

SCIENCE MUSEUM GROUP

SCIENCE MUSEUM GROUP CONSERVATION POLICY JUNE 2018

This Policy is part of the Science Museum Group's Collections Management Policy framework, which consists of:

- SMG Collection Development Strategy
- SMG Collecting Policy Statements
- SMG Collection Information and Access Policy
- SMG Conservation Policy

SCIENCE MUSEUM GROUP CONSERVATION POLICY JUNE 2018

GOVERNING BODY: BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF THE SCIENCE MUSEUM

DATE FOR APPROVAL: 2018

DATE FOR REVIEW: 2023

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The National Heritage Act 1983 requires the Science Museum Group (SMG) to: care for, preserve and add to the objects in the collection, exhibit them to the public and make them available for study and research; and to promote the public's enjoyment and understanding of science and technology, and of the development of those subjects.
- 1.2 The museums in the Science Museum Group share a mission to inspire futures by:
 - Creative exploration of science, technical innovation and industry, and how they made and sustain modern society;
 - Building a scientifically literate society, using the history, present and future of science, technology, medicine, transport and media to grow science capital;
 - Inspiring the next generations of scientists, inventors and engineers.
- 1.3 This policy supports the SMG strategic priority to sustain and grow our world-class collection.
- 1.4 This policy sets out the principles by which the Science Museum Group of museums (the Science Museum, London, the Museum of Science and Industry, Manchester, the National Railway Museum, York and Shildon, and the National Science and Media Museum, Bradford) will conserve the items in the collection.
- 1.5 Science Museum Group aims to achieve an appropriate balance between the use of, access to and preservation of the collection. The principles that govern the Group's approach to collections care and conservation are informed by:
 - Risk management;
 - Compliance with relevant legislation;
 - Following appropriate sectors' standards and best practice;
 - Sustainability;
 - Effective training and communication of conservation and collections care issues to employees and relevant stakeholders.
- 1.6 The purpose of conservation is to minimise deterioration and damage to the collection and through these activities enable its use for research, display, learning and enjoyment¹.

2. POLICY

- 2.1 It is the policy of the Science Museum Group that:
 - While conservation treatment will be necessary to allow items to be displayed or researched, where possible, the collection is preserved by reducing the potential for deterioration and damage rather than through treatment and repair. That is, preventive conservation methods are applied in preference to interventive conservation treatments.
 - Operating objects are part of the collection. They will be chosen for operation, and re-assessed regularly, using the published procedures. Objects will be prepared for operation only when the written agreement of the collections teams, and any further project or financial approval, is in place.
 - Any item known or suspected to contain hazardous material will be assessed and managed in line with legal and regulatory requirements, and best practice.
- 2.2 The following definitions are set out in the British Standard PAS197:2009 'Code of practice for cultural collections management':

Collections care (Preventive conservation): the range of activities intended to safeguard a collection. Note: these can include organisation policies, security, storage, cleaning, maintenance, handling, scientific investigation, environmental monitoring and control, conservation, provision of surrogates and emergency planning.

Conservation: interventive techniques applied to an item to achieve chemical and physical stabilisation for the purpose of extending the useful life of the item and to ensure its continued availability for exhibition and study.

¹This policy takes account of relevant standards and frameworks, such as Benchmarks in Collections Care, BSI PAS 198 Specification for managing environmental conditions for cultural collections and BS EN 16085:2012 Conservation of Cultural property – Methodology for sampling from materials of cultural property – General rules.

3. COLLECTIONS CARE PRINCIPLES

- 3.1 Preventive conservation requirements seek to balance, as far as possible, access and use of the collection with the need to preserve collection items. Measures are taken to prevent damage and minimise the risk of deterioration of items wherever they are stored, handled, displayed, exhibited, operated or loaned.
- 3.2 SMG aims to provide suitable, stable and sustainable environmental conditions for the collection.
- 3.3 Systems are provided to monitor, and measures put in place to maintain and improve the state of the collection and the environments and spaces in which it is stored or displayed. Systems include environmental monitoring and benchmarking assessments of areas where collections are housed.
- 3.4 Guidelines are provided for the appropriate environmental conditions in which to store, handle, display, study and transport the collection.
- 3.5 Display material and methods used for, and in proximity to, collection items will be appropriate for use.
- 3.6 All museum staff, interns and volunteers are to follow agreed procedures, guidelines and training for collections care activities including handling, cleaning, storing, transporting, acquisition, display, lending, disposing of collection items and reporting of damage.
- 3.7 The risk of damage to the collection by pests is reduced by implementing and maintaining a comprehensive integrated pest management (IPM) programme across the entire Museum estate.
- 3.8 The state of conservation of all items required for study, display, exhibition or loan is assessed and surveys of the collection on display and in storage are conducted periodically, the frequency depending on the vulnerability of the materials they contain.

4. CONSERVATION TREATMENT PRINCIPLES

- 4.1 The treatment of items required for public and research access or where condition requires urgent action to prevent loss, will be prioritised over conservation of items that are stable but not required for immediate use.
- 4.2 Conservation treatments are conducted by qualified or accredited conservators, or trainees under supervision, in accordance with international best practice and ethical guidelines. External conservation contractors should be professionally accredited.
- 4.3 All treatments carried out on the collection are documented fully and the resultant records are available and understandable in the collections management database.
- 4.4 Treatment methods use safe, stable, tested materials that, where possible, compromise neither further conservation treatment or scientific examination, nor the authenticity of the object.
- 4.5 SMG does not provide advice to the general public on how to undertake conservation or recommend any one particular specialist. Enquiries are referred to the Institute of Conservation (Icon) Conservation Register.

5. OPERATING OBJECTS PRINCIPLES

- 5.1 As leaders in science and technology communication and learning, the SMG remains committed to operating historic objects, recognising that the high levels of interest and the educational value in "working objects" make a meaningful connection between the museum's visitors and the collections.
- 5.2 The SMG's selection, risk assessment and review processes (based on the tenets of the National Heritage Act, 1983) are to ensure that working objects are used in a safe, secure and sustainable way, according to best practice, now and for the future, letting the importance and condition of the object and the quality of the evidence for an earlier state guide the decision.
- 5.3 Operating objects will be chosen using the published procedure for selecting and reviewing use of the collection items. This is to ensure use, care and preservation is appropriate for the object, minimising wear and deterioration as far as possible during use.
- 5.4 Operation of objects includes any use of an object beyond static viewing, for example working objects, single use for filming and objects that visitors interact with such as during locomotive cab or rail carriage access.
- 5.5 Operating objects may be considered for restoration to operating condition; the treatment may require a higher level of intervention than would be considered for static display. Treatment will preserve the integrity and original fabric of the items as far as possible and should be detectable while not necessarily conspicuous.
- 5.6 Restoration work will be agreed in consultation with conservators prior to work starting.
- 5.7 Restoration work will be carried out by appropriately trained and qualified engineers, technicians and conservators. Volunteers assisting with the restorations will be supervised throughout the work.

- 5.8 All restoration work must be fully documented, understandable and kept with object records.
- 5.9 Continued use and resources will be reviewed, using the procedure, to confirm that the current level of use can be maintained or that it requires altering to protect the integrity of the object.

6. RESEARCH AND SAMPLING

- 6.1 Scientific, technical examination and analysis are used to maintain and improve the preservation and treatment of the collections. Examination and analysis, including destructive sampling for research purposes, are undertaken following SMG procedures.
- 6.2 All research results are made available both internally and externally to conservation and museum professionals.