

# News



## Kirklees Council confirms closure of three museums

Geraldine Kendall Adams, 06.10.2016

Museums could still be saved if alternative arrangements are found

Three museums run by Kirklees Council are to be closed after cabinet members agreed to cut museum funding from £1m to £531,000 at a meeting earlier this week.

The museums in line for closure are Tolson Museum in Huddersfield and Dewsbury Museum, both of which cover local history, and the Red House Museum in Gomersal, which displays collections related to the Bronte sisters, who frequently visited the house.

The council said it can no longer afford to run all five of its museums due to central government cuts.

Dewsbury Museum and Red House Museum are funded up to April 2017 but could shut as early as next month.

Plans are less clear for Tolson Museum. The council intends to merge its collections with those of Huddersfield Art Gallery and establish a new museum and art gallery at a more central location in Huddersfield, but no site has yet been found. The current museum will remain open for business indefinitely until the new institution is nearing completion.

Graham Turner, the cabinet member for Creative Kirklees, said: "It is clear that many residents love and value the buildings we have, but if we do not close any of the sites it will be impossible to achieve the savings we need to make.

"With a constantly diminishing budget, we have to change the cultural offer but I believe the changes will ensure that we can deliver a service for the residents of Kirklees that tells our story, in a different and more up to date way."

However the council left the door open for third parties to take over the museums. At the cabinet meeting, Friends groups were told that councillors were open to discussing alternative funding plans or asset transfers.

A council statement said: "Expressions of interest will be invited for those museums not included in the final portfolio."

Ann Denham, the chair of the Friends of Tolson Museum, said there was little evidence that the council's plans for Tolson Museum would save the council money.

"We always thought this was about money but it isn't really. It would cost about £1m to clear and empty the museum," said Denham. "The [existing] building needs £3m spent on it, but what would the cost of a new place be? There are no costings and no-one was prepared to say how much would be saved."

Denham added: "The museum will be open for several years - nobody says what is going to happen next. Our priority now is to let people know we are still open for business."

Alistair Brown, the Museums Association's policy officer, said: "These closures show once again how fragile the survival of many local authority museums is in an era of austerity.

"I hope that a solution can be found to reopen these museums under different management, and that other local authorities around the country will show a greater appreciation for their cultural services than Kirklees Council as they set budgets this year."

The council's other two museums, Oakwell Hall and Bagshaw

Museum, will remain open.

Meanwhile [five museums in Lancashire](#) closed to the public last week while discussions about their future continue. Lancashire County Council, which says it can no longer afford to run them, has received detailed business plans from third parties interested in taking over the museums. A decision on their future is expected to be made before the end of the year.

A spokeswoman from the council said funds had been set aside to maintain the buildings and collections while the museums are closed.

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