



Brief for a Consultancy to undertake a Collections Review and Significance Assessment of the Natural Sciences Collections in the care of South West Heritage Trust

1. Introduction

The South West Heritage Trust are seeking an experienced consultant with knowledge of the Natural Sciences to undertake a Natural Sciences collections review and significance assessment.

2. Background

The South West Heritage Trust was founded in 2014 as an independent charity for Somerset and Devon. We are a regional organisation using museum, archive and landscape collections to support the delivery of heritage services to the diverse communities we serve. We bring together services previously provided by Somerset Council and Devon County Council, who remain our main funders. We care for 3 million museum objects and are also responsible for 10 million archives that tell the stories of Somerset and Devon.

Our **vision** is to 'celebrate and protect our rich heritage, helping everyone to enjoy it now and in the future.' That vision guides us in three key objectives:

Supporting People and Communities: We will support, empower and enrich people and communities

Protecting Our Heritage: We will preserve, protect and enhance our heritage, keeping it safe and accessible now and in future

Making an Impact: We will be enterprising, innovative and influential, and stand up for the heritage of Devon and Somerset

The Trust became an **Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation** in 2023. We are working with creative partners and community groups, from across the county, to deliver an ambitious programme of activity. This assignment will help us deliver Arts Council England's Cultural Strategy 'Let's Create' and embed their Investment Principles in our work.

Our work is guided by the Trust's 5-Year Strategy 'Moving Forward: A Strategy for 2020-25', Audience Development Strategy, Environmental Statement, and our Equalities Strategy.

South West Heritage Trust (SWHT) is responsible for the management of significant **Natural Sciences collections**, which include items of local, regional and national significance. The collections contain forty thousand rock, mineral and fossil specimens and 18,000 specimens of Ice Age mammals, representing the most significant Late Pleistocene assemblage in southern England. The biology collection consists of around 240,000 local reference specimens including a scientifically important herbarium. These collections have been highlighted as strategically important in the Trust's ambitions to increase audience engagement and tell relevant stories. We are seeking to develop a project to help us unlock the potential of these important collections and ensure their future care.

This collections review will be the first step in our journey to increase audience engagement with this significant collection.

3. Project Aims and Objectives

Our key aims are to:

- Improve access to the Natural Sciences collections by enhancing organisational knowledge and expertise.
- Widen the range of audiences who engage with the collection through our public engagement programme.
- Increase our understanding of the medium- and long-term challenges that face the collection and identify priority areas for action.
- Scope a project and funding strategy for managing and developing the Natural Sciences collections and widening public engagement to these collections with partners.

Our key objectives are to:

- Understand better the local, regional and national significance of our collections and create a statement of significance to support future funding applications.
- Identify the stories that the collections can tell relating to climate change and other contemporary issues.
- Identify the wider challenges facing the longer-term sustainability of the collections and outline priorities for action and options for the future management of the collection.
- Understand better the national and regional priorities in researching, developing and engaging audiences with Natural Sciences collections and identify potential partnership opportunities.
- Identify the potential of the Natural Sciences collections to engage audiences onsite, online and in our local communities.
- Identify future funding opportunities for projects focused on the Natural Sciences collections.

4. Outline of work

Working in consultation with the SWHT Curatorial Team, Senior Curator and Head of Museums and Engagement you will carry out a review of the Natural Sciences collection following the 'Reviewing Significance 3.0 Framework' and will help to answer the following questions:

- What are the current and potential usages of the collection for supporting academic research, formal and informal learning?
- What potential does the material have for engaging audiences with stories relating to climate change and contemporary issues relating to the natural environment?
- What are the meanings and values of the collection for current and potential audiences?
- How accessible is the material for current users and museum staff?
- How secure are the collections?

- How appropriate is the storage of the collection in terms of packaging, environment, and monitoring?
- What is the condition of the collection?
- Is there clear ownership of the collection and are loan agreements in place?
- How adequate is the documentation including retrievability of catalogue data and supporting documentation?

The findings of the review will be presented in report form outlining:

- The strategic context (local, regional, national).
- The collections' significance.
- The key challenges for the ongoing management and development of the collections and priorities for improving the long-term sustainability of the collection.
- The potential for the collection to tell stories and engage audiences.
- Opportunities for funding and partnership working.

This report will provide the foundation for a wider piece of work by the Trust to scope a future project and funding strategy for the Natural Sciences collections.

Project milestones:

Recruitment: September 2025

Start-up meeting: October 2025

Collections review: October to December 2025

Draft report: January 2026

Report sign-off: February 2026

5. Essential requirements

- A proven track record in completing collections reviews and significance assessments for a range of museum and heritage organisations.
- Experience of working with Natural Science collections.
- Knowledge of the Natural Sciences and Natural Science collections.
- Knowledge of the museum sector and relevant subject specialist networks.
- Capacity and flexibility to complete the assignment by February 2026.
- Public liability and professional indemnity insurance.
- The consultant will be based at their own premises but will be required to attend meetings and work with staff at the Somerset Heritage Centre in person and online. If arranged in advance it may be possible to provide desk or meeting space at the Somerset Heritage Centre.

6. Tender timeframe

Tender responses to be submitted by email to amal.khreisheh@swheritage.org.uk by 9:00 AM on Monday 29 September 2025.

Interviews (if required) will take place on Tuesday 7 October 2025.

Start date is expected to be October 2025.

7. Fee

The fee available for this assignment is up to £6,950.00, inclusive of expenses and VAT (if applicable). Payment terms to be staged payments in arrears. Schedule to be agreed with the successful tenderer.

8. How to apply

If you are interested in undertaking this contract, please submit an expression of interest in the following form:

- A proposal of no more than two sides of A4 setting out how you would undertake this contract and a separate costed breakdown of the budget by activity, detailing the number of days and including your day rate.
- Details of the consultant(s) who will work on the project and their CV(s), highlighting any relevant skills, experience or knowledge.
- The names and contact details of two referees.
- Proof of public liability and professional indemnity insurance.

9. Copyright

The copyright of any materials produced during the contract will rest with SWHT.

10. Contact details

If you have any queries in advance of submitting a tender please contact Amal Khreisheh, Senior Curator, South West Heritage Trust Email: amal.khreisheh@swheritage.org.uk