Museum Collections Development Policy

Name of museum: Valence House Museum

Name of governing body: London Borough of Barking and Dagenham Council

Date on which this policy was approved by governing body: 23 June 2015

Policy review procedure: The collections development 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: 23 June 2020

Arts Council England will be notified of any changes to the collections development policy, and the implications of any such changes for the future of collections.
1.0 Relationship to other relevant policies/plans of the organisation:

1.1 Valence House Museum's statement of purpose is: Valence House exists to inspire learning and pride by collecting, preserving and engaging people with the heritage of Barking and Dagenham.

1.2 The governing body will ensure that both acquisition and disposal are carried out openly and with transparency.

1.3 By definition, Valence House Museum has a long-term purpose and holds collections in trust for the benefit of the public in relation to its stated objectives. The governing body therefore accepts the principle that sound curatorial reasons must be established before consideration is given to any acquisition to the collection, or the disposal of any items in the museum’s collection.

1.4 Acquisitions outside the current stated policy will only be made in exceptional circumstances.

1.5 Valence House Museum recognises its responsibility, when acquiring additions to its collections, to ensure that care of collections, documentation arrangements and use of collections will meet the requirements of the Museum Accreditation Standard. This includes using SPECTRUM primary procedures for collections management. It will take into account limitations on collecting imposed by such factors as staffing, storage and care of collection arrangements.

1.6 Valence House Museum will undertake due diligence and make every effort not to acquire, whether by purchase, gift, bequest or exchange, any object or specimen unless the governing body or responsible officer is satisfied that the museum can acquire a valid title to the item in question.

1.7 Valence House Museum will not undertake disposal motivated principally by financial reasons.

1.8 This policy operates alongside and should be read in conjunction with the following policies:
   - Valence House Museum Care and Conservation Policy
   - Valence House Museum Access Policy
   - Valence House Museum Documentation Policy
   - Valence House Archive and Local Studies Library Collection Development Policy

2.0 History of the collections

2.1 A museum was founded at Valence House by Dagenham Borough Council in 1938. The then Borough Librarian, John Gerard O’Leary collected material of local interest and organised a series of annual exhibitions about life in Essex through the ages. The material predominantly collected at this time was fine art and ephemera.

2.2 In 1963 the collection of Fanshawe portraits, archive and library was donated to the borough. This comprised 40 oil portraits by artists such as William Dobson, Sir Peter Lely, Marcus Gheeraerts the younger and Cornelis Janssen van Ceulen, with
dates ranging from 1560 to 1949. This collection was subsequently added to in 1972, 2004, 2007 and 2014. Valence House operated as the headquarters of the Borough’s Library Service, with one museum display room until 1974.

2.3 The entire building became the Borough’s Local History Museum when the new Central Library opened in Barking in 1974.

2.4 In the late 1990s emphasis was placed on collecting household items from the 1930s with a view to developing an independent Becontree Estate house. The project was never implemented, resulting in material from this period being over represented within the museum’s collection.

2.5 In 2002 the Borough’s new Local Studies Library was opened at Valence House, with management of the service passing to Heritage Services in May 2003.

2.6 The Archive collections have been built up alongside the museum collections since 1938 by Borough Librarians and museum staff. In February 2003 the first Borough Archivist was appointed to care for and develop the archive collections, at which point the archive and museum collections were separated.

2.7 Valence House Museum operates alongside the Borough Archive service and Local Studies Library.

3.0 An overview of current collections

3.1 Valence House Museum’s collection totals around 20,000 objects, consisting of a wide range of artefacts which reflect the history and continuing development of the community of Barking and Dagenham. The collection spans a wide period of time, from Prehistory to the modern day.

3.2 The collections are strongest in their coverage of social history in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

3.3 Specific collections of note include:
  - Social history material (most social history themes are represented including domestic and family life, personal life, working and community life, and particularly includes items from the 1930s)
  - Fine art (including artwork by local artists, artwork that shows local scenes, and the locally, nationally and internationally significant collection of Fanshawe family portraits)
  - Archaeological material (Valence House Museum is the recognised repository for all archaeological finds from within the borough, including the nationally significant site of Barking Abbey)

4.0 Themes and priorities for future collecting

4.1 Valence House Museum’s priority for future collection focuses on five key areas:
  - Local social history – this includes contemporary collecting and intends to fill the gaps that exist within the collection
  - Local industrial history – this aspect of local history is hugely underrepresented within the collection and will include contemporary collecting
Contemporary Barking and Dagenham – material representing modern and current Barking and Dagenham that doesn’t fall within the areas outlined above

Archaeology – the redevelopment programme being undertaken in the borough will lead to an increase in the number of archaeological deposits at the museum over the next 5 years

Fine art – to build on and expand the museum’s collection of nationally significant works of art, particularly the Fanshawe family portrait collection. This would also include modern and contemporary art that relates to and/or reflects the lives and cultural diversity of people in Barking and Dagenham (both by artists living or working in the locality and artists with national and international reputations), modern and contemporary art of high quality in various media that supports the existing collection and topographical images of Barking and Dagenham and the immediate locality, together with works depicting renowned personalities and events in Barking and Dagenham’s history

4.2 These key areas have been highlighted as a priority following previous additions to the collection that have identified gaps in both the collection itself and in local knowledge, such as the purchase in 2004 of a lifebelt made by Fosbury’s of Barking, who were discovered to have made the lifejackets for HMS Titanic. The London Borough of Barking and Dagenham is a growing borough, and its population is in a constant state of flux. As such, contemporary collecting remains a priority for staff.

4.3 Valence House Museum is currently unable to accept large items into the collection due to a lack of storage space.

5.0 Themes and priorities for rationalisation and disposal

5.1 Valence House Museum recognises that the principles on which priorities for rationalisation and disposal are determined will be through a formal review process that identifies which collections are included and excluded from the review. The outcome of review and any subsequent rationalisation will not reduce the quality or significance of the collection and will result in a more useable, well managed collection.

5.2 The procedures used will meet professional standards. The process will be documented, open and transparent. There will be clear communication with key stakeholders about the outcomes and the process.

5.3 The priorities for rationalisation within the Museum collections are the Social History and Archaeology collections. Poor collection practices in the past have resulted in a quantity of items that do not fit the museum’s collecting policy, being either duplicates, of unknown provenance or of unknown connection to the collection.

5.4 Criteria to be used when identifying items for potential disposal:

- The items are no longer relevant to the Museum’s mission and are unlikely to have future potential for display or research
- They are considered more relevant to the collection of another museum or heritage body
- The Museum is unable to provide adequate care for the items
- The items are too badly damaged or deteriorated to be of any use or future use for the purposes of the Museum
They are items which pose a health and safety risk, where disposal is required to comply with relevant legislation or to remove the risk to staff from these items.

Duplicate items (after consideration of an item’s provenance and research value as well as physical duplication)

They are replica, exhibition or prop items which should have never been accessioned

5.5 Within the archaeology collection the environmental samples and bulk finds need to be reduced, particularly the pottery from Barking Abbey, which will increase the space for growth. This will be undertaken with guidance from Museum of London Archaeology (MoLA).

6.0 Legal and ethical framework for acquisition and disposal of items

6.1 Valence House Museum recognises its responsibility to work within the parameters of the Museum Association Code of Ethics when considering acquisition and disposal.

7.0 Collecting policies of other museums

7.1 Valence House Museum co-ordinates its collecting with the Archive and Local Studies Library. In general, it is agreed that the collecting areas of each service are:

- Museum – 3D material
  Art works
  Ephemera
  Framed works
  Textiles
- Archive - Photographs
  Digital media
  Archive material
  Maps and plans
- Local Studies Library – Duplicate ephemera
  Research material (books, etc)

7.2 Valence House Museum will take account of the collecting policies of other museums and organisations collecting in the same or related areas or subject fields. It will consult with these organisations where conflicts of interest may arise or to define areas of specialism, in order to avoid unnecessary duplication and waste of resources. Specific reference is made to the following organisation(s):

- Redbridge Museum Service
- Waltham Forest Museum Service
- Newham Museum Service
- Havering Museum Service
8.0 Acquisition

8.1 Valence House Museum’s policy for agreeing acquisitions is:

8.1.1 Only the Museum Curator is permitted to authorise acquisitions to the museum.

8.1.2 In the instance that the Museum Curator is not available to oversee the acquisition of items for their collections, a collection supervisor from either the Archive or Local Studies Library is permitted to accept the acquisition on their behalf.

8.1.3 In all instances a Museum Entry Form will be completed and signed by the depositor at the point of deposition.

8.1.4 Material that does not fall within the collecting policy of the Museum will be offered to the Archive or Local Studies Library, depending on which collection the material best suits.

8.1.5 Where contentious objects arise, agreement will be made between the Curator, Archivist and Local Studies Librarian regarding in which collection the objects(s) will be deposited.

8.2 Valence House Museum will not acquire any object or specimen unless it is satisfied that the object or specimen has not been acquired in, or exported from, its country of origin (or any intermediate country in which it may have been legally owned) in violation of that country’s laws. (For the purposes of this paragraph ‘country of origin’ includes the United Kingdom).

8.3 In accordance with the provisions of the UNESCO 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, which the UK ratified with effect from November 1 2002, and the Dealing in Cultural Objects (Offences) Act 2003, the museum will reject any items that have been illicitly traded. The governing body will be guided by the national guidance on the responsible acquisition of cultural property issued by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport in 2005.

9.0 Human remains

9.1 As Valence House Museum holds or intends to acquire human remains from any period, it will follow the procedures in the ‘Guidance for the care of human remains in museums’ issued by DCMS in 2005.

10.0 Biological and geological material

10.1 Valence House Museum will not acquire any biological or geological material.

11.0 Archaeological material

11.1 Valence House Museum will not acquire archaeological material (including excavated ceramics) in any case where the governing body or responsible officer
has any suspicion that the circumstances of their recovery involved a failure to follow the appropriate legal procedures.

11.2 In England, Wales and Northern Ireland the procedures include reporting finds to the landowner or occupier of the land and to the proper authorities in the case of possible treasure (i.e. the Coroner for Treasure) as set out in the Treasure Act 1996 (as amended by the Coroners & Justice Act 2009).

12.0 Exceptions

12.1 Any exceptions to the above clauses will only be because Valence House Museum is:
- acting as an externally approved repository of last resort for material of local (UK) origin
- acting with the permission of authorities with the requisite jurisdiction in the country of origin

12.2 In these cases Valence House Museum will be open and transparent in the way it makes decisions and will act only with the express consent of an appropriate outside authority. The museum will document when these exceptions occur.

13.0 Spoliation

13.1 Valence House Museum will use the statement of principles ‘Spoliation of Works of Art during the Nazi, Holocaust and World War II period’, issued for non-national museums in 1999 by the Museums and Galleries Commission.

14.0 The Repatriation and Restitution of objects and human remains

14.1 Valence House Museum’s governing body, acting on the advice of the museum’s professional staff may take a decision to return human remains (unless covered by the ‘Guidance for the care of human remains in museums’ issued by DCMS in 2005), objects or specimens to a country or people of origin. The Valence House Museum will take such decisions on a case by case basis; within its legal position and taking into account all ethical implications and available guidance. This will mean that the procedures described in 16.1-5 will be followed but the remaining procedures are not appropriate.

14.2 The disposal of human remains from museums in England, Northern Ireland and Wales will follow the procedures in the ‘Guidance for the care of human remains in museums’.

15.0 Disposal procedures

15.1 All disposals will be undertaken with reference to the SPECTRUM Primary Procedures on disposal.

15.2 The governing body will confirm that it is legally free to dispose of an item. Agreements on disposal made with donors will also be taken into account.
15.3 When disposal of a museum object is being considered, Valence House Museum will establish if it was acquired with the aid of an external funding organisation. In such cases, any conditions attached to the original grant will be followed. This may include repayment of the original grant and a proportion of the proceeds if the item is disposed of by sale.

15.4 When disposal is motivated by curatorial reasons the procedures outlined below will be followed and the method of disposal may be by gift, sale, exchange or as a last resort - destruction.

15.5 The decision to dispose of material from the collections will be taken by the governing body only after full consideration of the reasons for disposal. Other factors including public benefit, the implications for the museum’s collections and collections held by museums and other organisations collecting the same material or in related fields will be considered. Expert advice will be obtained and the views of stakeholders such as donors, researchers, local and source communities and others served by the museum will also be sought.

15.6 A decision to dispose of a specimen or object, whether by gift, exchange, sale or destruction (in the case of an item too badly damaged or deteriorated to be of any use for the purposes of the collections or for reasons of health and safety), will be the responsibility of the governing body of Valence House Museum acting on the advice of professional curatorial staff, and not of the curator or manager of the collection acting alone.

15.7 Once a decision to dispose of material in the collection has been taken, priority will be given to retaining it within the public domain. It will therefore be offered in the first instance, by gift or sale, directly to other Accredited Museums likely to be interested in its acquisition.

15.8 If the material is not acquired by any Accredited museum to which it was offered as a gift or for sale, then the museum community at large will be advised of the intention to dispose of the material normally through a notice on the MA’s Find an Object web listing service, an announcement in the Museums Association’s Museums Journal or in other specialist publications and websites.

15.9 The announcement relating to gift or sale will indicate the number and nature of specimens or objects involved, and the basis on which the material will be transferred to another institution. Preference will be given to expressions of interest from other Accredited Museums. A period of at least two months will be allowed for an interest in acquiring the material to be expressed. At the end of this period, if no expressions of interest have been received, the museum may consider disposing of the material to other interested individuals and organisations giving priority to organisations in the public domain.

15.10 Any monies received by the museum governing body from the disposal of items will be applied solely and directly for the benefit of the collections. This normally means the purchase of further acquisitions. In exceptional cases, improvements relating to the care of collections in order to meet or exceed Accreditation requirements relating to the risk of damage to and deterioration of the collections may be
justifiable. Any monies received in compensation for the damage, loss or destruction of items will be applied in the same way. Advice on those cases where the monies are intended to be used for the care of collections will be sought from the Arts Council England.

15.11 The proceeds of a sale will be allocated so it can be demonstrated that they are spent in a manner compatible with the requirements of the Accreditation standard. Money must be restricted to the long-term sustainability, use and development of the collection.

15.12 Full records will be kept of all decisions on disposals and the items involved and proper arrangements made for the preservation and/or transfer, as appropriate, of the documentation relating to the items concerned, including photographic records where practicable in accordance with SPECTRUM Procedure on deaccession and disposal.

16.0 Disposal by exchange

16.1 The nature of disposal by exchange means that Valence House Museum will not necessarily be in a position to exchange the material with another Accredited museum. The governing body will therefore ensure that issues relating to accountability and impartiality are carefully considered to avoid undue influence on its decision-making process.

16.2 In cases where the governing body wishes for sound curatorial reasons to exchange material directly with Accredited or non-Accredited museums, with other organisations or with individuals, the procedures in paragraphs 16.1-5 will apply.

16.3 If the exchange is proposed to be made with a specific Accredited museum, other Accredited museums which collect in the same or related areas will be directly notified of the proposal and their comments will be requested.

16.4 If the exchange is proposed with a non-Accredited museum, with another type of organisation or with an individual, the museum will place a notice on the MA’s Find an Object web listing service, or make an announcement in the Museums Association’s Museums Journal or in other specialist publications and websites (if appropriate).

16.5 Both the notification and announcement must provide information on the number and nature of the specimens or objects involved both in the museum’s collection and those intended to be acquired in exchange. A period of at least two months must be allowed for comments to be received. At the end of this period, the governing body must consider the comments before a final decision on the exchange is made.

17.0 Disposal by destruction

17.1 If it is not possible to dispose of an object through transfer or sale, the governing body may decide to destroy it.
17.2 It is acceptable to destroy material of low intrinsic significance (duplicate mass-produced articles or common specimens which lack significant provenance) where no alternative method of disposal can be found.

17.3 Destruction is also an acceptable method of disposal in cases where an object is in extremely poor condition, has high associated health and safety risks or is part of an approved destructive testing request identified in an organisation’s research policy.

17.4 Where necessary, specialist advice will be sought to establish the appropriate method of destruction. Health and safety risk assessments will be carried out by trained staff where required.

17.5 The destruction of objects should be witnessed by an appropriate member of the museum workforce. In circumstances where this is not possible, eg the destruction of controlled substances, a police certificate should be obtained and kept in the relevant object history file.