

MUSEUMS WORCESTERSHIRE STRATEGIC PLAN 2025-30



For review by Worcester City Council and Worcestershire County Council's
Joint Museum Committee, 6th March 2025

To be reviewed March 2030

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

We at Museums Worcestershire want to share with you our passion for the unique art, artefacts and stories that have shaped the identity of Worcester and Worcestershire for over 2000 years.

We believe museums help to make sense of the world by inspiring deeper knowledge of our history and culture and we want to make our collections, buildings and stories accessible, relevant and enjoyable for you.

The roles of Museums Worcestershire are to:

Enrich the cultural heritage and future of Worcester, Worcestershire and beyond.

Enable shared high-quality experiences, discovery and interaction at the County Museum at Hartlebury Castle, The Commandery, Worcester City Art Gallery & Museum, the joint collections store and through offsite projects and programmes.

Encourage understanding through the preservation and interpretation of the museum collections of Worcester City Council and Worcestershire County Council, and to make the collections widely accessible.

Expand opportunities by supporting other museums and organisations in Worcestershire and beyond.

How Museums Worcestershire works:

Be relevant by

- Understanding our visitors and those who engage with us, and being responsive to their needs
- Planning in partnership and being flexible to change
- Connecting to wider audiences

Be ambitious by

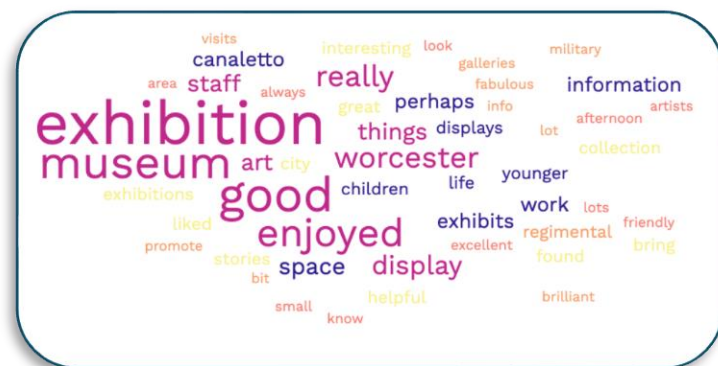
- Building our reputation for quality with our visitors, our peers and stakeholders
- Leading and enabling projects that bring investment to the heritage of the city and county
- Fulfilling museums' ability to change lives, in both everyday and extraordinary ways
- Working entrepreneurially and learning from experimentation

Be dedicated by

- Ensuring all at Museums Worcestershire have a shared aim to make a difference to our communities and visitors
- Having pride in our expertise and the significance of our museums and collections
- Ensuring financial resilience

MUSEUMS WORCESTERSHIRE MUSEUMS

During the planning towards this strategic plan, visitors to the three Museums Worcestershire museums were asked about their visits:



Worcester City Art Gallery & Museum brings great art to the doorsteps of Worcester people. The ambition of its high-quality exhibition programme and its central location and good transport links bring visitors from across the country to spend time and money in Worcester.

The beautiful Victorian building was purpose built, funded by Worcester residents for Worcester residents and is a focus of civic pride.

Visitors expect to see treasures from Worcester as well as a wide-ranging programme full of new ideas to interest them.

The Commandery is a rare medieval building, saved by Worcester City Council to share Worcester's place in history with local people and with tourists.

Its atmospheric spaces are mysterious and magical to explore with an authentic sense that the last battle of the English Civil War really happened on this very spot.

The facilities, events and activities bring a wide diversity of audiences into its ancient rooms. Situated in the heart of Worcester, it also feels like a safe space for families, schools and the local community.

Worcestershire County Museum encompasses the wide story of the county. It is known for the great experience it offers school students and families. It engages deeply with volunteers, the Gypsy Roma Traveller community and people living with dementia and their families.

Approaching up the long drive at Hartlebury Castle is an escape from normal life, where visitors feel the impact of the changing seasons and the inspiration of the special items on display.

WORCESTER CITY AND WORCESTERSHIRE COUNTY MUSEUM COLLECTIONS

Considered to be the eighth oldest museum service in the country, Worcestershire people have actively collected and preserved the City and County's culture and heritage since the 1820s. Two significant groups spearheaded collecting artefacts and specimens to ensure Worcestershire's heritage was not lost to future generations:

1833

Museum collecting began in earnest in 1833 with the formation of the Worcestershire Natural History Society led by Sir Charles Hastings. These early and now extremely significant natural history collections were bought by the Corporation of Worcester to ensure their preservation in 1881. The Victoria Institute was purpose built by the City, funded by the proceeds of the Worcestershire 1882 exhibition, to house a Library, Museum & Art Gallery and School of Art & Science in 1896.

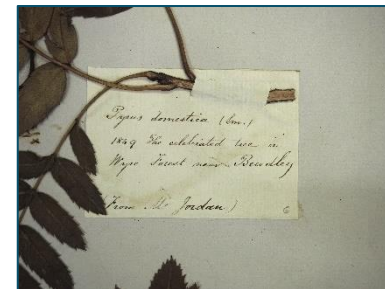
1966

Worcestershire County Museum was opened at Hartlebury Castle to house "33 tonnes" of objects from the Parker family. The Tickenhill Collection was established in the 1930s when Mrs Alice Parker and Mr Joseph F Parker began to preserve the disappearing rural heritage of Worcestershire. This collection is now held in a charitable trust for the benefit of the public with Worcestershire County Council as the charity's trustee.

Worcestershire is placed within a very typical English landscape. The County town, Worcester, is centrally located in England, developing around the crossing point of the River Severn at low tide. Worcestershire's rivers are a respected force with floods reclaiming both farmland and city streets on a regular basis. Worcester sits in the shadow of the Malvern Hills, one of Britain's most important classic geological areas with eleven out of the thirteen recognised geological periods of time represented in the rocks of Worcestershire. The historic and new market towns of North and South Worcestershire and their surrounding countryside tell of thousands of years of agriculture and industry development, success and decline.

Worcestershire's special position encompassing urban, rural, river, tidal water and hill has created museum collections significant both regionally and nationally that allows us to explore the quintessential English landscape and the stories of the people who, over thousands of years, have lived and worked in them.

The Collections Centre store, where the reserve collections are housed, has developed over twenty years as an accessible professional hub, hosting researchers, skills sharing events, volunteers and tours. Wider use of external expertise has identified previously unknown items in the collection with international significance. Museums Worcestershire has led the profession in discussions and in Historic England's research about the management of stored collections.



ABOUT MUSEUMS WORCESTERSHIRE

Museums Worcestershire is the civic museum service for Worcestershire County Council and Worcester City Council. Both local authorities had long supported their museums – at the City for 150 years and at the County for 50. In 2010, the two services joined together, creating a successful, efficient and ambitious service.

Museums Worcestershire is governed by a joint committee of elected members from both authorities, with a fundraising and advocacy charity working alongside. The service receives around two-thirds of its operating budget from the two authorities, with the rest from earned income. In addition, external funding is levered in every year supporting staff, activities and capital development. Development funding varies year-on-year but, on average, is comparable to the amount contributed by each authority.

The service employs 65 staff across both authorities, on contracted hours and casual contracts, together making up 29 FTEs. Staff are supported by 4,000 hours of volunteer time given annually. Together, these teams efficiently operate the three museums, care for the two collections and initiate and deliver exhibitions and collections development, learning and community projects, capital developments, commercial initiatives, fundraising and grant applications.

During the period of the last Strategic Plan, the service developed the three museum sites and cared for Worcester and Worcestershire's collections, enabling their powerful stories to be given voice both at the three museums and through a series of wider projects. Our developments have attracted new visitors and brought £3million a year of their spending into Worcestershire, benefitting local businesses and the mixed economy of Worcester City Centre.

The Commandery was relaunched in 2017, with renewed focus on its important Civil War history. Research into the power of Worcester's Civil War history raised the profile of Worcester's heritage internationally. Since then, dwell time for Commandery visitors has continued to increase with further additions to the displays, leading to Visit England awarding it a Gold Visitor Attraction in 2023. An Escape Room, improved café, events initiated by the team and by partners and a full activity programme have increased the diversity of site users, bringing a wide audience to experience The Commandery in ways that suit them best.

Hartlebury Castle re-launched in 2018 as a significant visitor destination, run in partnership with Hartlebury Castle Preservation Trust. New displays have continued to update parts of the Worcestershire County Museum. School visits and outreach have grown, and the new Museums Worcestershire Wellbeing Manifesto has focused on developing activities to support looked-after children, those living with dementia and their families, and those at risk of loneliness. The County Museum at Hartlebury Castle is now in need of significant investment, with associated risks, to enable its collections to be accessible and to meet the challenge of the next decades.

Worcester City Art Gallery & Museum's exhibitions programme has brought national visitors to unique blockbuster exhibitions rarely seen in regional venues of this size. Its aging visitor facilities are being renewed and galleries updated for new displays of the City's treasures. Visitors have closely engaged with the planning and development of Worcester's collections, with significant philanthropic support coming both from local and international donors.

Museums should plan effectively for the long-term and be able to adapt in a changing environment. Our planning is informed by a robust body of research and data, be that visitor feedback, income targets or commissioned expertise.

Museums offer an authentic, real experience in a world of artificial intelligence, algorithms and screens. Objects and their stories have the power to make real improvement in the lives of visitors and communities, offering a unique route to learning, emotional connection and mental wellbeing. We provide safe, neutral spaces where people visiting with loved ones or on their own all feel involved and part of Worcestershire's culture and heritage.

MUSEUMS WORCESTERSHIRE STRATEGIC AIMS 2025-2030

Build deep connections

In 2030, the museums will be places where people can come together to learn and exchange ideas, valuing different experiences.

We will work in open and constructive partnerships to help us use collections and stories to improve people's lives.

We will value the skills of our staff, volunteers and suppliers to harness the power of Worcestershire's history, science and art.

Protect and uncover Worcestershire's irreplaceable stories

In 2030, the civic collections of the Worcestershire local authorities will reflect the lives, memories, creativity and biodiversity of the county and the people who consider it home.

These stories will be celebrated and will inspire visitors to our area.

Heritage that is in danger of loss or obscurity will have support networks to safeguard it and share it widely.

Develop and diversify our audience

In 2030, the museums will have planned and implemented ways to help more people engage and will have identified and reduced barriers to access and growth.

Audiences connecting with Worcester and Worcestershire's collections and museums will expand: by reaching into broader geographic areas and by increasing participation from wider audience segments and demographics within Worcestershire.

Be financially resilient

In 2030, each museum will maximise its spaces and resources to be supported by a range of income streams, grant funders and individual donations both of money and of time.

Museums Worcestershire will be confident to invest in its expertise, in the strengths of its museums and the collections it manages so that future generations in Worcester and Worcestershire continue to benefit from their museums.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

Museums Worcestershire continually monitors its performance and responds to visitor and participant feedback. The following performance indicators are reviewed internally and with its local authorities, comparing with a five-year trend and benchmarking with other museums and visitor attractions wherever possible.

	Intended to measure
Monthly	
Number of visitors, all sites	Participation
Visitor trend against previous years, all sites	Growth
Website user sessions	Reach
Social media followers	Engagement
Admissions income, Commandery and County Museum	Viability
Retail income, City Art Gallery & Museum and Commandery	Viability
Café income, City Art Gallery & Museum and Commandery	Viability
Education bookings income, all sites	Viability
Room bookings income, all sites	Viability
Quarterly	
Income performance against target (%)	Viability
Narrative, visitor experience comments, all sites	Satisfaction
Number of children and young people visiting as part of a formal education programme	Engagement
Number of learners engaged in informal education programme, adults and children	Engagement
Annually	
Economic impact, using AIM tool, all sites	Impact
Residents' surveys, Museum User Satisfaction	Satisfaction
School visit and learning resource loans numbers broken down by key stage	Impact
Number of volunteers and number of volunteer hours contributed	Impact
Wellbeing, using UCL tool, change in mental positivity through participation	Impact
Number of objects lent to other venues and visitor numbers at those venues.	National & international profile
Acquisitions by city collection and county collection	Profile
When undertaken: Audience Finder and VAQAS survey snapshot, trend against previous years	Satisfaction
Narrative case studies where significant impact has been made for people taking part in projects and programmes	Impact
Narrative case study on improvements to collections	Impact

STRATEGIC CONTEXT

Museums Worcestershire Strategic Plan sits under the Worcester City Plan and Worcestershire County Council's Plan for Worcestershire.



The work of the museum service is included within the following strategies, at the County Council:

- Adults Prevention and Early Intervention Strategy: Coming Together to Ensure the Wellbeing of Everyone, 2023-2028
- Worcestershire Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy, 2022-2032
- Worcestershire Education and Skills Strategy: Ensuring a Good Education for Every Child in Worcestershire, 2019-2024
- Herefordshire and Worcestershire All-Age Autism Strategy, 2024-2029
- Worcestershire Destination Management Plan: Growing our Billion Pound Visitor Economy, 2024-2029,

and at the City Council:

- Worcester City Council Values and Competency Framework
- Worcester Arts and Culture Strategy, 2022
- Worcester City Council Customer Service Strategy, 2024-2028
- Worcester City Council's Environmental Sustainability Strategy 2020-2030
- Worcester City Play Plan
- Worcester Town Investment Plan, 2021
- A Vision for Worcester, City Centre Master Plan, 2019

This Strategic Plan 2025-2030 will be underpinned by annual service plans and annual budgets, approved by Museums Worcestershire's governing committee in June and October each year, detailing the work to be undertaken in the upcoming year and the resources required to meet the strategic aims. These annual service plans, in turn, direct every staff member's work plan and performance review, and set out the framework within which museum volunteers contribute their time.

This Strategic Plan forms the core section of wider service and project business plans.

Our partners are able to reference Museums Worcestershire's Strategic Plan to support their own business planning.

PRIORITY DEVELOPMENTS 2025-2030

These priorities have been developed in consultation with museum staff, senior officers at the City and County authorities, and from Councillor workshops and discussion.

These will form the big capital developments and underpin incremental change through annual review and development.

These priorities will drive grant applications, budget planning and development of philanthropy over the period of this strategic plan.

