners to support the most vulnerable in our borough.

Ambition 4: Strengthen the way we operate

Strategic Outcome 4: Continually review our services to ensure they meet the needs of the people of Copeland and ensure they are efficient, effective and accessible.

Strategic Outcome 5: Maximising our opportunities for growth within the council and with our strategic partners.

1.3 Aims

- To achieve the at least the minimum standards in collections care
- To display, handle and store the collections in suitable conditions
- To ensure the collections are fully documented and kept up-to-date
- To minimise risk, damage, or deterioration to the collections
- To preserve the collections for future generations

1.4 The Collections

The Beacon's collection numbers over 30,000 objects, including a large social and industrial history collection, a rich collection of local fine art and ceramics. The Beacon also holds collections of archaeology, natural sciences, numismatics, photographs, prints, books and maps. Please refer to the Collections Development Policy 2016 – 2021 for a detailed breakdown of the collection subject areas.

1.5 Links to Forward Plan

This policy links to 7.3 in the Forward Plan: *Secure, preserve, document, interpret and develop the museum collections.*

2.0 Collections Review

Lancashire Conservation Studios carried out an extensive condition survey in January 2005 prior to the Beacon's redevelopment in 2006-7. Over 500 items of major importance and value were surveyed along with other items required for display or identified by Beacon staff to be in a poor condition. A conservation programme costing £150,000 was subsequently implemented to conserve over 300 items between 2006 and 2008. Key examples include costumes and a Sedan Chair now on display for the first time.

A full collection inventory took place every 3 years from 2006 to 2012 and this will be picked up from 2016 onwards, having lapsed due to staffing changes. This includes condition checking and identifying objects in need of conservation treatment.

The Beacon will identify areas for improvement based on best practice within the sector, using resources such as PAS 198 and the Collection Trust's *Benchmarks in Collections Care*.

3.0 Professional Conservation and Collections Care Advice and Services

When procuring conservation treatments or guidance, The Beacon will use only conservators listed on the ICON Conservation Register.

Minor repairs may be carried out by Beacon curatorial staff but only after advice has been sought from a conservator or under their supervision.

In order to ensure that the Beacon continues to develop informed policies and procedures relating to the preventative and remedial conservation of its collections the Beacon will use external sources of advice including the following:

- Collections Trust website
- National Trust Manual of Housekeeping
- Museum Practice
- Benchmarks in Collections Care
- ICON registered conservators
- Cumbria Archive Service Conservation Unit

4.0 Preventive Conservation

Preventive conservation refers to 'all measures and actions aimed at avoiding and minimizing future deterioration or loss' of objects (ICOM definition).

4.1 Provision of Suitable Buildings

The Beacon is committed to providing secure and environmentally controlled buildings to house the collections. Full details of the provision of suitable buildings are contained in the Beacon's Collections Care and Conservation Plan, 2016 – 2021.

4.2 Environmental monitoring

In line with the Beacon's commitment to using preventive conservation to preserve the collections, staff will:

- Monitor and improve the environment in all display and storage areas, including temperature, relative humidity, light, and dust.
- Prevent threats to collections through regular and effective housekeeping.
- Monitor pests and control accordingly.
- Use archival standard storage and display materials.
- Improve storage methods in line with Benchmarks in Collection Care recommended practice.
- Conservation clean any objects on open display.
- Document the condition of all objects.
- Document any remedial conservation of objects.

4.3 Environmental control

As part of its preventive conservation policy, the Beacon will control the environment in all storage and display areas to create conditions which will reduce damage and deterioration. Further details on this are specified in the Beacon's Collection Care and Conservation Plan, 2016 – 2021.

4.4 Handling

The Beacon will train all staff – and researchers/visitors, where appropriate – on correct handling of the collections. No untrained personnel are allowed to handle items from the collection. Researchers/visitors working the collection will be supervised by a member of staff at all times.

5.0 Remedial Conservation

Remedial conservation refers to 'all actions directly applied to an item or a group of items aimed at arresting current damaging processes or reinforcing their structure' (ICOM definition).

5.1 Setting Priorities for Conservation

Given the restricted level of conservation funds available, it is essential to set priorities for remedial conservation.

Priorities for conservation will be based on the following –

1. The artefact(s) are needed for display or research.
2. The artefact(s) have been identified as requiring urgent remedial attention resulting from the collection inventory and condition check.

These may be items that are already damaged, or are at risk of damage to themselves or other parts of the collection.

5.2 Conservation treatment

When procuring conservation treatments or guidance, The Beacon will use only conservators listed on the ICON Conservation Register.

Remedial conservation will only be carried out in consultation with curatorial staff.

5.3 Documenting conservation

Any conservation treatments will be documented following the SPECTRUM minimum standard for 'Conservation and Collections Care'.

6.0 Legal and ethical requirements

The Beacon staff and any conservation contractors will comply with all legal requirements relevant to Collections Care & Conservation, including:

- Health & Safety At Work Act 1974
- Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002
- Data Protection Act 1998

The Beacon staff and any conservation contractors will comply with the Museum Association's Code of Ethics 2015.

7.0 Emergency Plan & Practice

A detailed Emergency Plan to allow for prompt and effective salvage of any collections at risk is provided for The Beacon (see MUS/66), and will be reviewed and updated at least every five years, and after any major organisational or building changes. Copies are controlled and restricted, provided to Director, Operations Officer, Head of Regeneration & Community, and the Fire Service.

In-house Emergency Plan practice days will be held for the whole team once a year.

8.0 Policy Awareness

To achieve maximum understanding and awareness, the approved version of this document will be issued to all team members and freelance staff working to support the care and conservation of the collection.

Curatorial staff will attend the Executive Committee and any related preliminary meetings to tackle any queries raised by elected members relating to this policy.

In addition to hard copy versions being available at The Beacon, this document will also be available in alternative formats, languages and print sizes as well as downloadable from the museum's website www.thebeacon-whitehaven.co.uk.

9.0 Policy Review

This Collections Care & Conservation Policy requires adoption by Copeland Borough Council via Executive Committee after formal review every 5 years.

This document will be reviewed and submitted to Copeland's Executive Committee by March 2021, or sooner as required.