

Wessex Museums Partnership Interpretation Strategy, 2019–22

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1. Executive summary

This paper was commissioned by the Chair of the Wessex Museums Partnership (WMP) Programme and Collections Working Group and the Wessex Museums Partnership Manager in February 2019, to develop a high-level interpretation strategy for the Wessex Museums Partnership.

The overarching theme for interpretation is adapted from the WMP Strategic Plan:

Sharing the stories of Wessex people and our relationship to the rest of the world.

Five key messages should underpin all WMP interpretation:

1. Wessex is a region with national and international connections
2. The people of Wessex are diverse, creative and resourceful
3. The region's heritage and culture are characterised by connections to the deep past, to people and to the landscape
4. The WMP museums each tell different chapters in the fascinating story of Wessex, from prehistoric times to today
5. The stories of Wessex are relevant to everyone today

Five strategic goals for interpretation support the WMP's ambition to 'inspire more people to explore and enjoy the outstanding art and heritage of the region and to understand its significance to their lives':

- I. Visitor needs and interests should be at the heart of all WMP exhibitions, public programmes and other outward-facing activities.
- II. Use 'Wessex' as a lens through which to view the world and give a regional perspective on universal themes or issues of national and international significance.
- III. The partner museums should work collaboratively to make the most of their collections and subject expertise.
- IV. WMP programming should make local people feel proud of their museums and the region.
- V. Interpretation should enhance the WMP reputation among competing attractions in the region.

The following **Wessex themes** could be developed across the WMP to create collaborative exhibitions and enhance public programming:

- I. Wessex in myth and legend
- II. Wessex land and water
- III. Wessex and the wider world
- IV. Creative Wessex
- V. Enterprising Wessex

In addition, universal human themes (such as faith and religion) or themes specific to the individual museums (such as specialist collections) could be used by the partnership. The WMP should regularly revisit these themes for future projects and interpretive planning.

2. About the Wessex Museums Partnership

As one of the Arts Council England's new National Portfolio Organisations, the Wessex Museums Partnership (WMP) has an ambitious four-year plan for exhibitions, collections management and community engagement.

'The WMP... is a natural partnership of museums covering the geographical spread of Dorset and Wiltshire, and with world class collections spanning archaeology, fine and decorative art, ethnography, literature, social history, costume and textiles. As such, **the Wessex Museums are perfectly placed to share the story of Wessex and its relationship with the rest of the world.**'

Central to the collaborative partnership is the ambition to, '**inspire more people to explore and enjoy the outstanding art and heritage of the region and to understand its significance to their lives.** We will share the amazing story of the region in new and exciting ways and make a major contribution to the cultural, social and tourism economies of Dorset and Wiltshire'.

Extracts from: *Wessex Museums Partnership Strategic Plan, 2019–2022*
(words in bold are particularly relevant to the Interpretation Strategy)

This high-level interpretation strategy and action plan is intended to help the WMP identify ways to engage with existing and new audiences.

3. Audiences

Over 300,000 people visit the partner museums each year. This Interpretation Strategy considers how best to use interpretation to engage more deeply with the partners' existing audiences, and how to reach out to new and under-represented audiences. Well-planned, dynamic and engaging interpretation can help to break down barriers to engagement and build up a following of repeat visitors, particularly within the local region.

Existing audiences

The visitor profile across the partnership is very similar – with current audiences predominantly white, British and over 50 years of age. Just over half of all visitors are locally based, and encouraging repeat visits among local people is central to the objectives of the WMP Strategic Plan. The other half are tourists, mainly from the UK, and the Strategic Plan aims to raise the partner museums' profile as significant cultural destinations in the region.

New target audiences

There are audience groups within each of the four localities that are not currently engaging with the museums as much as they could be. These audiences are the focus for the WMP's Audience Development priorities. The two priority groups that have been identified as a focus for the Interpretation Strategy are:

1. Local communities who have never visited the museums, especially those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, and military families.
2. Young people aged 17–24.

Audience research

The WMP has undertaken a partnership-wide visitor survey through Audience Finder, and the individual museums also use a range of visitor intelligence collection methods and tools for analysis. This research has built up a clear picture of existing visitors, as outlined above. Research to improve the partnership's understanding of under-represented visitors in the region was being undertaken alongside this interpretation strategy in early 2019. Our work with the partnership has highlighted the need for more in-depth research into new target audiences (see Key actions in Section 7).

4. Themes and key messages

The **overarching theme** for interpretation across the partner museums is adapted from the WMP Strategic Plan:

Sharing the stories of Wessex people and our relationship to the rest of the world.

We have identified five key messages for the partnership that underpin all WMP interpretation.

Key messages:

1. Wessex is a region with national and international connections
2. The people of Wessex are diverse, creative and resourceful
3. The region's heritage and culture are characterised by connections to the deep past, to people and to the landscape
4. The WMP museums each tell different chapters in the fascinating story of Wessex, from prehistoric times to today.
5. The stories of Wessex are relevant to everyone today

Our research highlighted a range of **common themes** that could be developed across the partnership to create exhibitions and public programming. These fall naturally into three broad categories:

1. Universal human themes
2. Wessex themes relating to the region and its people
3. Themes that are specific to the four museums

The focus of this interpretation strategy is the **Wessex theme**, which is explored in more detail in Section 8 below. A separate document in Appendix 3 explores all three themes in more detail. They should be referred to regularly as inspiration for future exhibitions, public programmes and public-facing outputs. Ideally, the museums should regularly refer to and explore these themes for future interpretive projects.

5. Approach to interpretation

Interpretation is essentially about communication – how to convey key messages to target audiences.

For the purpose of this strategy, interpretation mainly focuses on exhibitions but it is intended to cover all collections-based content, such as:

- Gallery refresh
- Public programming
- Learning activities
- Contemporary collecting
- Digital content

However, it could equally be extended to all methods of communicating with WMP audiences including websites, social media, press releases, advertising etc.

As our understanding of audiences becomes more nuanced, so the delivery and evaluation of interpretation becomes more refined. In fact, over the course of this project to devise an interpretation strategy, the WMP has developed a more nuanced understanding of the concept of 'Wessex' and its relevance to local audiences. Whereas it was initially envisaged that 'Wessex' should be used as a central theme for interpretation, this approach is now considered too restrictive. Instead, a slightly different approach is being adopted which uses Wessex as a lens through which to view the world. This approach will enable the partner museums to give a regional twist to any theme.

In addition, all interpretation should:

- Play to the strengths of the WMP collections and subject expertise;
- Be adapted to the local audiences of each partner museum;
- Bring fresh perspectives on the region;
- Cover a range of target audiences and learning styles;
- Improve the visitor experience, drive footfall and extend dwell time.

6. Key findings and guiding principles

Our research identified the following key findings:

- Interpretation should deliver a clear message about regional relevance while also allowing individual WMP museums to maintain their own separate identities.
- The definition of Wessex should be flexible to avoid imposing limitations on the WMP public programme.
- The WMP organisations are at different stages with individual interpretation strategies and shared access to collections.
- The interpretation action plan should be ambitious yet manageable within existing resources.
- The partner museums should aim to develop a better understanding of each other's collections, to identify commonalities and strengths to support each other's displays.
- Contemporary Collecting is central to the vision of the WMP as a forward-facing and engaging organisation.
- The WMP has an opportunity to establish itself as a leading organisation in the region regarding interpretation techniques and approaches.

Our research has led to the following guiding principles for a shared interpretation policy:

- **Audience-focused:** putting visitor needs and interests at the heart of all WMP exhibitions, public programmes and other outward-facing activities.
- **Collaborative:** working across the WMP to address gaps in collections and share subject knowledge.
- **Achievable:** creating an action plan that is ambitious yet manageable within existing resources.
- **Clear and accessible:** engaging a range of diverse audiences through clear and accessible interpretation.
- **Regional and relevant:** focusing on what makes the region special and relevant to local audiences and tourists alike.
- **Wessex:** treating the concept of Wessex as abstract rather than specific, allowing for different interpretations for different contexts.
- **Contemporary collecting:** working with local audiences to co-curate projects and create new content for exhibitions.

7. Strategic goals and actions for interpretation

The following strategic goals will support the WMP's ambition to 'inspire more people to explore and enjoy the outstanding art and heritage of the region and to understand its significance to their lives'. They are examined in more detail below and accompanied by **performance measures** and recommended **key actions**.

- I. Visitor needs and interests should be at the heart of all WMP exhibitions, public programmes and other outward-facing activities.
- II. Use 'Wessex' as a lens through which to view the world and give a regional perspective on universal themes or issues of national and international significance.
- III. The partner museums should work collaboratively to make the most of their collections and subject expertise.
- IV. WMP programming should make local people feel proud of their museums and the region.
- V. Interpretation should enhance the WMP reputation among competing attractions in the region.

I. Visitor needs and interests should be at the heart of all WMP exhibitions, public programmes and other outward-facing activities

Every public-facing project should begin with the target audience – their interests, learning needs, motivation and access requirements. This will ensure that interpretation fulfils its primary role: to develop content and communicate key messages to a diverse range of visitors. An **Audience Checklist** is given in Appendix 1 to ensure audience needs are taken into account.

Key actions:

- Identify target audiences at the beginning of every project. Target audiences should include existing visitors and stakeholders, as well as those which are being developed.
- Use **Appendix 1 Audience Checklist** to quantify what is known about these audiences and what work still needs to be done.
- Create an open dialogue with the target audiences to better understand their needs and interests and identify how the WMP can play a role in meeting those needs.
- Undertake regular visitor research (qualitative and quantitative, formative and summative) to gain a better understanding of target audiences, their interests, access needs and learning requirements. Use the results to develop more meaningful projects and programmes for deeper engagement.

Performance measures:

- Number of target audience members captured in visitor surveys

- Number of repeat visits captured in visitor surveys
- High visitor satisfaction measured by visitor surveys and general feedback
- Number of focus groups consulted for formative and summative evaluation

II. Use 'Wessex' as a lens through which to view the world and give a regional perspective on universal themes or issues of national and international significance

This approach will allow the partner museums to take any theme which resonates with their local audiences while also giving a regional slant. For exhibitions which tour between partner museums, the regional slant should be adapted to suit the interests of local audiences. Another way to consider this goal is, 'Think global, act local'.

Key actions:

- Create partnerships with local councils, organisations and community groups to tie the WMP programme to local, regional and national events in order to attract new audiences and play a more meaningful role in the region.
- All exhibitions, whether developed in-house or loaned-in, should include content about what makes the exhibition relevant to the locality. This could be as simple as a text panel with a photograph, a showcase with WMP objects or the results of a community project.
- Consider ways to position the WMP as a space where people can learn about local issues in a non-judgemental and non-partisan environment.
- Encourage visitors to think about Wessex in new and diverse ways.

Performance measures:

- Number of partnerships created to tie WMP programme with local, regional and national events.
- Number of new exhibitions or public programme events which provide a regional perspective or which make a case for local relevance.
- Number of interpretation techniques or activities which provide new and diverse perspectives on local issues.
- Positive feedback (qualitative) from local visitors and repeat visits (quantitative)

III. The partner museums should work collaboratively to make the most of WMP collections and subject expertise

Individually, the WMP museums have a wealth of knowledge and experience about their collections, regional history and local audiences. This knowledge should be pooled to enable the individual museums to work more efficiently and with added value. Another way to think about this approach is, 'Stronger together'.

Key actions:

- Use the Programming Group to become more familiar with WMP collections, for example with tours of specific galleries, illustrated talks about collections, bring a key object to the meeting for discussion, share new research being undertaken. Make a note in the minutes of the meeting of resonances and cross-over with partner museum collections.
- Encourage individual museums to share information about new projects for feedback on relevance to target audiences, suggestions for new perspectives and recommendations for loan objects. Use colleagues at partner museums as ‘critical friends’.
- Adopt a formal and consistent process for generating, evaluating and developing ideas for exhibitions across the museum partnership (see Appendix 4).
- Develop an Interpretation Plan template (see Appendix 5) to act as a control document during the exhibition planning phase, and as a benchmarking document during post-project evaluation. Review Interpretation Plans regularly to find out what approaches work best for your audiences.
- At the end of each project, compile a Lessons Learned document to share with the WMP group. Limit the document to 3–4 key lessons and suggest practical advice for future projects. Keep these documents in a shared ‘knowledge base’ and review regularly.
- In the longer term, the WMP museums should aim to develop shared access to comprehensive collections databases with shared terminology for searchable key words.

Performance measures:

- Number of talks, tours etc to familiarise WMP with each other’s collections and subject expertise
- Number of times a subject or learning specialist formally contributes towards content development at a partner museum
- Number of loans between WMP
- Number of exhibition ideas generated and shared with WMP, using new exhibitions template – see Appendix 4.
- Agreed list of searchable terminology for collections databases
- Percentage of WMP collections available on an accessible and searchable database

IV. WMP programming should make local people feel proud of their museums and the region

Although this strategic goal is closely aligned with the first one about putting audiences at the heart of all museum activity, this goal is more focused on the motivation of local visitors.

Key actions:

- Ensure the public programme represents the diversity and multiple perspectives of those who have previously been denied a voice or who don't fit neatly into a local or regional stereotype.
- Consider developing a shared handling collection that travels between the museums and community groups (schools, youth groups etc) as part of a joint outreach programme. The group could start by developing a set of criteria for the WMP handling collection (for example, should the collection include accessioned objects?).
- Always request feedback from target audiences and use this to identify ways to improve future programming.
- Create a WMP programme of future exhibitions with regular changes at set times of year to assist with cross-museum planning and help develop a community of repeat visitors.

Performance measures:

- Overall visitor satisfaction with WMP programmes and exhibitions
- Increased numbers of visitors and repeat visits, particularly among local audiences
- Increased diversity of audiences who engage with WMP exhibitions and activities
- Number of Lessons Learned documents in the shared 'knowledge base'
- Number of organisations who borrow the handling collections
- Percentage of people who would recommend a WMP visit to friends and family

V. Interpretation should enhance the WMP reputation among competing attractions in the region

This goal requires knowledge-gathering about local attractions to benchmark performance and identify ways for the WMP to excel at visitor satisfaction.

Key actions:

- Identify local competitors and ways to benchmark performance against them
- Organise regular (2–3 per year) WMP team visits to museums or other local competitors to review displays, gain new perspectives and observe visitors. If possible, meet staff to share ideas and offer reciprocal visits – they may even provide a free meeting space. Discuss how WMP could offer a better visitor experience.
- For loans out to external exhibitions, such as the *Stonehenge* exhibition at the British Museum, work closely with lenders to ensure the story of Wessex is told and is in line with the WMP interpretation strategy's key messages (see Section 4).

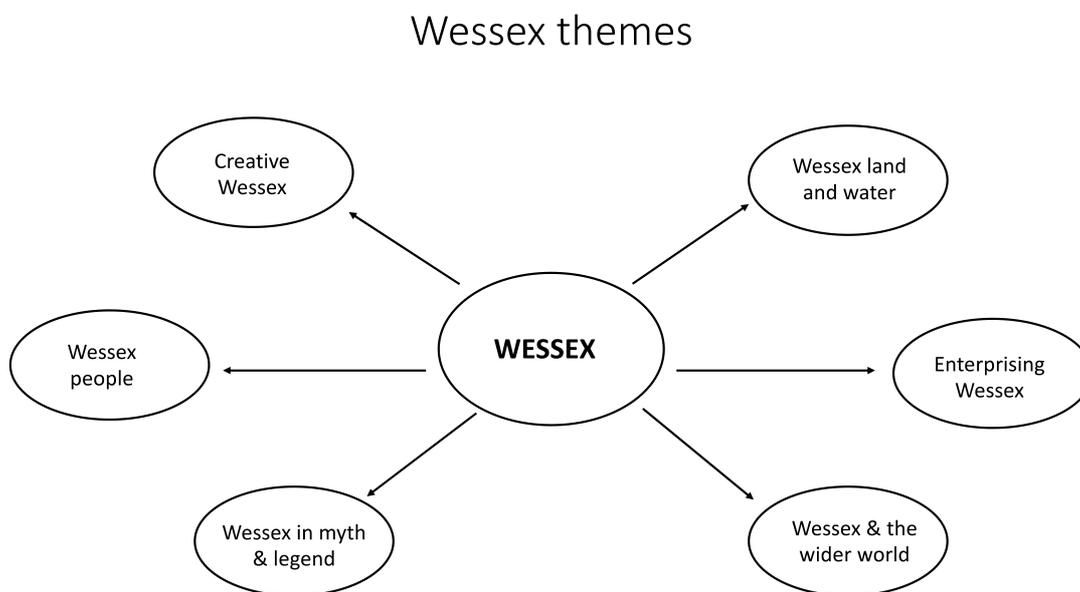
- For loans out to non-WMP exhibitions, insist on being credited on object labels, catalogues, printed leaflets and the acknowledgement panel as part of the loan agreement.
- In the longer term, the WMP could establish an interpretation network in the Wessex region for sharing skills and ideas, potentially aligned to the South West Museums Federation. This could be as simple as a google-group which encourages members to seek and share advice, with questions and answers recorded for a shared knowledge bank.

Performance measures:

- Visitor satisfaction surveys which show increased awareness of WMP
- Number of visits by WMP to local museums or other competitors
- Number of WMP reciprocated visits of local museums or other competitors.
- Increased number of repeat visitors
- Number of loans to non-WMP museums
- Number of mentions on exhibition acknowledgement panels
- Number of members of local interpretation network.

8. Wessex theme explored in detail

As agreed with key WMP and museum staff, this interpretation strategy focuses on the second **common theme** – Wessex. We have identified six sub-themes under the umbrella of ‘Wessex’ (please note that these are working titles):



The sub-themes could be treated in a number of ways:

1. As themes for seasonal exhibitions and public programmes.
2. As themes for a range of activities throughout the year (as in, ‘The Wessex Museums’ Year of Mythology’ or ‘The Wessex Museums Year of Landscape and the Sea’).
3. The themes could also be adapted to tie in with national events, such as Pride, Black History Month, WWII anniversaries etc.

For the purpose of this interpretation strategy, we have been asked to focus on the following five sub-themes:

- I. Wessex in myth and legend
- II. Wessex land and water
- III. Wessex and the wider world
- IV. Creative Wessex
- V. Enterprising Wessex

Below, these sub-themes are explored in detail with examples of how they could be applied by the partner museums.

I. Wessex in myth and legend

(a region steeped in myth, legend and folklore)

Key Message:

Wessex is steeped in ancient myths and legends, which have been kept alive through art and literature, popular folklore, and ritual.

Message explored:

- From the ancient rituals and beliefs of Stonehenge to King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, the myths and legends of Wessex have a firm place in the public imagination today.
- These stories have made their way into popular folklore through real and fictional characters, from the Salisbury giant and Thomas Hardy's characters to the Tolpuddle Martyrs and Harry Paye.
- Evidence of myths and legends can be found today in names (Wiltshire Moonrakers), the landscape (Cerne Abbas, Stonehenge), and traditions (Morris Dancing).

Examples of application:

- Oral history project to capture people's memories of local folklore, ghost stories and legends, passed down from their grandparents.
- An exhibition using WMP collections to explore local myths and legends through the ages.
- Local ghost storytelling at Hallowe'en
- Interactive map showing sites related to myths and legends

II. Wessex land and water

(the story of the land and sea, and Wessex's many waterways)

Key message:

Wessex is a rural region with an important coastline and many waterways, all of which play a vital role in the region's economy. These land and seascapes have in turn been shaped by human hand and thought.

Message explored:

- Geology formed the land and seascape of Wessex. Early humans relied on the region's natural resources and began to shape the land and waterways.
- People settled and had a deeper impact on the region through agriculture, fishing, architecture etc, and the region's geography also shaped its economy.
- Today Wessex is a region with many designated Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Special Scientific Interest, which attracts people from all over the country (and the world).

Examples of application:

- Work with a land artist (e.g. Richard Long) to explore the historic collections and make connections with the landscape of Wessex today.

- Work with a photographer to capture life on Wessex's canals and rivers today. Call out to visitors to submit their photographs to an exhibition, a book or on social media.
- Walks and talks around the local landscape. For specific audiences such as families, young people and schools, potentially work with an external specialist, such as The Travelling History Company:
<https://www.thetravellinghistorycompany.com>
- Outreach programme to work with local schools and youth groups to form a 'Wessex Extinction Rebellion' campaign to encourage local people to take action to protect their natural environment. Use the collections (geology and natural history) to explore climate change from deep history to today's Anthropocene. Discuss questions such as 'What impact have humans had on the world?' 'What changes can we make in our everyday lives?' 'Can public protest and activism influence change?' (link to Wessex social history, e.g. the Tolpuddle Martyrs). Outcome could be a film made by the group shown in schools and community colleges.
- Maps of local walks with key features of the landscape available to download from WMP websites. Partnership project with the Wessex Waterways Restoration Trust: <http://wwrt2.bravesites.com/start>

III. Wessex and the wider world

(the region has a long history of migration)

Key message:

Wessex has always been, and continues to be, a dynamic region with a constant influx and outflux of different peoples from around the world.

Message explored:

- Wessex has a long history of connections to the wider world – from the Amesbury Archer, who came to Wessex from central Europe in about 2300 BC, to the forthcoming army basing programme, which will see hundreds of British army families return to Wiltshire from Germany.
- The region has an important coastline with international maritime links (import and export trade, such as commerce with fisheries of Newfoundland from 16th century onwards, strategic location across the water from Europe/ North America).

The following extract from the WMP Strategic Plan supports this message:

'The story of Wessex as told through the four partner museums' collections is one of rich cultural diversity. This diversity is highlighted in the museums' displays and is a platform for interpretation, learning and contemporary collecting.'

Examples of application:

- A community project across the four partner museums to explore the history of cultural diversity in Wessex through a modern lens. Working with under-

represented audiences within each museum's local area to gather new stories of people's personal experiences of living in Wessex, looking at their own family histories and how these relate to the wider story of Wessex, and what makes them proud of the region today. This project could have a contemporary collecting remit – collecting stories, objects and ideas that paint a picture of multi-cultural Wessex today.

- Storytelling for adults and families, e.g. Pirates and smugglers (the story of Harry Paye) to tie in with Poole Pirates Day, Roman Wessex: a multicultural society (partnership with Wessex Archaeology?).
- A collaborative research project and exhibition with Dorset-based BAME author, Louisa Adjoa Parker, to look at Wessex's hidden histories. Could tie in with Black History Month. Louisa has written about Black History in the region, including the story of Black American GIs stationed in Dorset during WWII. She could also run creative writing workshops, storytelling and poetry reading as part of the public programme. <https://www.louisaadjoaparker.com>

IV. Creative Wessex

(Wessex inspires creativity)

Key message:

From Thomas Hardy to Jeremy Deller, artists and writers have always been, and continue to be, inspired by the Wessex landscape and its natural resources.

Message explored:

- The people and landscapes of Wessex have long inspired artists and writers, such as Thomas Hardy, William Barnes, Turner and Constable, Rex Whistler, Henry Lamb and Augustus John, Elisabeth Frink, Richard Long, and Jeremy Deller.
- Today, the region has a rich cultural landscape, with food and drink, music, theatre and literary festivals that attract people from all over the country.

Examples of application:

- WMP partnership with regional festivals (e.g. Thomas Hardy Festival, Dorchester Literary Festival, etc). Could involve the WMP hosting a stand or a tent at a festival with talks, storytelling and object handling. Also acts as marketing/ PR to encourage new visitors to the four museums.
- Workshops or performances by local theatre and literary groups (e.g. the Hardy Players) on site at the four museums. Could part of Museums at Night national programming.
- Wessex Lates (Thursdays/ Fridays) at the partner museums with cultural events themed to tie in with exhibition programming. Could include music, talks, poetry readings, themed food and drink stands etc. The V&A Museum were the first to launch Friday Lates, which have now become an integral part of London's cultural offer <https://www.vam.ac.uk/info/friday-late>
- Architectural tours of Wessex, including the four museum buildings. A series of tours in each of the four towns that could tie in with national events, such as Heritage Opens Doors Days (offering free visitors and tours

of the buildings in September (<https://www.heritageopendays.org.uk/visiting>). Could include a hardhat tour of Devizes Assize Courts during renovation.

V. Enterprising Wessex

(a diverse, dynamic economy)

Key message:

Wessex is a thriving region which is home to a diverse range of trades and industries, some of which go back centuries while others are at the cutting edge of science and technology.

Message explored:

- Despite often being labelled as a region that was overlooked by the Industrial Revolution, Wessex has always been home to many trades and industries, from shipbuilding, farming and textiles to maritime commerce with North America. The region is still known for some key industries (e.g. Poole Pottery) and is considered by some to be the birthplace of trade unionism.
- Today, Wessex is home to many small independent businesses (sustainable farming, micro-breweries, slow food etc), as well as thriving national and international businesses (Sunseekers luxury yachts, Lush, Dorset Cereals) and pioneering industries at the cutting edge of science and technology (e.g. Porton Down).

Examples of application:

- Craft workshops: make a pot inspired by Poole pottery, make soap in partnership with Lush
- Walking tour of historic industrial sites and buildings
- Partnership with food and beer festivals: WMP stand/ tent with object handling and storytelling to connect Wessex industry today to its historic past.
- Tour of up and running businesses: Dorset Cereals factory, micro-brewery tasting tours, spend a day on a sustainable farm.
- WMP Young Enterprise group for young people aged 17–24 hosted by the partner museums with business people from regional businesses coming in to give talks and run workshops voluntarily. Partnership with local youth groups and employment initiatives.

9. Appendices

Appendix 1: Audience Checklist

This checklist should be used when developing exhibition content and interpretation to ensure audience needs are taken into account.

1. Audiences

- How much do we know about the target audiences, their interests and learning needs?
- What do they already know or feel about the subject?
- Do we need to find out more about the audiences?
- How could we involve them with content development?
- When would be the best stage to test content/interpretation with audiences?

2. Learning

- What key messages should audiences take away?
- How should we interpret complex themes or storylines to make them accessible?
- How might the exhibition change people's knowledge, understanding, skills, behaviour, attitudes and feelings about the subject?
- How might our own knowledge and attitudes influence the exhibition?
- How do we cater for different learning needs and learning styles?
- Do the displays encourage people to use all their senses?
- Are there opportunities for parents/carers and children to learn together?

3. Motivation

- Is the subject appealing, accessible and relevant to the target audiences?
- Are there opportunities for interactivity, participation, discussion and collaboration?
- Does the display offer changes in pace and atmosphere?
- What are the most inspirational or memorable exhibits with 'wow factor'?
- Do we present multiple perspectives and pique curiosity?
- Are there opportunities for feedback – and how will we respond to feedback?
- Do we challenge visitors to think in new ways or to try new experiences?

4. Physical environment

- How does the design allow people to feel confident, safe and comfortable?
- Is there adequate space for sitting, contemplating, interacting?
- Is there easy access to toilets and places to eat?
- How will visitors orient themselves and find displays which interest them?
- How do we maximise access for people with disabilities or limited mobility?
- How can we enable access for wheelchairs and buggies?
- How can we engage visitors with sensory impairments?
- Is there suitable space for group learning activities and events?

Appendix 2: Audit of WMP temporary exhibition spaces and facilities

Each of the Museums in the partnership has individual spaces for temporary exhibitions. This template should be completed as an overview to assist when planning shared exhibitions:

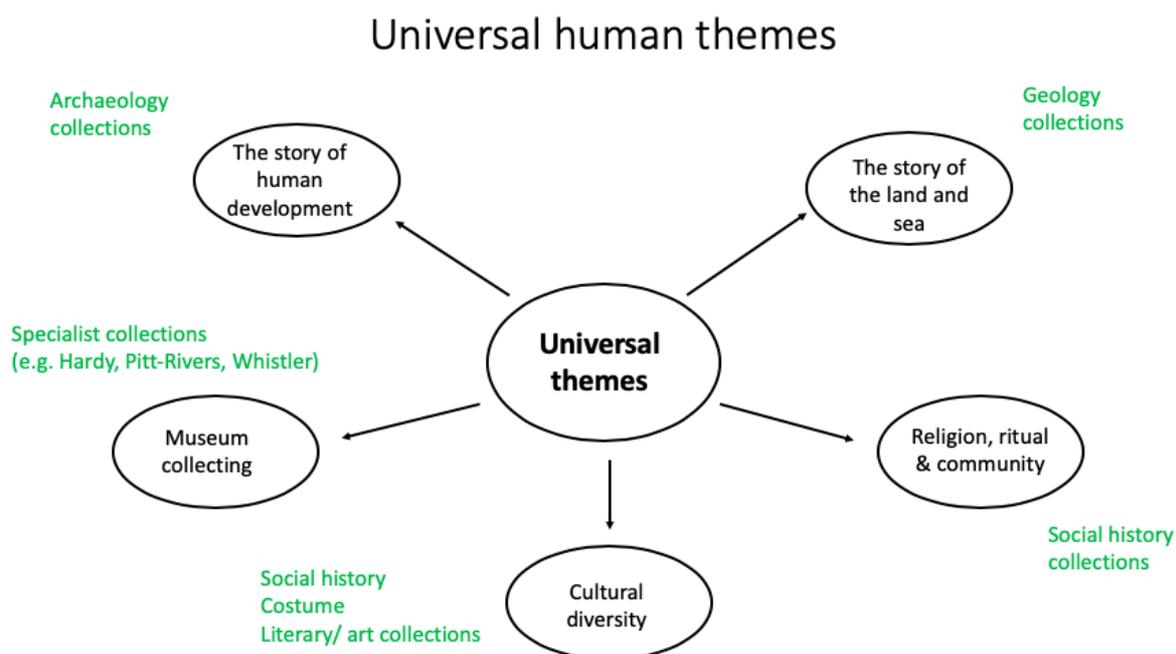
| | Dorchester | Poole | Salisbury | Wiltshire |
|--------------------------|-------------------|--------------|------------------|------------------|
| Size sq/m | | | | |
| Ceiling height | | | | |
| Location and access | | | | |
| Lighting equipment | | | | |
| Environmental readings | | | | |
| Security | | | | |
| Showcases – nos and dims | | | | |
| AV equipment | | | | |
| Other | | | | |

Appendix 3: Common themes

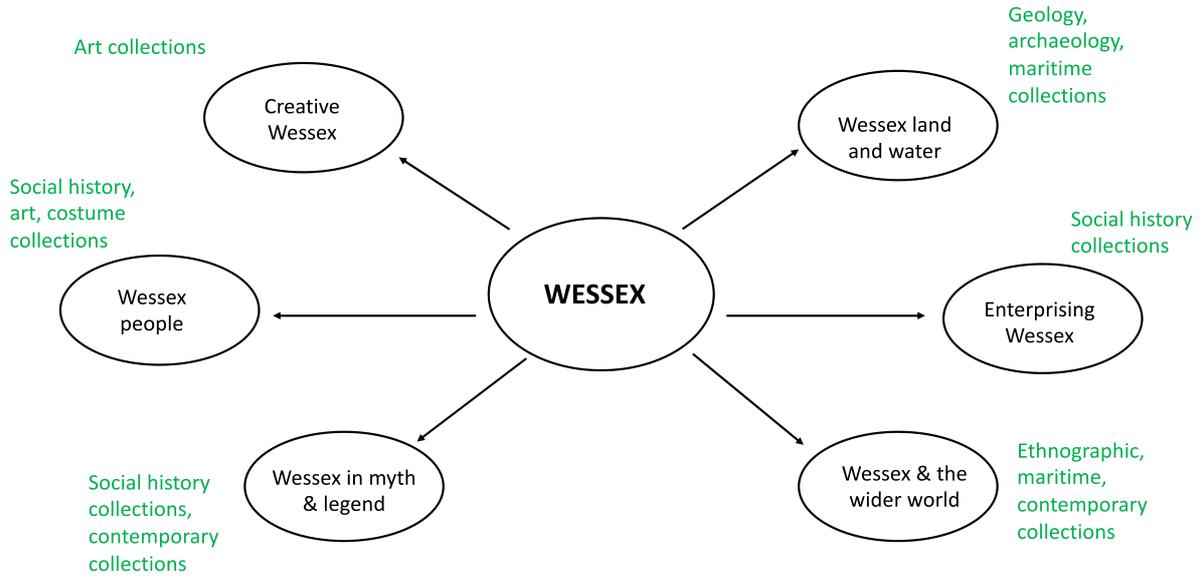
During the research phase of the project, we identified common themes that connect the four partner museums and tell the stories of Wessex. These fall naturally into three categories:

1. Universal human themes
2. Wessex themes relating to the region and its people
3. Themes that are specific to the four museums

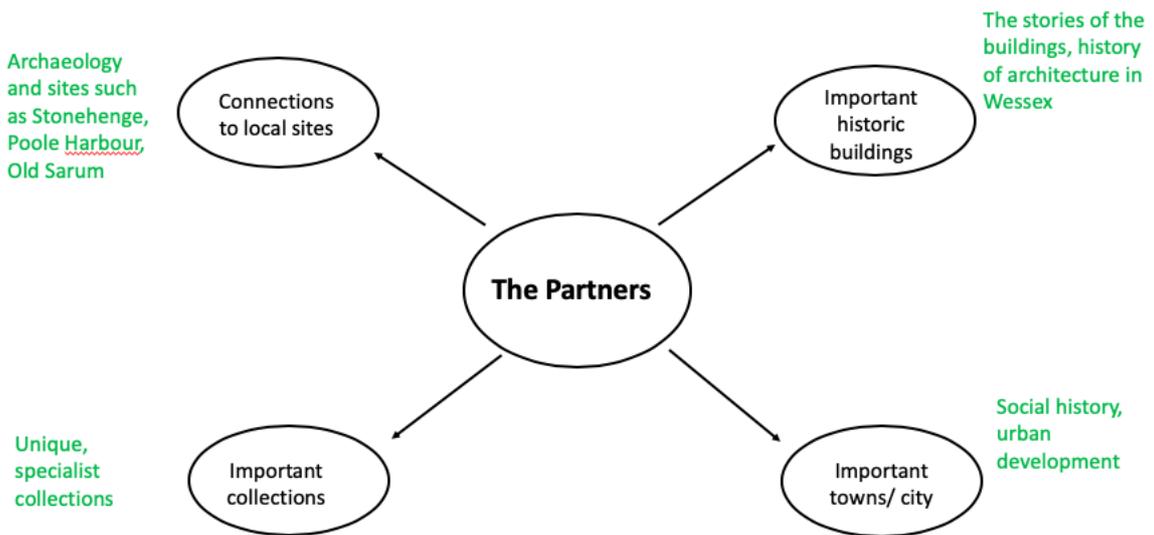
The diagrams below explore these themes in more detail, showing possible sub-themes and how they relate to the museums' collections. Apart from the Wessex theme, which has been explored in detail in Section 8 above, the themes are intended as springboards for the WMP to develop more fully for future projects.



Wessex themes



Museum themes



Appendix 4: WMP Exhibition proposal template

Blue text is for guidance and should be replaced with information specific to the project proposal.

| | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Working title: | Working title of exhibition or other public-facing activity |
| Proposed by: | Name and Museum |
| Lead venues and lead curators: | Which WMP would be the lead venue? Which other WMPs would be involved or provide second venue? Who would provide curatorial or subject specialist expertise? |
| Dates: | Proposed dates for exhibition or activity, subject to resource availability. Why do it then – i.e. is it linked to an anniversary? |
| Summary: | Summary of overarching concept with themes and key messages. What are the strengths or unique features of this exhibition? Has a similar exhibition been done anywhere before? What makes this different? |
| Key objects and loans: | List the key objects from across the WMP and why they are significant. Are there any key loans from outside the WMP? Are there opportunities for contemporary collecting? |
| Aims + objectives: | How might the exhibition meet the aims and objectives of the WMP strategy or of individual museums? How would the WMP measure the success of the exhibition? |
| Audiences: | Who are the target audiences? What do we know about them and why will it appeal to them? |
| Learning outcomes: | What will visitors learn from this exhibition? |
| Cost: | How much is the exhibition likely to cost? Typical headings might include: conservation, mount-making, transport for loans, research, repro permissions, design, graphics, media (software and hardware), showcases etc |
| Funding: | Potential sources of funding? Potential sponsors or working partners (for in-kind support). Opportunities for Retail? |
| Collaborations: | What opportunities exist for collaboration and co-curation outside the WMP? |
| Digital: | Is there an opportunity for an online presence? If so, what would this be? |
| Programming: | What opportunities exist for associated programming? |
| Staff resources: | Which key staff members from across the WMP would be involved in developing and delivering the exhibition? How much time is likely to be required? |
| Reviewed by: | Name of reviewing panel and date |
| Next steps: | Recommendations for next steps made by review panel (approval - or rejection with recommendations for how to improve and resubmit proposal) |

Appendix 5: Interpretation Plan template

For each exhibition, a detailed Interpretation Plan should be compiled to describe each component of the display and associated programming in terms of:

- Exhibition description
- Themes and key messages
- Target audiences
- Interpretation tools
- Learning outcomes
- Special requirements and opportunities

The Interpretation Plan acts as a control document to inform research and identify ways to work across various museum disciplines such as learning, marketing and digital media. It should also act as a control document during the exhibition planning phase, and as a benchmarking document during post-project evaluation. Review Interpretation Plans regularly to find out what approaches work best for your audiences. Below is sample that could be used as a template for future projects.

Sample Interpretation Plan

| | | | | |
|--|--|---|--|------------------------------|
| Title of the exhibition: e.g. Stories from Stonehenge | | | | |
| Overarching theme: | | | | |
| <i>One sentence to sum up the exhibition as a whole</i> | | | | |
| Key messages: | | | | |
| <i>4 or 5 key messages taken from your exhibition proposal and developed with the project team. Refer back to WMP key messages and guiding principles to ensure the exhibition messages link in with the WMP key messages.</i> | | | | |
| Target audiences: | | | | |
| <i>Existing:</i> | | <i>New:</i> | | |
| Learning outcomes | | | | |
| <i>Intellectual outcomes:</i> | | <i>Emotional outcomes:</i> | | <i>Behavioural outcomes:</i> |
| Section 1 (Area of the Exhibition: e.g. Introductory gallery) | | | | |
| Key messages: | | Functions of this area | | |
| <i>2 or 3 key messages taken for this section of the exhibition</i> | | <i>e.g. Scene setting, an area for visitors to gather themselves and get their bearings, exhibition guide pick-up point etc</i> | | |
| | | Estimated dwell well time: e.g. 5 mins | | |
| Look and feel of this area | | | | |
| <i>e.g. Well-lit gallery space Feels like the start of a journey of discovery Minimal but well-chosen objects and interpretation Free-flow – people can visit the items in the room in any order and are free to pick and choose what they want to find out about and leave when they wish</i> | | | | |
| Content/ story | Interpretation tools | Materials/ resources | Contextual material | Target audience |
| Introduction to the exhibition | e.g. Text panel (150 words) near entrance to the exhibition | | e.g. Historic image of Stonehenge | e.g. All |
| Map of Wessex locating Stonehenge and other important sites | Large-scale wall graphic | Wall vinyl | | All |
| Introduction to the key functions of Stonehenge, which were... | Case of 'gateway' objects | Conditioned showcase, object labels | Reconstruction drawings to give context to the objects | All |
| Interview with an archaeologist at Stonehenge | Multimedia guide commentary (2 mins max) | See multimedia guide proposal | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Headshot of the interviewee Footage of Stonehenge today | Specialist interest learners |
| Perspectives of Stonehenge from different eras | Historic quotations at high level (20–30 words each) | Wall vinyls | | Independent adults |
| Timeline of key events | Image-rich animated digital media presentation | Large front projection onto gallery wall | Historic images – one per event on the timeline | All |
| The people of Stonehenge (from the distant past to today) | Handling object desk facilitated by a volunteer. (flint axe, vessels, modern druid divination stick etc) | 6 x accessioned museum objects and replicas Volunteer training | Suite of hardcopy images for use by the volunteer to help illustrate a point | Families and young people |

Appendix 6: Recommended reading for exhibition planning and interpretation

The Manual of Museum Exhibitions, edited by Barry Lord and Gail Dexter Lord, 2014
– a practical guide to the entire process of planning, designing, curating, interpreting, producing and evaluating exhibitions.

Contemporary Collecting: Theory and Practice, by Owain Rhys, 2011
– advice on the development of contemporary collecting practices

The Power of the Plough, Rural Museums Network, 2012
For inspiration and as a guide to interpretation and display techniques for everyday objects, in this instance the humble plough: <https://326gtd123dbk1xdkdm489u1q-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Rural-Museums-Network-The-Power-of-the-Plough-May-2012.pdf>

A Sense of Place, An Interpretive Planning Handbook, by James Carter, 2001
https://www.jamescarter.cc/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/A_Sense_of_Place_James_Carter.pdf

Jen Kavanagh, a museum consultant, is currently preparing a contemporary collecting tool kit for Museum Development North West, which she has offered to share once it has been published.

<https://museumdevelopmentnorthwest.wordpress.com/theteam/>

Much has been written about the need for diversity and inclusivity in museums. For further information see *The Case for Inclusive Museums* issued by the Museums Association and available for download here:

<https://www.museumsassociation.org/download?id=1194934>

See collectionstrust.org.uk/terminologies/ for information regarding search terms for collections databases. The Collections Trust conference on 12 September 2019, *Keywords – finding the right word to find the right record*, will look at terminology control and why it matters.