



South Holland District Council

Ayscoughfee Hall Museum Care and Conservation Policy

September 2020

Community Development

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Introduction

Ayscoughfee Hall Museum was originally built in the 1450s. It is a Grade I listed building and was awarded this status by English Heritage in 2012. A Grade I listing indicates that the building is deemed to be very important and of national significance. Only 2.5% of Britain's listed buildings are in this category.

English Heritage carefully considers any application to alter the fabric of a listed building, and their permission must be obtained before any works are undertaken. As the managers of the Ayscoughfee Hall and Gardens Trust, SHDC is unable to grant itself listed building planning consent.

Ayscoughfee Hall Museum reopened to the public in June 2006 following a project that saw the building refurbished and the Museum reinterpreted. This scheme was financed largely by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and they requested that the building, along with its history and development, be the main exhibit of the new Museum.

The collections of Ayscoughfee Hall Museum are mainly comprised of social history material (hand and drainage tools, agricultural and rural craft items), textiles (predominantly working and domestic costume) and two- and three-dimensional objects relevant to the South Holland district. There is also a small but significant collection of fine and decorative art objects.

Scope – Policy Aim

The aim of this policy is to lay out the guidelines for-

- A generic framework within which all aspects of environmental management are deliverable at minimum sustainable levels and in accordance with agreed benchmark parameters.
- Adhering to minimum standards of best practice in collections care.
- Appropriate responses to developments in national professional guidelines.
- To build upon the concepts set out in the Ayscoughfee's site Conservation Plan written by Anderson and Glenn in 2002.
- The care and maintenance of Ayscoughfee Hall's physical fabric.
- The maintenance of the Museum's internal environment.
- The care of the Museum collections stored in the Hall and at off-site stores.

It should be noted that the latter three elements are linked to each other and cannot be considered in isolation.

Legislation or Executive Summary

As a responsible museum, Ayscoughfee Hall has a duty of care to the objects in the permanent collection, and to the structure of the Hall itself. This latter is especially important since the Hall was awarded Grade I listed status in January 2012.

As trustees of the charity, South Holland District Council has a legal duty to apply trust funds appropriately, and in particular to maintain the Hall and Gardens in a suitable manner.

Policy Consultation and Consideration

This policy has been written with proper regard to Arts Council England's guidelines on museum collections development, taking into account all legal, moral and ethical guidelines. This policy follows the earlier Ayscoughfee Hall Museum Collections Development Policy, approved by Cllr Howard Johnson, Portfolio Holder in August 2012.

Policy Statement

1. The care and maintenance of Ayscoughfee Hall's physical fabric

- 1.1 The Hall is inspected on a monthly basis by the Museum's staff. Any issues raised by these inspections are discussed with SHDC's Asset & Property Team, in order to decide whether to deal with the issue immediately or alert the specialist maintenance contractors (see 1.3 below).
- 1.2 The Museum's Front of House staff routinely check the building as they prepare to open to the public and also at the end of the day. Any issues relating to the care and maintenance of the building are immediately brought to the attention of the Museum Manager and recorded on the day sheet.
- 1.3 The Hall receives four visits each year from a specialist contractor who undertakes routine maintenance (cleaning gutters, clearing any vegetation growing next to the building, etc.), as well as dealing with any specific problems brought to their attention by the Museum's staff following the monthly inspections.
- 1.4 Advice is taken from SHDC's Conservation Officer on any issues relating to the care and maintenance of Ayscoughfee Hall's physical fabric or any improvements to the building, which, in the opinion of the Museum Manager and Asset & Property Team, are of a nature that cannot be progressed without reference to English Heritage.
- 1.5 Any maintenance work is paid for from the Asset & Property Team's Buildings Maintenance budgets.

2. The maintenance of the Museum's internal environment

- 2.1 It is a fundamental aim of a museum to collect, display and preserve collections. The creation and maintenance of a stable environment is integral to the latter activity, as it is an important factor in prolonging the collection's life span.
- 2.2 Ayscoughfee Hall Museum's collection comprises objects made of a variety of organic and inorganic materials. Each of these has optimum levels of relative humidity (RH) and temperature that together create an ideal environment for storage and display. Some of the RH and temperature values required by parts of the collection are unsuitable for others, so the ideal is always to create a balanced and stable environment that provides the best conditions for the most objects for the longest possible period.
- 2.3 Many different elements have to be considered when attempting to create the balanced environment described in 2.2. It should be recognised that the Museum's staff are able to control only a limited number of these factors due to the Hall's listed status, and the restrictions that brings (see Introduction and 1.4, above).

2.3.1 The historic nature of the Hall. The fifteenth century fabric of the building is not conducive to achieving the ideal balance of environmental conditions referred to in 2.2, as the Hall is not built of modern materials and was clearly not designed to be a museum. Moreover, Ayscoughfee Hall's grade I listed status means that no substantial changes can be undertaken to make these standards easier to attain.

2.3.2 The Museum's visitors. The fundamental reason for the existence of Ayscoughfee Hall Museum is to welcome visitors to this important building. Ironically, the more successful we are and the greater our footfall, the larger the fluctuations in the building's RH and temperature. The use of humidifiers and dehumidifiers to control RH will be explored as budgets allow. Certain rooms will be given priority over others depending on their construction and contents.

2.3.3 Heating. There is an obligation to maintain a comfortable temperature for both staff and visitors, but this has an impact on the environment. The Museum's heating is provided through electric radiators that were installed in 2014, and which maintain a regular temperature. This varies throughout the Hall, with higher temperatures maintained during opening hours throughout public areas of the Hall.

2.3.4 Lighting. As budgets allow, the light bulbs used in the Hall are being changed to ones that use less energy and have a longer working life. This saves money and reduces the temperature within the Museum.

2.3.5 Pollutants. Neither the Hall nor the Museum's off-site store (see 4.1 below), are located in areas of high pollution but as the primary cause of air pollutants, traffic levels will continue to be monitored.

2.3.6 Cleaning. Cleaning is carried out 5 days of the week (Tues to Sat), before the Museum opens to the public, with major 'deep' cleaning taking place once a year. This is a vital part of the Museum's maintenance and housekeeping programme.

2.3.7 Ambient light. The majority of windows in the Museum have had UV filters applied to them. These transparent films allow visible light through, but block the ultra violet wavelengths that are harmful to museum collections. These have a ten-year lifespan- as they were installed in 2007, they are due to be replaced.

2.3.8 Pests. Small pheromone traps are used to monitor insect activity. All indications are that these are at acceptably low levels, although areas of concern have been identified. These will continue to be monitored, with action being taken as required.

2.4 The Museum's internal environment is monitored through a system of twelve electronic transmitters, located throughout the building. The accompanying software allows for the current temperature and RH to be examined, and for previous readings to be scrutinised. These transmitters and the associated software are maintained annually, with regular reviews carried out by the Museum Manager to ensure acceptable levels.

3. The care of the Museum collections stored in the Hall and at off-site stores

- 3.1 Three of the Museum's rooms are given over to storage of the collections, while there is also an off-site facility on the former CSU depot in Holbeach. This comprises a brick building and a separate metal storage container which was installed in July 2009.
- 3.2 Exactly like the collections stored in the Museum, the material in Holbeach comprises objects made of a variety of organic and inorganic materials. The environmental circumstances and requirements are the same as those outlined in 2.2.
- 3.3 The environmental conditions in the brick building are deemed acceptable, but it is anticipated that those in the storage container will not be suitable in the long term. Consequently, the use of humidification equipment and other measures will be considered as budgets allow.
- 3.4 The Holbeach store is checked regularly, and the collections stored there visually inspected for signs of damage.
- 3.5 Pest management is more problematic at this store, therefore collections objects at the Holbeach store are those deemed by the Museum Manager to be at least risk of infestation. However, remedial work is required to treat several objects in the storage container for woodworm infestations. This will be carried out by AHMG team members, with reference to the Regional Collections Advisor.
- 3.6 Ongoing collections audit and documentation will identify any need for remedial conservation. Any items identified as potentially in need of conservation will be reviewed by the Museum Manager, with suitable professional guidance sought as appropriate. Conservators will be identified using the Institute of Conservation (ICON), with funding made available from Ayscoughfee Hall Museum's budgets and external sources as required.
- 3.7 South Holland District Council regularly reviews usage of its sites as part of its ongoing asset management, which may have an impact on the continued use of Ayscoughfee Hall Museum's offsite store. The Holbeach store has been identified as an asset for disposal. The Museum Manager will work with the relevant SHDC officers to identify a suitable alternative store, and plan the movement.

4. Acceptable storage parameters

- 4.1 Given the situation outlined above and the limitations on what measures can be undertaken given budgetary constraints and the Hall's listed status, the following environmental parameters will be adopted for the collections stored and displayed in Ayscoughfee Hall Museum and the Holbeach store:

4.1.1 Relative humidity. Maintain RH at a fixed point within the range 45% - 60% with fluctuations not exceeding 5%.

4.1.2 Temperature. Maintain temperature at a fixed point between 10 – 15 degrees centigrade, with fluctuations not exceeding one degree.

4.1.3 Light. This is best dealt with by setting out acceptable levels of luminance for specific material, as they relate to the Museum's collection. This is detailed in the table below. Storage areas only require lighting during periods of access; these are limited when compared to display

exposure. The majority of items in store are boxed or packaged and are therefore protected from the effects of light.

Material	Recommended maximum visible light level in lux	Recommended maximum annual lux-hours exposure
Costume	50	96,000
Textiles	50	96,000
Watercolours	50	96,000
Prints and drawings	50	96,000
Parchment	50	96,000
Paper	50	96,000
Plastic	100 -200	192,000 – 384,000
Oil and tempera paintings	200	384,000
Wood	200	384,000
Black and white photographs	200	384,000
Metals	300	576,000
Stone	300	576,000
Glass	300	576,000
Ceramics	300	576,000

Implementation

Responsibility for the implementation of this policy lies with the Museum Manager and Communities Manager.

The Museum Manager will monitor the day-to-day conditions of the Hall and off-site stores, as well as monitoring the maintenance contract and routine maintenance surveys. Any decisions required to maintain the Hall and/or off-site stores will be taken by the Communities Manager and Museum Manager in conjunction with South Holland District Council's Conservation Officer and Asset & Property Team.

Date of policy

September 2020

Date of review

September 2022