

Response to Request for Information

Reference FOI 000782
Date 13 January 2017

Works of Art/Notable Collections

Request:

Please can you treat this as an FOI request and supply the following information:

1. What is the total value of works of art or notable collections of value held by your authority?
2. Please list the most valuable five works of art / collections of note held by the authority.

In response to your questions 2. and 3. above, Wolverhampton's Visitor Economy Service has approximately 20,000 objects in its collection across all three museum sites; Wolverhampton Art Gallery, Bantock House Museum and Bilston Craft Gallery. Although difficult to give precise figures approximately 5% of this collection is on display at any one time and approximately 10% over the course of a year. Alongside this, collections are accessed by the public through stores tours, which are run both as general explorations of the stores and on focused events on particular collections, and through booked visits to see particular works. 68% of our collections are also available online through <http://www.wolverhamptonart.org.uk/collections/> and <http://blackcountryhistory.org/>.

The learning and community engagement team also provide access to objects from the collection, particularly our under displayed archaeology and fossil collections, through mini displays, school sessions, family workshops and reminiscence groups. Works that have not been displayed in exhibitions have therefore still been accessible to and accessed by the public. Some items for reasons of conservation are necessarily limited to short periods of public display. The collections rotate regularly and our reserve collections are available to view in our store by appointment. Items from the gallery are also at times loaned to other galleries for specific exhibitions and on a similar basis the Art Gallery can receive loans from other galleries for specific exhibitions.

The permanent base of the collections is the Art Gallery although items from the collection are displayed at our other sites including Bantock House and Bilston Craft Gallery. All of the collections are owned by the city council so we do not make a distinction for each site.

In the interest of the security of the artworks and artefacts in Wolverhampton City Council's care, it is our policy not to reveal any insurance values of objects in the collection. Therefore, under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 ("the Act") Wolverhampton Council has withheld this information, as we consider that the section 31 exemption applies.

To further explain our reasons for applying of this exemption:

Section 31 (Crime prevention)

We are applying this exemption because providing the exact value of objects and artworks in the care of the council facilitates easy identification of the most items or artworks, which places them at increased risk of theft or vandalism.

In not providing the requested information we have considered the balance of interest as set out in section 2(2)(b) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Whilst we acknowledge that there is a public interest in the value of objects and artworks held in public collections being freely available, in this case we feel that this interest is outweighed by the need to protect the collections from theft and vandalism. We also feel that it is our responsibility to take whatever actions best protects the objects and artworks held in our care and donated to us in good faith by the public.

In applying this exemption we make no assumption as to your own interest in this matter, but we are mindful that if we release this information to the public domain we will be unable to control who has access to it.

We can confirm that the service currently insures the entire collection to value of £10 million, however this is not reflective of the market value of the collection.

3. Since 2010, how many and which works of art have been sold by the authority, and how much did they raise?

We have not sold any work from the collection since 2010.