A manifesto for local museums in Wales
Museums in Wales are at the heart of their local communities. They provide a sense of place or “Cynefin”; raise awareness of crucial topics such as the climate crisis, diversity and equality; offer economic benefits and provide community services – especially during the pandemic.
Over the past four years museums have supported the delivery of critical Welsh Government policies, most notably those relating to the Well-being of Future Generations Act. This work has ranged from supporting informal and formal learning to enhancing health and wellbeing and tackling social injustice, as well as bringing countless social and economic benefits to our nation. Museums are central to the drive for cultural democracy and cultural rights across Wales, and also present our stories to visitors from across the world.

Recent political and social events such as austerity, the pandemic and Brexit have had a serious impact on Wales and have provoked new divisions amongst communities. More than ever before, people need museums to help make sense of the world around us and provide opportunities to learn, engage and shape their futures. During the Covid-19 emergency they have supported local communities through the pandemic in numerous ways:

- Museums including Storiel in Bangor, the Firing Line Museum in Cardiff, and Wrexham Museum provided specialist resources to support home-schooling during lockdowns.
- Museums including Ceredigion Museum, the Museum of Cardiff and Tenby Museum created community engagement projects to help record people’s experience of the Covid pandemic.
- Museums including Cyfarthfa Castle, the Egypt Centre, Monmouthshire Museums, Cynon Valley Museum and Y Gaer developed new digital engagement work to grow their digital audiences while their doors were closed.
- Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales supported NHS efforts by inviting hospital staff to choose pieces from the National Art Collection to provide inspiration and solace for staff and patients.

See here (Museums Change Lives Cymru) for more information on how museums have worked with their communities to make a positive difference to people’s lives.
What Next For Museums in Wales?

Museums in Wales are valued but vulnerable. The Museum Association’s research shows that local authority investment in museums in Wales has declined by 31% in real terms in the last decade. This vulnerability has been apparent for some time – it was clearly recognised in the Welsh Government’s Expert Review into Local Museum Provision in Wales, 2015. Many of the recommendations of that report remain relevant for the sector today, and we encourage local authorities to engage with the Welsh Government and local museums to consider implementing them in the current context.

In 2022, we are asking politicians to imagine what could be achieved with an ambitious new investment to secure the cultural and creative future of the nation.
Museums can contribute to local authority objectives, the goals of the Well-being of Future Generations Act and the new Welsh Government’s Programme for Government in a range of ways, including:

- helping local communities thrive
- championing and giving opportunities to use the Welsh language
- growing civic pride in place and environment
- regeneration of the local and national economy
- developing participatory learning experiences and resources for the new curriculum and for learners of all ages
- fostering physical and mental health and wellbeing
- tackling poverty and creating opportunities for those most at risk of socio-economic exclusion
- encouraging sustainable tourism and ‘staycations’ by ensuring local areas have a varied offer to attract domestic tourists throughout the nation.
- highlighting the climate and nature crisis and promoting sustainability
- supporting under-represented communities and increasing understanding of issues around equality
- improving access and participation to culture and heritage for all to enjoy
In order to deliver these benefits, local authorities should draft and implement local cultural strategies that provide a framework to ensure that museums, working alongside other art forms, play their part in the recovery from Covid and help to create flourishing communities. These should take into account the Welsh Government’s proposed new Cultural Strategy, and should consider how museums can contribute to the full range of local authority activities, including health and wellbeing, tourism and economic growth. Local authority investment should be focused on:

- Ensuring that museums are able to deliver core museums services and retain sufficient in-house expertise to manage projects and fundraise for project-based work.
- Digital infrastructure, capacity and skills development. During the Covid pandemic museums across Wales have engaged with communities on- and off-line, supporting home learning and providing resources to support families and communities. Coordinated investment in digital infrastructure and skills will enable museums to create a sustainable hybrid model of real and online events, programming and engagement for the future.
- Developing a skilled and diverse workforce which ensures that local museums in Wales truly reflect and represent their communities and the diversity of Welsh society, and care for and use collections with expertise and integrity.
- Ensuring that local museums can work with and welcome their local communities as thriving civic spaces where everyone is represented and can engage with and benefit from museum collections, stories and ideas.
- Supporting culture-led tourism and economic initiatives, including national events such as the Welsh Museums Festival. These events are vital in attracting visitors to museums and supporting domestic tourism.
- Attracting other government and philanthropic investment in museums by working with national governments, agencies and donors to identify projects that will promote social impact.
Local authorities that create clear cultural strategies and choose to invest in their museums based on the priority areas above will be well placed to deliver better museums for their communities, and to meet their own objectives, including those set out by the Welsh Government in the Well-being of Future Generations Act and the wider Programme for Government, as well as the WLGA’s Manifesto for Localism and Rural Wales Manifesto.

The Museums Association and the Welsh Museums Federation are ready to work with councillors and local authorities across Wales to support positive, strategic investment in local museums.

If you would like to discuss the recommendations in this document further, please write to:

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