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(Please note that "Information Only" reports do not require an Integrated impact assessment, Legal or Finance Comments as no decision is being taken)

<b>Title of meeting:</b>	Culture, Leisure and Economic Development Decision Meeting
<b>Subject:</b>	Portsmouth's Natural History Collections
<b>Date of meeting:</b>	17 July 2020
<b>Report by:</b>	Director of Culture, Leisure and Regulatory Services
<b>Wards affected:</b>	All

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**1. Requested by**

1.1 The Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure and Economic Development

**2. Purpose**

2.1 To report on progress to identify collectors and collections in Portsmouth's natural history collections.

**3. Information Requested**

3.1 The 'Wild about Portsmouth Project', funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and match funded by Portsmouth City Council was set up to share and raise the profile of the city's natural history collection.

3.2 Underpinning the project has been a team of volunteers (26 to date) who have helped to catalogue and re-organise the collections. The 'Herbarium Rehousing project' (cutting and making up 1500 folders with colour codes for 20,000 plants before relocating into 36 herbarium cabinets donated by the Natural History Museum, London) and the 'Big Box Blitz' (bagging up and rehousing 2000 taxidermy specimens) are two examples of how volunteer assistance has been crucial in helping to improve standards and access to the collections.

3.3 Since the project began, the size of the database has more than doubled, from 16,000 specimens to 33,000 specimens catalogued. These have been catalogued by both volunteers and staff, with the bulk of the work carried out by the Natural History Collections Assistant. Although the original records met museum documentation standards, many were catalogued as part of an audit exercise and very little provenance data captured.



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- 3.4 From the outset of the project, the curator was keen to develop the database to capture as much data on each record as possible. One of the great strengths of Portsmouth's natural history collection is the quality of data attached to the specimens. Volunteers and new staff were trained in what to record for each record and where to add the information.
- 3.5 Although more labour intensive, this approach has created an important biological and geological resource. One of the first insect collections catalogued was the Guernonprez moth collection (8500 records). The data was shared with the Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre and Sussex Moth Group who have found several new species records for the Sussex.
- 3.6 Having natural history collections with good quality data enables the city's collection to take part in local, national, and international recording initiatives and contribute to biodiversity and environmental research at universities and other institutions. Over the last two years the natural history collections have contributed to research at the University of Portsmouth (ancient DNA in molluscs), the University of Southampton (ongoing research into robin behaviour and measuring carnivore skulls) and sawfish measurement and DNA analysis for the Universities of Southern Mississippi and Louisiana State.
- 3.7 Lockdown has enabled the curator and assistant to focus on the collections data. The natural history collections assistant, a keen entomologist, has been working through the Hymenoptera (bees and wasps) collection – cataloguing, checking identities and labelling each insect. Once complete this will be the first fully curated and labelled insect collection.
- 3.8 The curator has been working through the original 16,000 records to improve the quality and quantity of data. Brief descriptions have been globally edited to add common and scientific names and field data, but many have needed updating individually. Fortunately, card index files set up in the 1960s – 1980s (the forerunner of digitisation) still existed along with day books, accession registers and notebooks, which provided a valuable source of additional information. To date (June 2020) just over 12,000 records have been updated.
- 3.9 Working through the database has provided the curator with a more detailed overview and scope of the natural history collections and, for the first time in decades, 'lost' collections knowledge has been regained. The work on the database will help ensure that this regained collections' knowledge is retained.
- 3.10 An overview of the natural history collections has been attached to this report. It was written to provide evidence to the statement that the natural history collection 'is of regional significance, with some parts of the botanical, geological

and entomology collections being of national significance' 'by the Natural History Museum (London) in their draft report *Wild about Portsmouth – Assessment of Portsmouth's Natural History Collections*' .



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Signed by  
**Stephen Baily**  
**Director of Culture, Leisure and Regulatory Services**

**Appendices:**  
**Appendix 1 - Summary of Portsmouth Natural History Collection**

Summary of Portsmouth's natural history collections

**Background list of documents: Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972**

The following documents disclose facts or matters, which have been relied upon to a material extent by the author in preparing this report:

Title of document	Location