



ESTABLISHING A VISION: New Walk Museum and the Story of Leicester

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CONTENTS

1. Overview	5
2. Establishing a Vision: <i>New Walk Museum</i> <i>and the Story of Leicester: the brief</i>	6
3. The process	7
4. Beginnings: <i>the characterisation</i> workshops	8
5. Research and discussion: <i>workshops 2</i> <i>and 3</i>	9
6. Research and discussion: <i>the visits</i>	11
7. Formulating a vision: <i>the 3-day workshop</i>	17
8. A new vision for New Walk Museum	20
9. Vision in action	21



OVERVIEW

New Walk Museum sits in one of the UK's most ethnically diverse cities. In 2007, figures suggested that 40% of the City's population were from ethnic minority backgrounds with an expectation that this would rise to 50% sometime after 2011. Following a period of economic decline, in recent years the City has undergone significant investment, a process which is on-going and which is bringing new retail, business and cultural opportunities to the City. The cultural life of the City is central to the political agenda of the City Mayor who is leading on initiatives such as Connecting Leicester, a project intended to highlight the city's heritage and which aims to build – through redevelopment and reconfiguration of the city centre – a historic and family-friendly city. A key element of Connecting Leicester is The Story of Leicester, a project aimed specifically at

promoting Leicester's social and built heritage. New Walk Museum has the potential to play a key role in this project.

The Museum, located on New Walk, Leicester's historic eighteenth-century walkway, opened in 1849 and was one of the first public museums to be established in the UK. It is now part of Leicester Arts and Museums Service, a city-wide service that manages 4 museums and 5 heritage sites. Across the service, the collections are diverse – including decorative arts, costume and textiles, archaeology, geology and Egyptology. The Service also has a remit for contemporary art and craft and has been active in developing a range of projects such as a partnership with Tate to bring ARTIST ROOMS to the City. Its location and diversity mean that the Museum has great potential to act as a hub for heritage and to play a key role in the social and cultural life of the City.

Over recent years, New Walk Museum has undertaken a plethora of activities that have

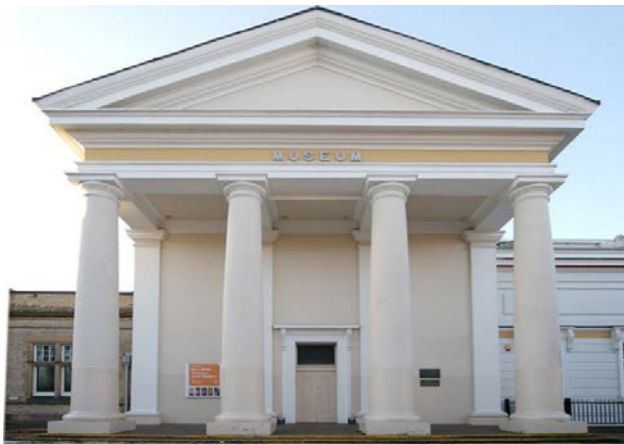
seen visitor numbers rise from 111,000 per year in 2002 to an average of 170,000 between 2007 and 2010. In 2011, visitor figures peaked at 250,000 as a result of specific exhibitions. That said, at the moment New Walk Museum is not reaching its potential compared to other flagship museums in major cities. Visitor research shows that large sections of Leicester's populations do not visit the Museum – people from poorer socio-economic backgrounds are under-represented as are disabled people. Similarly, management, staff and stakeholders all share concerns about both the need for a stronger vision for New Walk Museum and the physical limitations of the building.

Commissioned by Arts Council England in a direct move to unlock the potential of New Walk Museum, **Establishing a Vision: New Walk Museum and the Story of Leicester**, is a partnership between Leicester Arts and Museum Service, Leicester City Council and the Research Centre for Museums and Galleries (RCMG) in the School of Museum Studies at the University

of Leicester. The project set out to re-think the role of New Walk Museum within the life of the City and to work with Museum staff and key stakeholders to identify a set of core values and priorities to inform all future developments at the Museum. The following pages describe and illustrate the activities undertaken by the project partners before setting out the results of this process; a new vision for New Walk Museum and some early representations of the 'vision in action'.



ESTABLISHING A VISION: New Walk Museum and the Story of Leicester: the brief



The project set out to:

- Foster innovation and ambition for New Walk Museum.
- Place visitors at the heart of a new strategic vision for New Walk Museum.
- Generate new ways of thinking about the Museum, its location, its physical fabric, its collections and its resources in the context of the City of Leicester.
- Deliver a shared sense of the rationale and focus of New Walk Museum as well as an overarching plan and set of priorities for the Museum through which future developments, large or small, will be developed.

Activities included:

- Two characterisation workshops designed to draw out perceptions of New Walk Museum amongst (i) the staff of Leicester Arts and Museums Service and (ii) key stakeholders.
- A series of research seminars with leading thinkers on museums and galleries.
- A series of structured visits to a range of city museums with a strong strategic vision.
- A 3-day creative workshop with a core group of Leicester Arts and Museum Service staff in order to identify a mission and set of core values for New Walk Museum and to begin to visualise the vision in action.

THE PROCESS

What might New Walk Museum look and feel like to visitors if approached through the newly articulated mission and core values?

Between December 2012 and February 2013, a changing group of Leicester Arts and Museums Service staff attended workshops, visited inspiring museum developments and took part in formal and informal discussions about the future of New Walk Museum and its potential to play a vital role in the social and cultural life of the City. At each stage, a simple but effective grid was completed by each member of staff, capturing inspiring ideas and their relevance to Leicester and New Walk Museum (see right).

Following this period of research and discussion, a 3-day residential enabled a core team of Leicester Arts and Museums Service staff to work together with colleagues from the School of Museum Studies to distil the mission and core values for New Walk Museum from the mass of ideas, data and feedback gathered during the New Walk Museum Vision process.




The final 2 days of the residential were utilised to begin to think through the 'vision in action'. What might New Walk Museum look and feel

like to visitors if approached through the newly articulated mission and core values?

Visit 1 Name:

New Walk Museum Vision
Establishing a Vision: New Walk Museum and the Story of Leicester

1. Inspiring ideas from the visit.....	2. Effective display/interpretation (specific examples) ...
3. Implications for New Walk Museum.....	4. Random thoughts....

BEGINNINGS: the characterisation workshops

In terms of aspirations for the future of the Museum, all wanted to see a museum which was stimulating, contemporary, accessible, humorous, radical, transformative, surprising, contextualised, of the city and for the city.

Workshop 1 was run twice; once for staff and once for a wider group of stakeholders. The aim was to use a light-hearted and humorous process of working in small groups to liken New Walk Museum to a character from film or TV in order to draw out peoples' views of the Museum and their aspirations for its future.

The stakeholder workshop was attended by 34 people. These were mainly individuals attached to formal groups such as the Civic Society, Leicestershire Chamber of Commerce, Leicester Society of Artists and organisations such as Soft Touch Arts and Phoenix Arts as well as a good number of academics and museum organisation trustees. There were significant similarities of thought across the stakeholders, all of whom characterised the Museum as rather traditional, respectable, and knowledgeable but also rather old-fashioned and out of touch with the realities of the City. Characterisations included John Thaw (a national treasure but aloof and uninvolved), and 'our mum'.

The staff workshop was understandably more revealing of the workings of Leicester Arts and Museums Service and New Walk Museum than the stakeholder workshop. Two staff groups focused on what was perceived to have been a lack in management at the Museum. With a great deal of tongue-in-cheek humour, one staff group characterised themselves as a well-known children's television programme with characters running in all directions to ensure the show must go on, and the theatre crumbling around them.

In the remaining staff groups, an interesting pattern emerged with the focus very much on a sense that although some excellent projects and displays had been produced at the Museum, these were disjointed and fragmented. Here, New Walk Museum was characterised as Jordan (overly augmented in certain areas with no underpinning values!), Joan Rivers (won't take advice and doesn't know when to stop, quick fixes rather than long term solutions) and Michael Jackson (more and more plastic surgery covering the cracks without looking in the mirror).

In terms of aspirations for the future of the Museum, all wanted to see a museum which was stimulating, contemporary, accessible, humorous, radical, transformative, surprising, contextualised, of the city and for the city. Here, characters included Grayson Perry (a good communicator), Helen Mirren (surprising, real, approachable, popular, evolved, respectable, bold), Stephen Fry (knowledgeable, humorous, uses media well), Dr Who (timeless and always reinvented for a new audience).

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION: workshops 2 and 3

Workshops 2 and 3 brought an experienced and successful group of museum professionals to Leicester to share their work with Leicester Arts and Museums Service staff. Short talks were given by Stephen Snoddy, Director New Art Gallery Walsall, Sue McAlpine, Curator and Exhibitions Officer at Hackney Museum, Mark O'Neill, Director of Policy and Research Glasgow Life and formerly Director of Glasgow Museums, Graham Black, Reader in Museum and Heritage Management Nottingham Trent University, and Ross Parry of the School of Museum Studies. The talks ranged across a number of subjects from building a community exhibitions programme and digital media in museums, to undertaking major capital development and driving forward a visitor-centred museum vision in a local authority context. A number of key themes emerged across the talks and in the discussions that followed:

Focus, strategy, leadership

- The need for clarity of focus about what New

Walk Museum is and who it is for.

- The need for a strong audience-centred vision to be placed at the heart of all of the work of the Museum in order to develop a coherent Service and, importantly, a coherent visitor experience.
- The need for strong and confident leadership and for senior managers to have the trust of local politicians in allowing them to put the vision into practice.
- The need for the vision to underpin a development strategy to ensure collective focus.
- The need to be able to articulate an ambition for New Walk Museum; what does it aspire to be?

Working practices

- The need on the part of the staff, for joined up thinking and opportunities for team-based

project working, not bound by traditional hierarchies and structures.

- The need for partnership working - critical to being relevant and contemporary.
- The need to be adaptable, imaginative and creative in a changing social, economic and political environment.
- The need for all museum activity to work incrementally and collectively to realise the shared vision.

Contemporary relevance & relationships

- The need for contemporary relevance to a wider section of the local community than currently exists.
- The need for dialogue and engagement with local communities in order to develop exhibitions and displays which are relevant and meaningful particularly with those communities who are not represented amongst the current stakeholders.
- The need to build relationships and trust with a wide range of local communities.
- The need to collaborate with the public, to understand the real public by meeting them, not by idealising them or second-guessing them.
- The need to acknowledge that the museum is as much about challenging contemporary issues as it is about the past.

Communicating with visitors

- The need for displays to be based on ideas; collections can be used in multiple ways and not just within disciplines.
 - The significance of stories in constructing effective meaning making for museum visitors.
 - The need for simple language but not simple ideas.
 - The need to consider the museum's communication strategy, might it be (as at Kelvingrove) object-based, visitor-centred, storytelling, flexible, and responsive?
 - The need to include multiple voices, different viewpoints and different perspectives in the museum - real experiences are most compelling.
 - The need to engage visitors for the museum experience to be participatory.
- The need to understand that digital technology in museums needs to be pervasive, participatory and personalised.
 - The need for the museum to be confident at demonstrating the critical role of culture in everyday life.
 - The need for simple communication such as strap lines to express to the public what the museum is doing.

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION: the visits

Herbert Museum and Art Gallery, Coventry

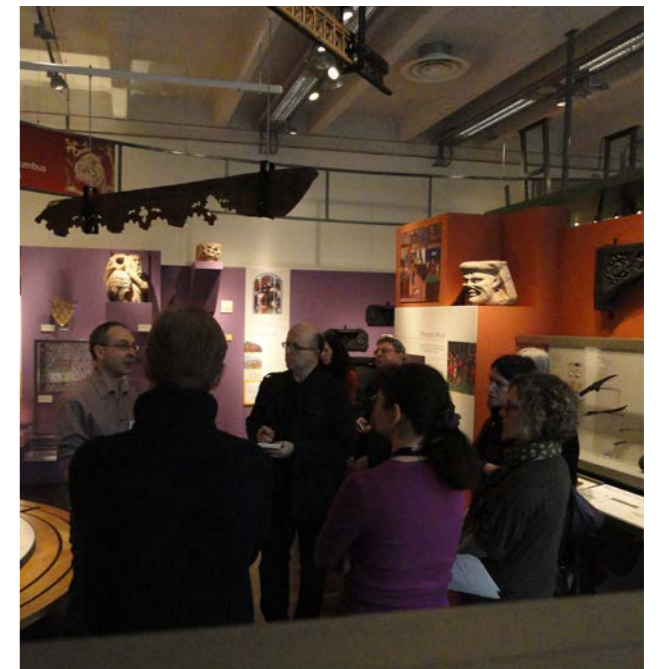
Between 2005 and 2008 the Herbert underwent a major £23million physical and intellectual redevelopment process resulting in new permanent and temporary exhibition galleries, a glass court linking the Museum directly to the city archives, the addition of community learning, training and media spaces and the creation of a new open-air public space. Jointly funded by Coventry City Council, the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), Renaissance West Midlands, the Department of Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) Wolfson Foundation Fund, Advantage West Midlands and English Heritage, in 2010 the Museum won the Guardian Family-Friendly Museum Award; in its first year after re-opening it saw visitor figures rise from 80,000 to 311,000.

The visit to Coventry was hosted by Senior

Curator Martin Roberts and colleagues who provided a wealth of information and insight into the redevelopment process. Leicester Arts and Museums Service staff were taken on a tour of the Herbert in order to explore the relationships between the conceptual and the physical – the stories the staff at the Herbert wanted to tell and how this was manifested in the physical layout of the museum and the displays.

With an overall emphasis on family learning, the conceptual framework at the Herbert is incredibly simple; visitors are presented with a small number of core galleries covering history, art, natural history and temporary exhibitions. Within each clearly signposted gallery, a particular approach is taken. In the History Gallery, for example, the Museum tells the story of Coventry through a high level timeline under which sit themed stories supported by object rich displays with opportunities for dialogue and family learning woven in. In the Natural History Gallery a target audience of disabled children was used as a starting point for a redisplay of

the natural history collections in highly sensory and engaging ways. In terms of the Art Gallery, staff were very open about the reticence amongst staff at the Herbert to incorporate the family learning approach into the art displays, a decision that has meant that the art spaces are less attractive to audiences and currently under-utilised.



Feedback from Leicester Arts and Museums Service staff included:

*'Welcoming, friendly, coherent, intelligent';
'Large, friendly, open entrance area'*

'FAMILY LEARNING - like the idea'

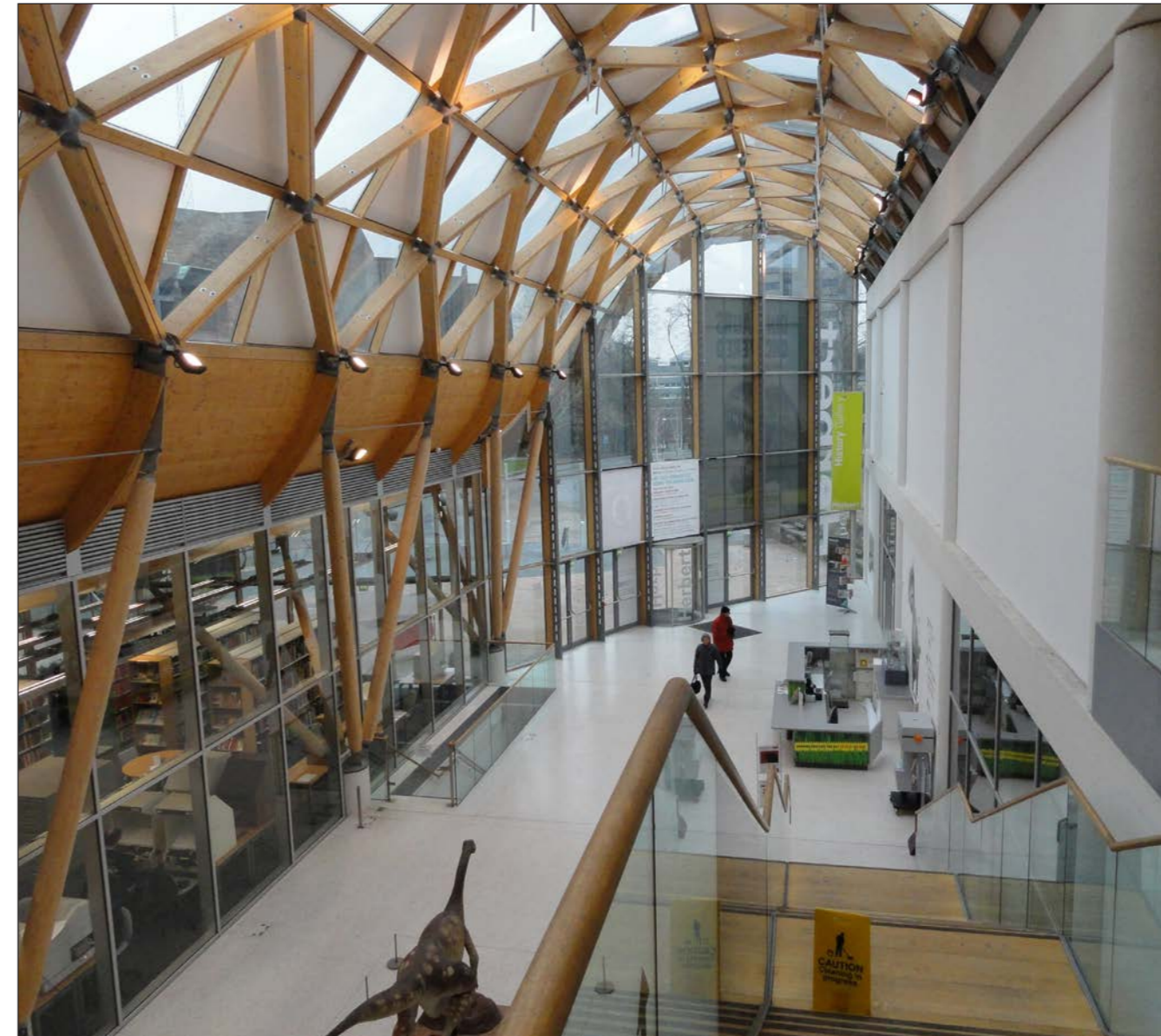
*'Lots of exhibits in limited space and lots of physical access to specimens – tactile';
'Importance of variety'; 'Like the use of large sized items in various galleries'*

'Cross team working – all working together to make the museum survive'

'Elements – very evocative use of the senses to engage the audience'; 'Bird calls and vibration – wonderful for hearing impaired'

'Bringing people and their thoughts and ideas into the displays - I thought this museum was alive and changing'; 'More opportunities needed in Leicester for people to contribute – their thoughts - their objects – their experiences'

'We have to show that New Walk is for all of Leicester, all working together to achieve this'



Museum of London



The visit to the Museum of London was hosted by Frazer Swift, Head of Learning. During the visit, emphasis was placed on the processes used by the Museum of London to manage exhibition development and tie that development to the core values and target audiences of the Museum, all of which are focused around learning. The museum personnel work together in multi-disciplinary teams – drawn from learning, design and curatorial – in order to ensure that the content, media and design are the best possible fit for their specific target audiences. Towards

these ends, the Museum uses the Generic Learning Outcomes and learning styles to ensure that the galleries are developed with specific target audiences in mind. The group visited the Galleries of Modern London, a series of galleries which explore the history of London from 1700 to the present day and which include over 7000 objects drawn from across the Museum's collections. Throughout, new technologies and a range of media are utilised to provide access to a wealth of information and a range of opportunities for interaction and participation. The Museum reports that the addition of very recent histories is drawing in new audiences.

Museum of London was particularly appealing to the staff from New Walk Museum who applauded the team-based approach and the robust systems and processes that staff at the Museum of London had put in place in order to manifest their vision effectively.

Feedback included:

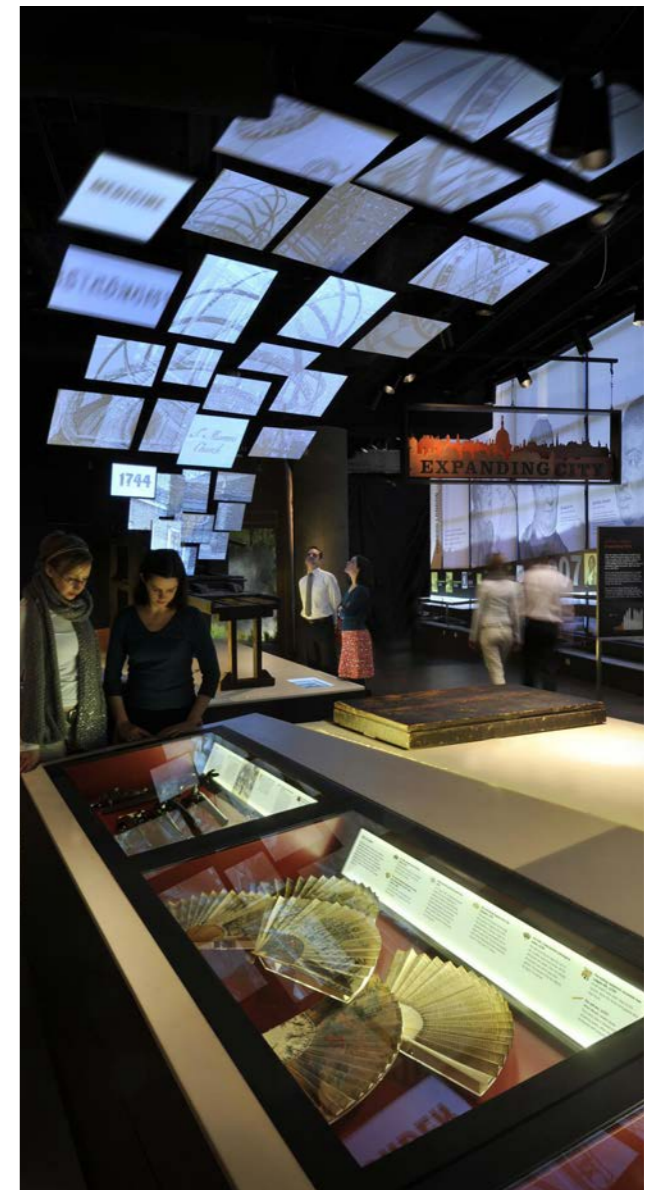
*'Integrating design, learning and curatorial';
'Joined up thinking, very inspirational';
'Thorough planning, involving design, education, curatorial staff vital to fully realise the educative potential of the collections';
'Collaborative design process'*

'Social space built into gallery layout'; 'Do we have space to create social space upstairs at New Walk Museum?'

'Under 5's activities areas incorporated into the main gallery and part of interpretation, not separated off'

*'Inclusion of real people into interpretation';
'Like the scale and drama of the displays';
'Liked the use of art as social documents/ illustration rather than art for its own sake';
'Would like movement and light/dark to be built into design'*

'Impressed with galleries with no text'



'Good access/ circulation (spatial planning) to support visitor experience'

*'A total commitment to their future';
Dedicated project management roles and strong core team working, tight project focus, combined with a clear strategic view'; 'How to work together as a team and to have learning totally inclusive from the beginning of a project'*

'A really inspiring visit where people are the heart of making it all work/ it is not the post but the person that makes it happen'



All images with kind permission of Museum of London

Museum of Liverpool, National Museums Liverpool (NML)



The visit to Museum of Liverpool was hosted by Janet Dugdale, Director of the Museum of Liverpool and David Fleming, Director of NML. The emphasis of the visit was very much on the strong and powerful social vision that the senior managers have for the Museum of Liverpool and for the wider Service. NML is a great success story, having both quadrupled and dramatically broadened the social demographic of its visitors.

Museum of Liverpool opened in July 2011 and is NML's £72million flagship development with major funding from the Northwest Regional Development Agency (NWDA), The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and the Department of Culture Media and Sport (DCMS). The city Museum has been much discussed for its democratic approach to content development – the displays were developed through a large-scale community consultation process – and its immediate popularity; visitor figures during the Museum's first year of opening have far exceeded targets and early reports suggest that the displays are provoking engaging experiences and on-going dialogue between the Museum and local people. The Museum's displays are characterised by the large number of stories they tell and the range of media and entry points they offer into the content. Displays clearly generated for specialists sit alongside content for young people and adjacent to activities for families with children. Similarly, high and popular culture

sit side by side, overcoming false disciplinary boundaries in order to tell the stories of the city more effectively. The result is a well-used and vital museum that is leading the way in museum practice and offering a glimpse of how a major city museum, if appropriately focused on its local people and local stories in a global context, can contribute to a shared sense of place and identity.

Feedback included:

'Passion for their role to inspire and educate (and as agents of change)'; 'Need really clear vision of what you want to do and really strong reasons for doing it'

'Being able to look out over the city to give a sense of place'; 'Need for two way conversation with users'; 'Keeping it local focused'; 'People feel welcome, like they belong, like the museum belongs to them'



'Circulation between galleries, wc's on each floor, good café and shop and main foyer were given adequate space for a wonderful experience'; 'We need to ensure that NWM works for our new vision. The building, its spaces and how the visitor moves around is fundamental to the success of any new galleries'

'Themes based on visitors interests rather than collections'; 'People matter as much as things'; 'videos using images and voiceovers to quickly and visually tell stories e.g. shipping containers – story of sugar'; 'Children's activities in all the galleries with seating for adults'

'Braille, sign language, subtitles used a lot – inclusive'; 'Use of colour to help guide the visitor to their desired destination'; 'Liverpool map' artwork involving and sharing people's contributions and experiences - not an isolated impenetrable artwork but an object about and for the city'

'How to encourage wider participation of all of Leicester communities in the use of the museum and to contribute to future projects'; 'Explore the relevance of collections to our visitors'; "Postcode' exhibition giving disaffected young people a voice through art and photography'; 'Involvement of people, sharing stories of the city / equal to the collections in value'

'We have collections but do not always root them in our own city, but this should not be about parochialism as we have stories from all over the world'



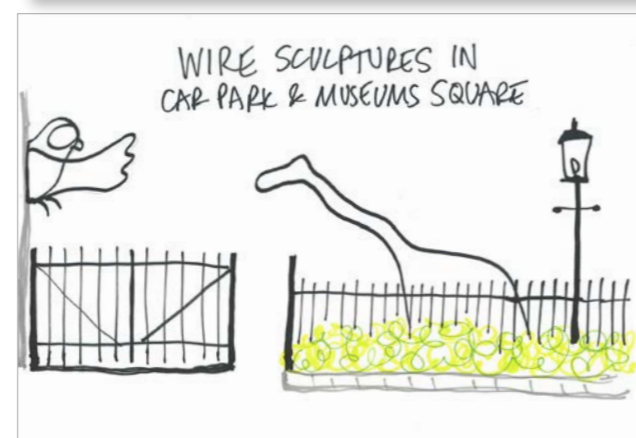
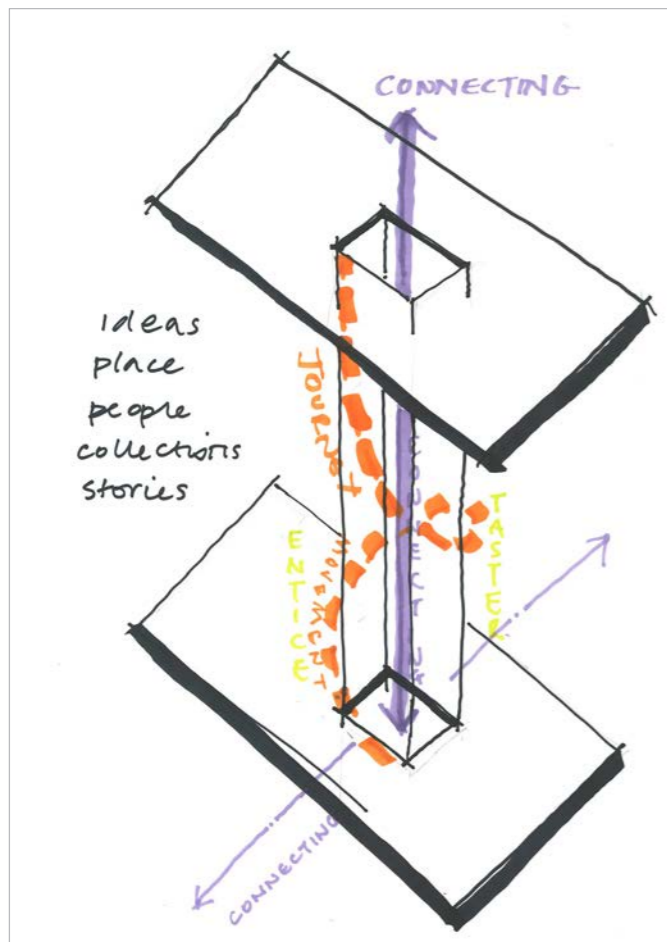
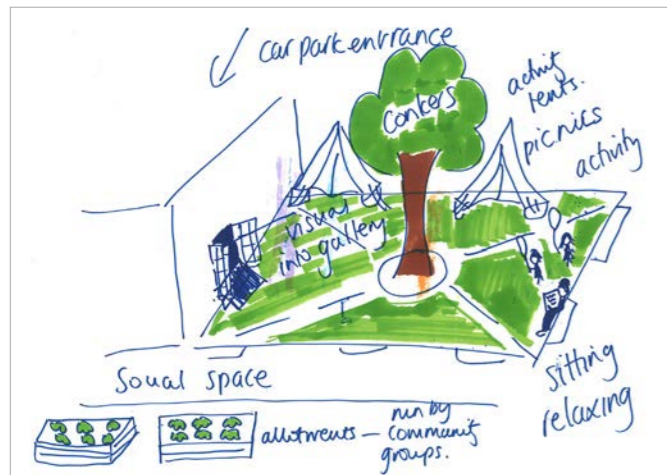
FORMULATING A VISION: the 3-day workshop

The final part of the New Walk Museum Vision process comprised a 3-day residential workshop.

Taking place at Launde Abbey in Rutland, the workshop was attended by 14 core staff from New Walk Museum including curators, front of house staff, learning officers, designers and senior managers. The brief for the 3 days was to (i) reflect on the process to date and develop a first draft of a vision and set of core values for New Walk Museum and (ii) to work with exhibition designers Metaphor, to help to articulate that vision in action.

The process was valuable in itself for continuing the teambuilding and advocacy for long-term planning. However, the process also moved into the very early stages of developing an overarching story and masterplan for New Walk Museum.







Stories not disciplines
 Using collections creatively
 Young people. Families

	Leicester	New Walk.
BME	54%	26%
People with disabilities	19%	3%
C2.D.E	59%	24%

* Leicester young city (17 day atmosphere)
 * Based on figures of visitors from the city (522)
 ** 28% from County 20% beyond

THE CITY / THE WORLD

Why is the city here? (Landscape Geology/Dinosaurs)

Radical city (is this a story of politics?)

Journeys of people / objects / the city / other places. (Expressionist... Angry young people Egyptology (Microbial history))

Making the world a better place (Doc arts / social history)

SENSE OF PLACE



A NEW VISION FOR NEW WALK MUSEUM

OUR MISSION IS TO:

Inspire a passion for learning and a passion for Leicester.

We do this through a focus on people and place, linking a local focus to global perspectives and stories.

WE WILL:

Build relationships with all our local communities.

Work in partnership with a range of educational and social organisations.

Create a shared social space for dialogue, debate and active citizenship.

Inspire creativity by opening up opportunities for participation and collaboration.

Look to the past to understand the **present** and inform the **future**.

Contribute to making Leicester an inspiring city to work in, live in and visit.

OUR VALUES:

We believe that museums are fundamentally educational in purpose and should be enjoyable places to visit.

We believe that museums are places for ideas and dialogue that use collections to inspire people.

We believe that museums have a significant role to play in the social fabric of the city, enhancing people's lives and providing a force for social good.

VISION IN ACTION

1. EXTERIOR

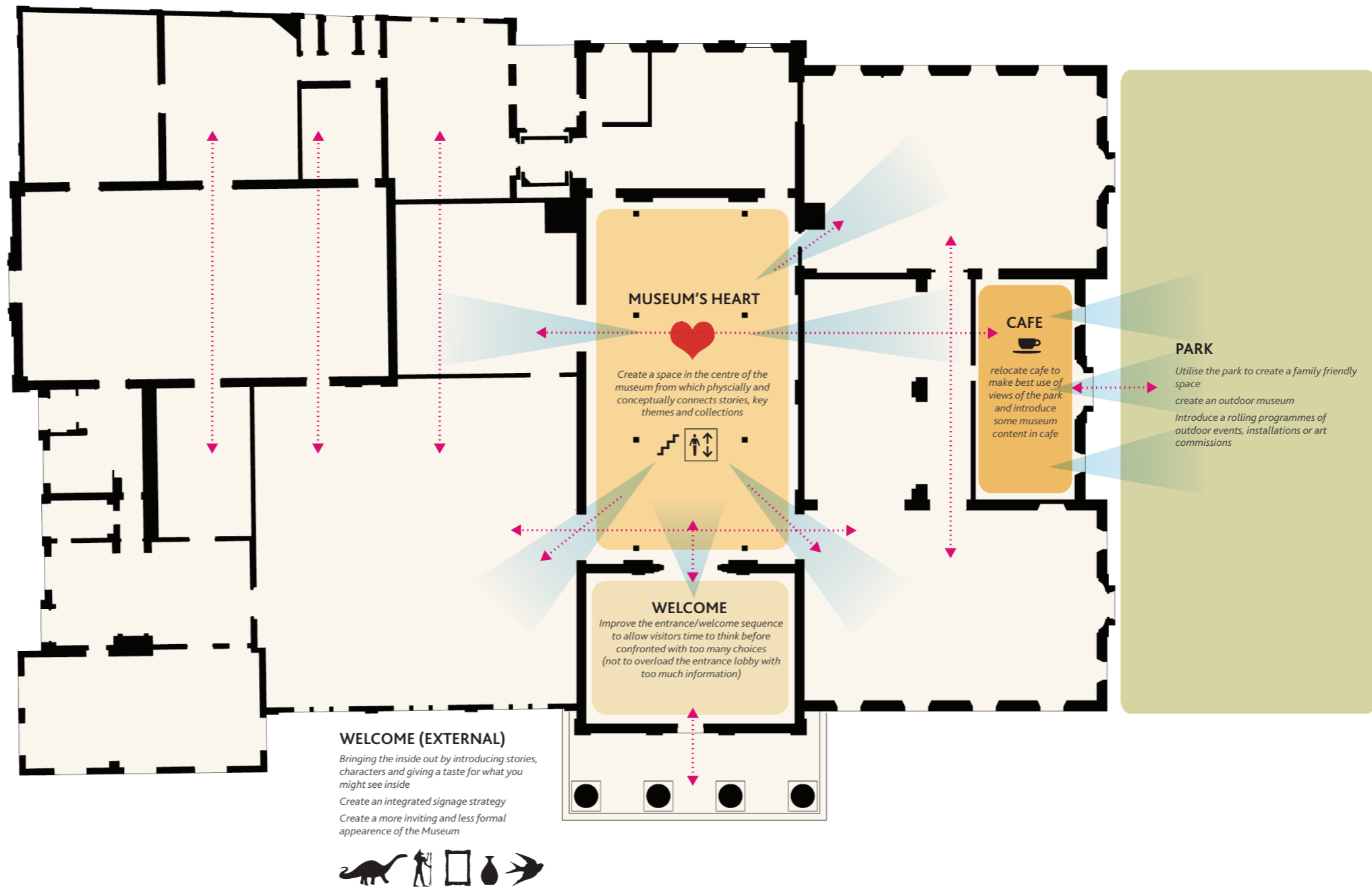
What might New Walk Museum look and feel like to visitors if approached through the newly articulated mission and core values?

The newly decorated façade of Leicester's New Walk Museum aims to break down the barriers between inside and out, so that the story comes out into the landscape whilst new visitors go into the museum. Banners, cut-outs, flags, posters, lettering and a 3-d installation all help bring the Museum's story outside onto the pavement, and signal that this is a Museum for families and children where everyone is welcome.

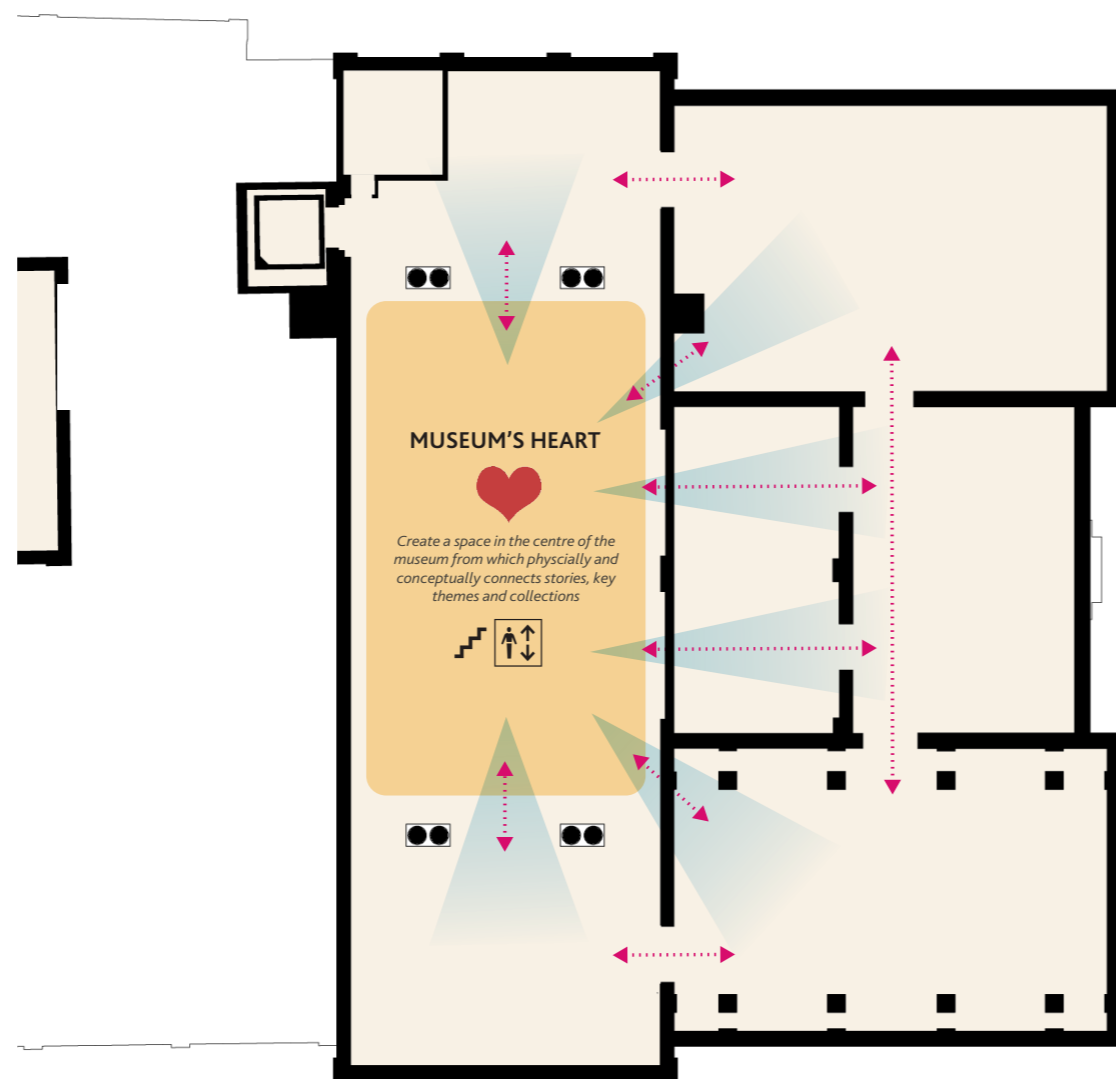


2. WARM WELCOME/ENTRANCE

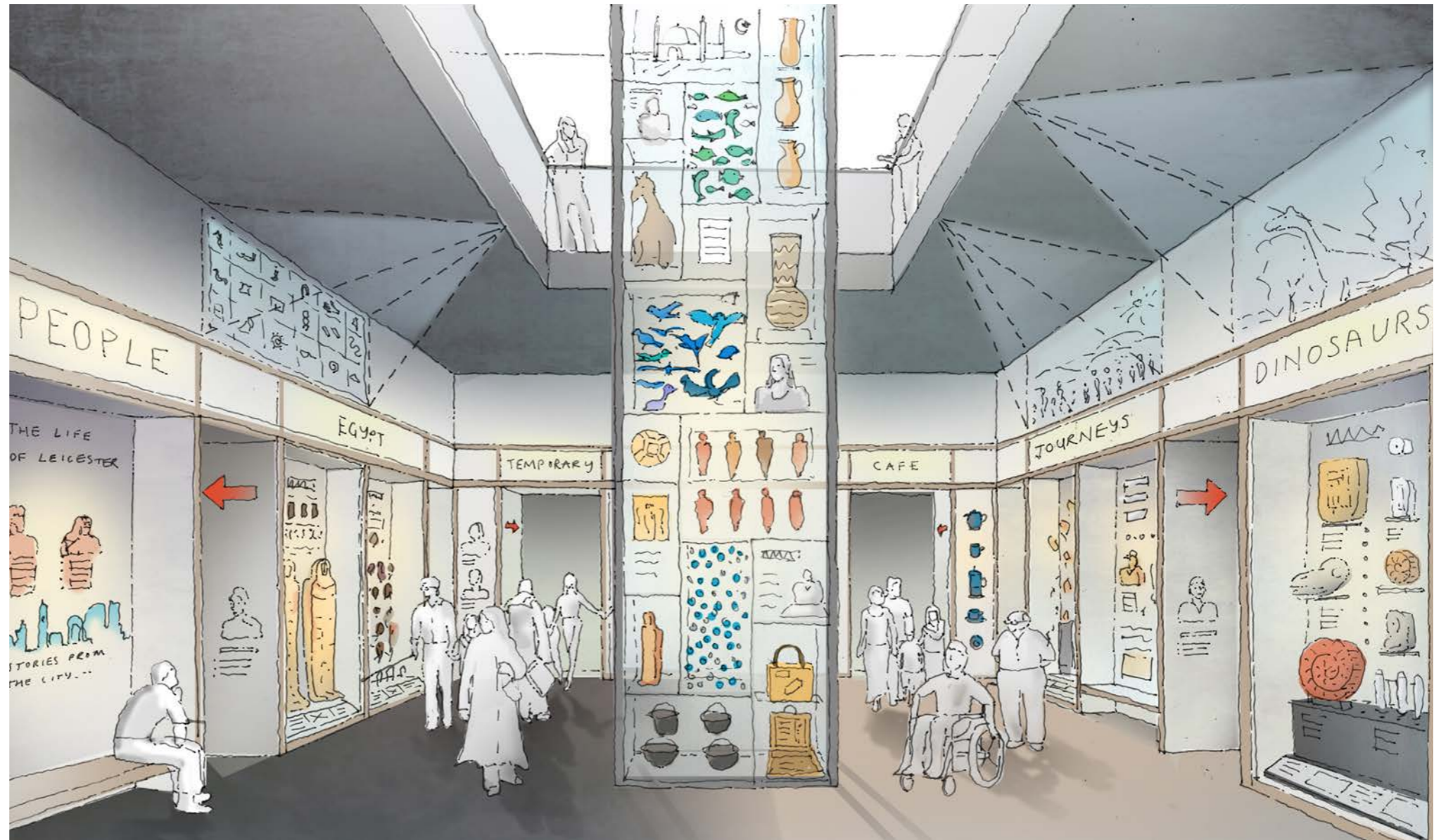
The warm welcome to New Walk Museum will continue inside. This new Welcome to the Museum makes transparently clear the visitors' choices and journeys. It also signals that this Museum is as much about people as it is about things. A spectacular showcase tower rises up through the middle of the building, joining the ground and the first floor together. Generously scaled doorways reveal vistas and give visitors real choices.

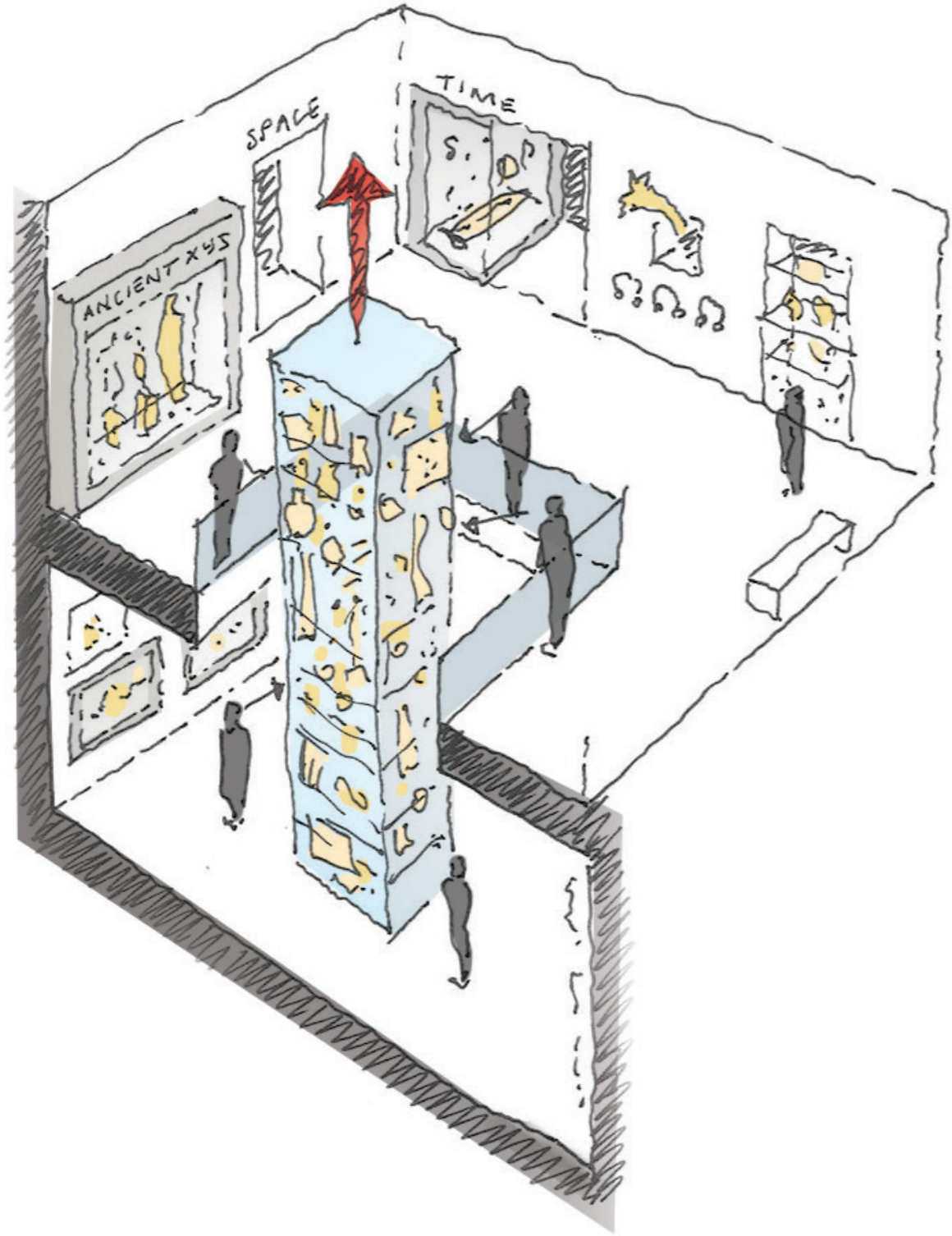


GROUND FLOOR



FIRST FLOOR

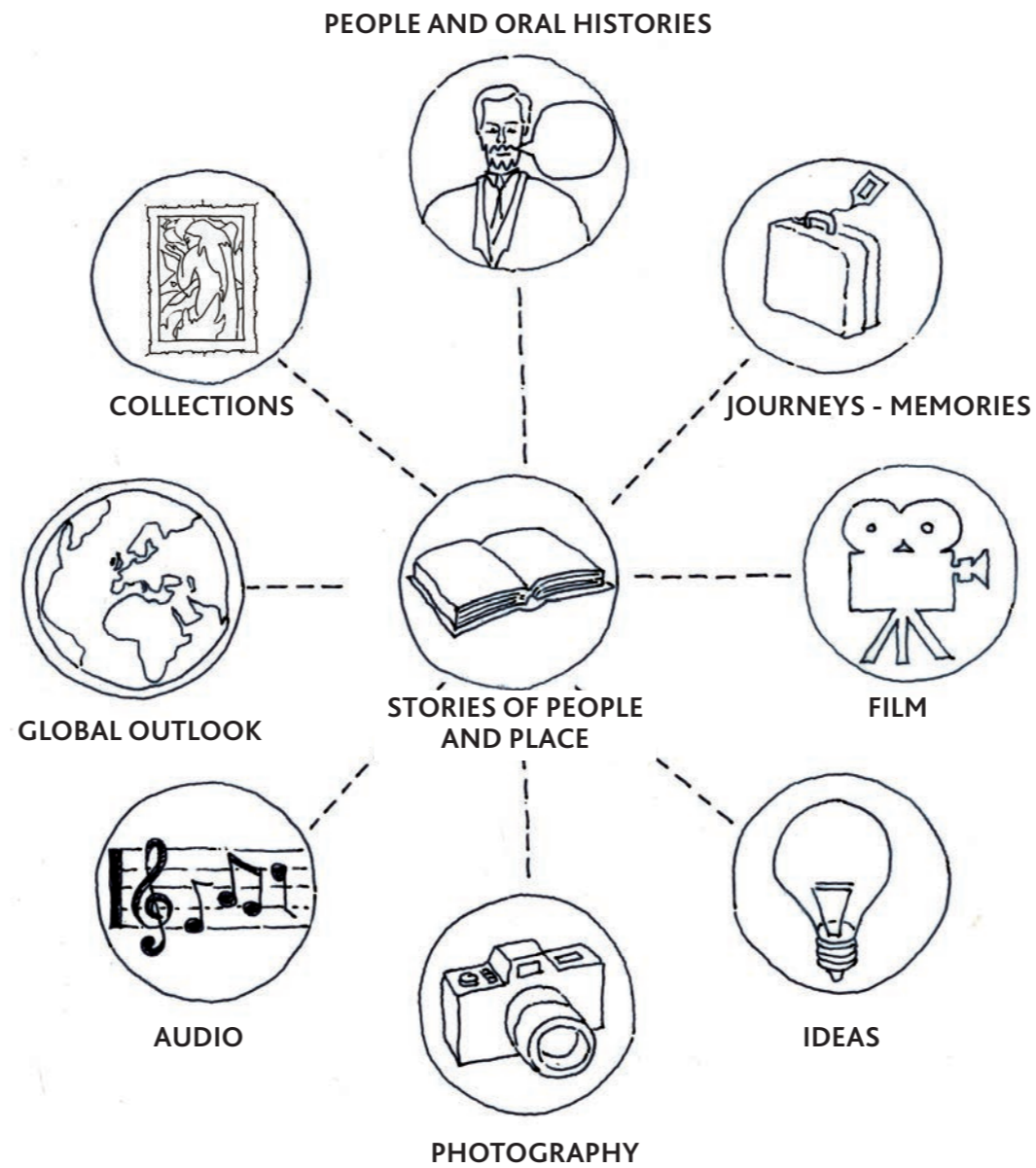




3. EXHIBITIONS AND DISPLAYS BASED ON STORIES OF PEOPLE AND PLACE



New displays and exhibitions will tell stories of people and encourage visitors to and residents of the City to explore the history of the region, the people who have lived, passed through and settled here and the City's changing relationship to the rest of the world. New Walk Museum will generate detailed, experiential and emotionally resonant displays and exhibitions providing an enjoyable and engaging space for learning for a range of users. It will use its collections in innovative ways to both stimulate and enhance these stories and it will commission films and oral histories in order to generate content and build an engaging and active environment. Prioritising access for a range of users and with a particular emphasis on families, it will integrate opportunities for interaction throughout.

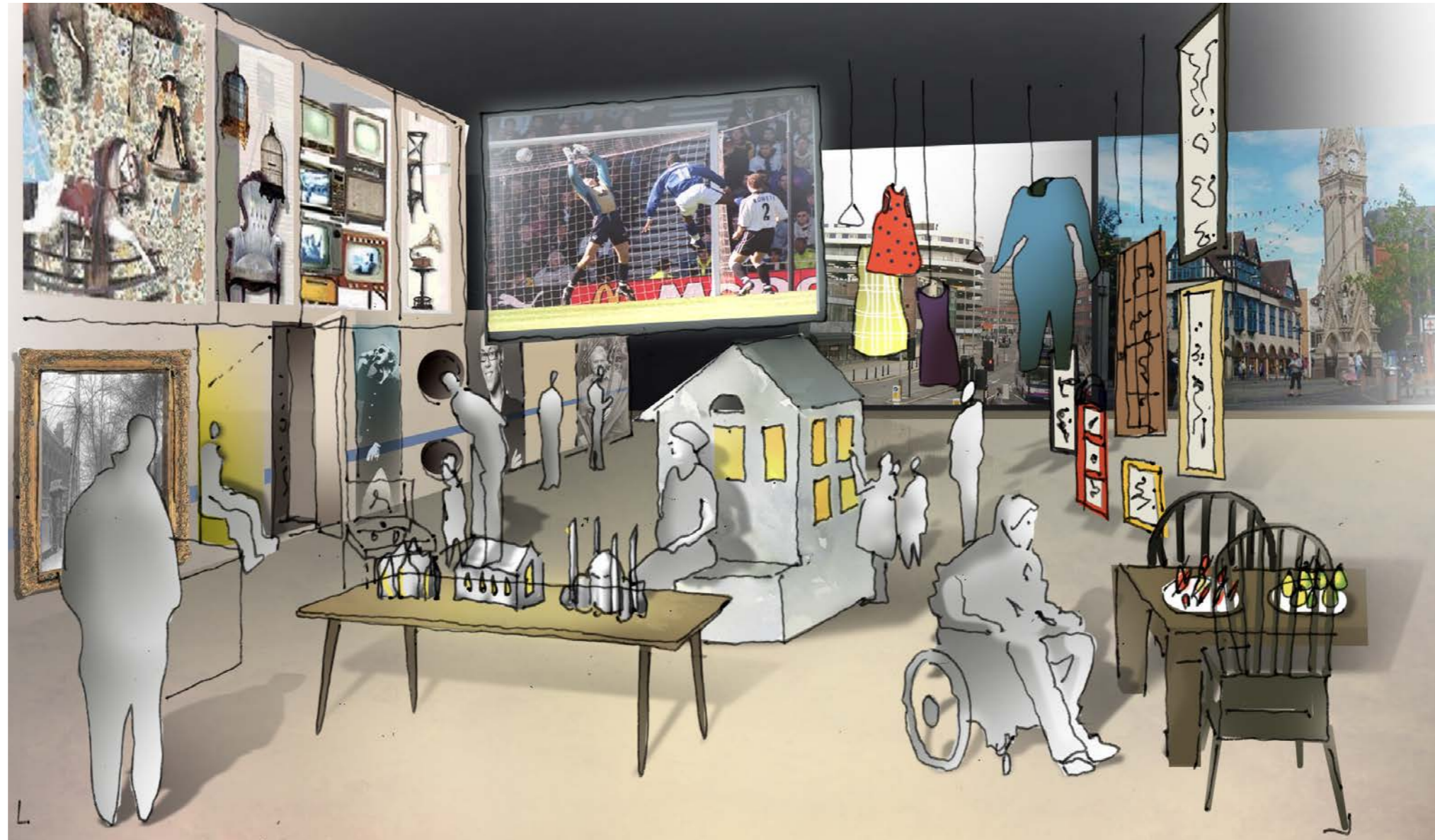


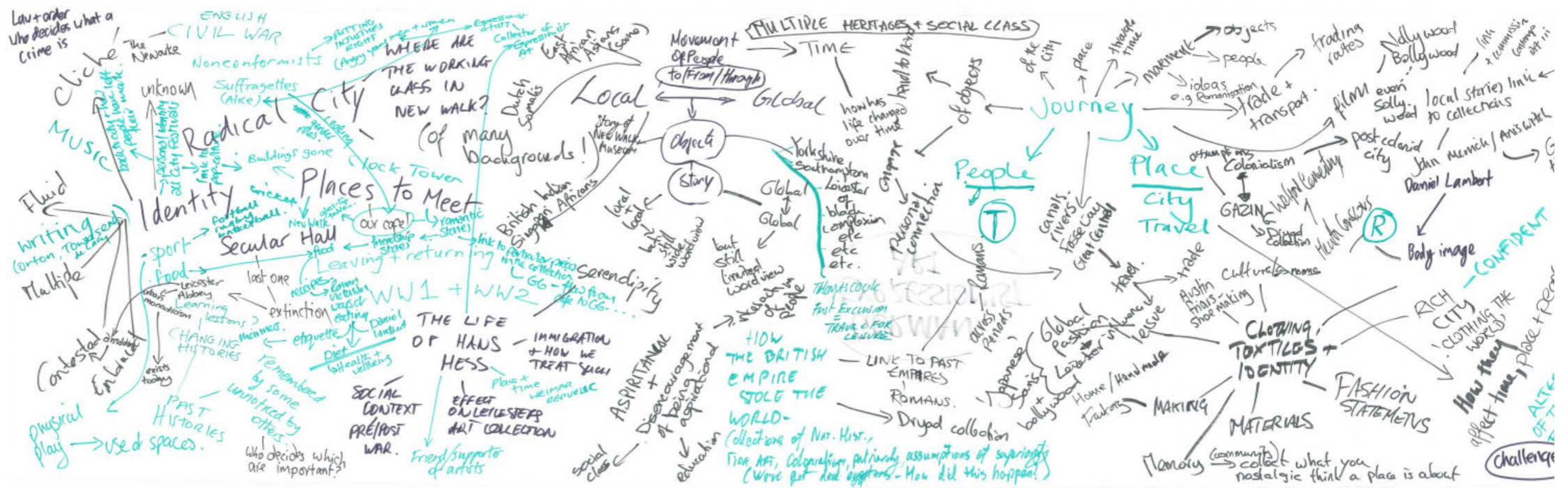
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4. A MUSEUM THAT IS ATTRACTIVE AND ACCESSIBLE TO ALL SECTIONS OF THE CITY

New displays and exhibitions will work hard to broaden their appeal to a range of users with popular culture alongside high culture and activities for children alongside content developed for specialists. Creating a sense of place and identity, displays and exhibitions will speak of the City, past, present and future.





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