Local Authority Museums After the Cuts: A Study of Other-than-Public Forms of Management

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An earlier version of the literature review has been included in the following publication:

Arts Council England (2015) 'Research to understand the resilience and challenges to this of Local Authority museums.' Available online: http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/publication/research-understand-resilience-and-challenges-local-authority-museums

Sections of chapters 3 and 6 will be included in the forthcoming publication:

Rex, B. (forthcoming 2018) 'Museum management after austerity: encounters with expertise and the performative effects of documents', Special issue of *Museum & Society: Museum Methods for Researching the Museum as Institution and Organization,* Morse, N., Rex, B. and Richardson, S. (eds)

Abstract

Museum asset transfer is a process where responsibility for the operation and management of museum buildings owned by local authorities are transferred to external groups. Instances of museum asset transfer are increasing as local authorities attempt to reduce expenditure in response to austerity measures. While the politics of austerity have been thoroughly described and critiqued, its repercussions for local authority museum services are yet to be grasped. This thesis examines one of these repercussions, seeking to understand the processes, people and rationales involved in asset transfer.

The methodology for the thesis takes the writings associated with actor-network-theory (ANT) as a point of departure. This provides a way into the detail of how asset transfer works, both inside the local authority and for the groups of local people involved. Chapter 4 illustrates the influence of limited numerical data and reductive valuation frameworks on decision-making, showing how certain types of museum are more vulnerable to cuts than others. Chapter 5 describes the mechanics of asset transfer, showing that transfer groups have limited leverage to shape transfer conditions.

Chapter 6 investigates how organisational practices shape relationships, structure actions and circulate implicit logics as a means to understanding the experience of members of transfer bodies entering the museum profession for the first time. I show that perceptions of professional identity are important and are informed by encounters with organisational practices as much as with people. Chapter 7 provides empirical evidence of how the public nature of these buildings complicates as well as motivates transfer, with attempts to ensure this publicness was maintained having both limiting and enabling effects.

While asset transfer involves separation from the public infrastructure of the local authority and the withdrawal, in part or in full of their financial support, this thesis seeks to show that transfer bodies and council officers remain concerned with the public nature of these buildings, exploring how this concern is translated into action in this context. The forms of management resulting from asset transfer are termed 'community' or 'alternative' management in professional debates. The term 'other-than-public' is proposed as a productive prefix as it highlights the central conceptual tension of transfer: interpreting and maintaining publicness in a setting where public support has been removed.

Acknowledgements

I would like to offer my sincere thanks to all of those who participated in this research for their time and generosity of spirit. I am extremely thankful to local authority officers for openly sharing their experiences and offering thoughtful reflections in what is a deeply challenging financial climate.

This study of public museums takes place at a pivotal moment in their history where their place as a necessary component of a flourishing society is being challenged from various directions. It is because of the efforts of individuals such as those who were interviewed for this project that several local authority museums remain open to the public. I am extremely thankful to all of you for welcoming me into your respective museums, and for being equally as curious about asset transfer and its permutations as I am. My own curiosity in local authority museums and their management has been deepened and inspired by the ideas and experiences shared during fieldwork and I hope the thesis captures something of the complexity of the landscape you are navigating.

My colleagues at Newcastle University have been a constant source of advice, support and encouragement. I am deeply grateful to my supervisors, Andrew Newman and Areti Galani, you have supported this project and my ability to do it from the very beginning which has enabled me to see it through to the end. I would also like to thank Rhiannon Mason for ongoing support and Anthony Parton for supporting my intellectual interests many years ago.

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Finally, thank you to my family for always being there for me and believing in me, and to my friends for spare rooms, drink and distraction.

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Abbreviations

ACE – Arts Council England

ACV – Asset of Community Value

ANT – Actor-Network-Theory

AIM – Association of Independent Museums

BMDC – Bradford Metropolitan District Council

CAT – Community Asset Transfer

CCT – Compulsory Competitive Tendering

CIC – Community Interest Company

CSR – Comprehensive Spending Review

DCLG – Department for Communities and Local Government

DCMS – Department for Culture, Media and Sport[1]

FGH – Ford Green Hall

LCC – Lancashire County Council

LGA – Local Government Association

MA – Museums Association

MHG – Manor House Group

MLA – Museums, Libraries and Archives Council

NMHG – New Manor House Group

NPM – New Public Management

SoTCC – Stoke-on-Trent City Council

SRoI – Social Return on Investment

RBC – Rossendale Borough Council

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[1] DCMS was renamed DDCMS (Department for Digital Culture Media and Sport) in July 2017.

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Chapter 1
Introduction

 'I need to voice long term concerns about public investment and especially the loss of local authority funding which is now the most pressing issue day to day for many cultural organisations across the country'.

Sir Nicolas Serota, chair of Arts Council England, March 2017

'Do you know savvy, local businesses, or heritage enthusiasts with lots of spare time?! Lancashire County Council are appealing for serious, interested parties to come forward and take over the running of the museum service.

Please do get in touch with the council if you know anyone or any group who could realistically run our local heritage sites'.

Roger Mace, chair of the Friends of Lancaster City Museum, January 2016

Across the UK museum sector, the impact of the assertive austerity agenda of the previous coalition government (2010-2015) and its continuation by the current Conservative administration (2015-present) are being keenly felt. Since 2010, central government has reduced the annual grant paid to local authorities (known as the Revenue Support Grant) and changed the nature of funding to local authorities more generally. An analysis by the National Audit Office suggests that in the period from 2010 to 2016, there will have been a total reduction of 37% to total local government funding to local authorities (2014: 11). Data published by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) demonstrates that local authority spending on museums and galleries has decreased by 31% in real-terms between 2010/11 and 2015/16 (Museums Association 2017: 16). Generally, claims of vast change should make us wary. Yet the set of circumstances facing local authorities at this time are unprecedented (Hastings et al. 2015) with organisations such as the Local Government Association (LGA) terming the 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) and subsequent Local Government Financial Settlements 'the worst in living memory' (Hastings et al. 2013: 5).

Differences in funding infrastructures mean local authority museum services have been disproportionately affected by the budget cuts in comparison to DCMS-sponsored national museums. Prior to 2010, many museums owned by local authorities were managed in-house

by local authorities themselves. To avoid the closure of museum buildings which councils believe they can no longer afford to maintain and manage, several local authorities have sought to transfer responsibility for the management of these museums to external organisations of various types and maturity.

The passage of whole museum services from local authority control to separate museum trusts is not new, with the first shift of this kind taking place in the 1970s (Babbidge et al. 2006). This first tranche involved the transfer of entire museum services to trust models. This was often a strategic move as trust status was felt to deliver financial freedom, savings on business rates, along with increased opportunities for entrepreneurship and philanthropy (MLA 2010). The move was initiated and lead by council personnel and involved external actors or organisations to a limited degree: in general, museum services transferring to trust continued to employ the same personnel, although restructuring was common.

What is new, however, is the carving up of museum services into those sites which are retained by the local authority and those which are assigned for transfer to embryonic external organisations, social enterprises or local interest groups. Whilst museum asset transfer could not be described as prevalent, the MA observe 'an ongoing trend among local authority museums to transfer operations outside council control' (2017: 10). As local authority spending is unlikely to return to pre-2010 levels, this trend is likely to continue, making this study an important first step in understanding the rationales informing these shifts as well as their ramifications.

The current phase of transferring individual museum buildings to newly formed organisations, which often comprise residents of the areas where the transfer museums are based, remains uncharted territory for local authority staff and external groups. The media and professional press have begun to publish commentaries on this approach to public museum management.[2] However, these new management models have received little to no attention in the academic literature, leaving their complexities and ramifications under analysed. As this thesis shows, museum asset transfer accentuates several topics and issues of interest to museum studies (i.e. professional values and expertise), making it an engaging and productive phenomenon for research.

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[2] When I began this research in 2013, scant attention was paid to the fate of regional museums following the cuts. In response to the latest figures generated via the Museums Association's Annual Cuts Survey, 2016 saw commentaries appear in the Financial Times, BBC News, London Review of Books and The Guardian. My own commentary appeared in this outlet in 2015: https://www.theguardian.com/public-leaders-network/2015/jul/10/who-runs-local-museums-surviving-funding-crisis.

This research is an in-depth exploration of how the transfer of individual local authority museums works, specifically focusing on how these complex processes are negotiated by people on the ground and what these changes might mean for the role of publicly-owned cultural assets in the future. As signalled by the opening quotations, at the heart of this research is an interest in going beyond describing the challenges local authorities face. Although it is with some reluctance, taking public sector retrenchment as a given opens up space to analyse the multiple ways this set of circumstances is experienced and negotiated in practice, by public sector professionals and individuals seeking to lessen the impact of the cuts on services and spaces that matter to them. Local authority personnel may have no choice but to cope with the cuts, but they do have a degree of discretion as to how they are delivered and how these decisions are made (Jones 2014; Clayton et al. 2015a, 2015b; Lipsky 1980).

There is no doubt that the political argument for 'community management' is distinct from that for 'public service', the justification for the former is linked to its adaptability to the specific needs of individuals or groups whose claims on the museum are discernible, where the universality of the latter is legitimised on the grounds of addressing inequalities and the avoidance of neglect for one group's needs by prioritising another. Such public benefit arguments should be understood as a legitimisation strategy, not neutral descriptions of the museum's exceptionality (see Graham et al. 2013: 107). However, there is an important distinction in principle (the question of realisation in practice remains a separate concern) between the intentions associated with museums remaining part of public infrastructures and those that transition to forms of management beyond the public. As Chapters 7-8 discuss, the ramifications of such transitions for the degree to which transferred museums maintain their public character was considered as an inherent and vital challenge by members of transfer bodies. These reflections make reference to the hopes and aspirations, and where appropriate, early stage practices of transfer groups. While the impact of assigning responsibility for continued museum provision at those sites selected for transfer to the capacities and motivation of groups of local individuals on the distribution of cultural access is of central concern to this investigation, particularly as government rhetoric downplays the equity issues associated with asset transfer and other-than-public management more generally, a larger scale project would be required to answer this question and one occurring at a juncture when the scale of transfer can be discerned.

What I am interested to explore here is how museum asset transfer arrangements take shape rather than asking whether they 'work' or 'succeed', for what 'success' might mean in the context of these transfers remains unclear (see Skerratt and Hall 2011). The thesis moves

through granular accounts of museum management change to explore how decisions to remove public subsidy are made within local authorities. It also explores the practical challenges and conceptual dilemmas arising from transferring assets widely held to belong to 'the public' to organisations which I term 'other-than-public'. I use this term because asset transfer bodies are not public organisations in a conventional sense, yet those responsible for them, as this research illustrates, identify heavily with the values and ethics associated with being a public body. As will become clear, the move towards other-than-public forms of management for public museums requires us to rethink values and concepts foundational to the distinctiveness of local authority museum provision such as accountability, universal access, museum ethics and the public interest logic.

The methodological and analytical approach taken within this study is inspired by actor-network-theory (ANT) (Latour 2005). The reason I use ANT in this study is twofold: first, it is orientated towards local circumstance and specificity so encourages inquiry which is process-focused and 'empirical through and through' (Latour 1986: 3); two, it is wary of grand explainers, treating concepts such as 'organisational culture' or 'professional expertise' as factors whose capacity to influence practice has to be described through the empirics as opposed to being called forth as simplistic explanations for why museum practice is how it is. In ANT, all structuring forms, whether this is an organisation itself or a concept widely held to shape organisational practice, are viewed as verbs rather than nouns (Law 2003a [1992]: 6-7) because they are precise network effects rather than universal factors which exist in the order of things.[3] What this means for this thesis is explored at length in Chapter 3 but in brief terms an ANT informed approach guides research towards 'how' questions which is helpful for this study about museum asset transfer because this is currently an under-researched topic. For example, how are decisions made to remove public subsidy from one museum and not another? How did asset transfer become the preferred solution to the problem of museum provision in austerity? How do the groups taking over these museums form, and how do they negotiate the terms of their relationship with the council? How do they engage with their new responsibilities? How do foundational concepts such as 'accountability' or the 'public interest' shape the actions of organisational actors and how do they come together to shape

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[3] ANT develops Foucauldian formulations of power and the mutually reinforcing relation of knowledge practices and power structures (1980). Yet, whereas Foucault provides the conceptual framework for foregrounding the role of a variety of material forms and mechanisms in the government of conduct as part of an argument that 'power relations are rooted in the social nexus [rather than] a supplementary structure over and above "society"' (1980: 340), ANT takes this reasoning forward by pointing towards its consequences for methodology, such as extending the range of agents who can be said to participate in Foucault's power relations, hence why the frame of reference for this study is ANT.

organisational practice on the ground? As the evidence-base on these transfers remains under-developed, providing answers to these questions is an important contribution of this thesis.

This thesis explores these topics through empirical materials relating to three case-studies. Each case-study represents a local authority where an individual museum was put forward for transfer, although as the research illustrates, this is where the similarities between the case-studies end. Each of the local authorities engaged with an external group/s in an attempt to avoid the permanent closure of the museum in question, but the terms of these relationships were diverse and the outcomes varied. The empirical material takes the form of: in-depth interviews with members of transfer bodies, local authority personnel, elected members and museum staff; a library of documents relating to the transfers and a collection of ethnographic field notes from one case-study where negotiations regarding the transfer remained 'live' during the research period.

Through exploring these changes in depth, and by acknowledging the complexity and nuance of devolving responsibility for a publicly-owned building to other-than-public organisations, this thesis marks an original contribution to the field through its emphasis on:

- how decisions about museums are made within local authorities, as well as the frameworks of valuation used and the type of evidence that feeds into these discussions;
- why people participate in these projects and how their participation is shaped by the demands of the present;
- the distinctive nature of the local authority museum both in terms of the organisational practices associated with it, its ownership history and institutional form;
- how concepts such as 'publicness', 'community benefit' are understood by members of transfer bodies and council personnel, and how attachment to these values can both inspire and limit engagement;
- the influence of routine organisational practices on the behaviour of incoming museum managers and their understandings of what 'museum work' constitutes and how its priorities are perceived;
- the limitations of understanding museums as 'services' rather than 'spaces' within local authorities and how this counters public perceptions about museums.

I argue that the move to involve social enterprises, local interest groups and independent trusts in the management of museums cannot be understood through existing research on participatory forms of museum practice, nor should these changes be interpreted simply as

contracting out or outsourcing. In many ways, the withdrawal of local authority support, either wholly or in part, for individual museums across the UK should be read as a radical break with the recent past, involving a series of complete changes and the opening up of potential for alternative forms of practice to emerge. Yet, as I will discuss, relationships between local authorities and new management organisations, as well as relationships between new managers and their work as museum professionals are subject to the influence of several factors which were already features on the landscape of local authority cultural provision. For example, the priority given to making 'culture' work for the economy is by no means a new development (see Mason 2004) but, as I go on to show, these ideas are becoming increasingly influential as councils make decisions about where to spend resources.

Understanding how these existing organisational practices and commitments are negotiated and interpreted by people new to museum work is essential to enriching our knowledge of how the public museum, ideas about its role and purpose are being reshaped in the context of austerity.

1.1 Research question, aims and objectives

The research project set out to answer the following question:

How and on what terms do other-than-public management arrangements for ex-local authority museums function, and how do members of transfer bodies and local government practitioners engage with their roles and responsibilities in relation to this task?

The research has five aims and a series of linked objectives:

Aim one: to analyse how and why particular museums were chosen for transfer and the local contexts in which these decisions occurred using ANT.

> Objective one: to identify who is involved in these decisions within local authorities.

> Objective two: to discuss the decision-making process within local authorities and the type of evidence/knowledge on which these decisions are based.

Aim two: to detail the terms of these new management arrangements and the negotiation processes leading up to their implementation using ANT.

> Objective one: to analyse the role of policy tools and legislative measures within the Localism Act 2011 and cognate initiatives encouraging the transfer of managerial responsibilities to organisations outside the public sector in the case-studies.

Objective two: to explore the different types of management arrangement implemented and the influence transfer groups had on this.

Aim three: to examine the relationship between members of transfer bodies and the museum sector, as well as with the idea of 'museum work' itself.

Objective one: to examine relationships between paid museum staff and members of transfer bodies.

Objective two: to address how newly formed groups with minimal-to-no previous contact with professional museum work identify with their roles as museum workers.

Objective three: to reflect on the potential of involving groups external to the museum sector in museum work to bring forth different ways of thinking about museum practice.

Aim four: to explore how members of transfer bodies and local authority personnel engage with their new roles and responsibilities.

Objective one: to analyse how members of transfer bodies and local authority personnel interpret the notion of the public museum and public sector and whether these interpretations influence practice.

Objective two: to analyse the motivations of members of transfer groups and how they made sense of their task.

Aim five: to assess what practical outcomes would be of benefit to members of transfer bodies.

Objective one: to assess the extent to which members of transfer bodies access the resources available to them pertaining to asset transfer.

Objective two: to work with relevant sector bodies to facilitate the production of further resources as appropriate.

1.2 Key terminology

1.2.1 Not 'community': awkward phrases as a guard against obfuscation

It is important to clarify why the neologism other-than-public organisation and slightly awkward phrasing like 'other forms of management than direct delivery' are used throughout this thesis to refer to those groups who formed to manage a museum instead of cognate

phrases such as 'community organisation', 'non-public organisation' or 'third-sector organisation'.

In policy documents as well as toolkits and reports from professional organisations, and some of the academic literature, phrases such as 'community management' and 'community organisation' are used frequently. The implication is that these organisations comprise people who tend to live, work or have a personal or professional stake in a particular geographical area (e.g. DCLG 2006: 2; DCLG 2011a; Moore and McKee 2013). As Raymond Williams wrote, the term 'community' is never used unfavourably nor given 'any positive opposing or distinguishing term' (1983: 76). It carries connotations of warmth and 'implies openness and accessibility' whilst at the same time indicating difference from other groups (Gilchrist, Bowles and Wetherell 2010: 4; see also Mason 2005: 206-7). In the context of the other-than-public forms of management explored in this thesis the term is problematic on several levels.

First, it obscures differences by grouping together examples of other-than-public management which involve organisations with vastly different working practices, missions and goals. This goes against the aim of the research which is to unpack the nuance and diversity of how new forms of museum management are being assembled on the ground. A professional leisure trust is not the same as a newly formed Community Interest Company (CIC), and apart from in legal terms, one newly formed CIC is not the same as another.

Second, the use of the term 'community management' or 'transfer to community organisation' in media reports of the transfers as it was in relation to the cases examined here infers that transfer bodies reflect the community in some way. As I demonstrate in Chapter 7, this encourages groups to feel they should take decisions which reflect the needs of the community (the meaning of which is subject to interpretation) which they find challenging considering the lack of support available for such work. The term also implies that these groups have something in common beyond a desire to maintain the museum, which may not be the case.

Third, when used by policymakers and professionals the term is rarely more than an empty signifier but one which may have exclusionary effects on prospective members of transfer bodies. For example, community may be taken to refer to the geographic location or area in which the museum is located, discouraging the involvement of distant but interested individuals or groups. Thus, it is unhelpful in a research context where the aim is to examine how people come to understand their roles, responsibilities and to whom accountability is owed.

Similarly, I prefer the term 'other-than-public' over 'non-state' or 'non-public' because the latter imply that these organisations do not embody public values or identify with the idea of being a public body. As Chapter 7 shows, this is far from the case. Additionally, 'other-than-public', in its unfamiliarity, draws our attention to the newness of these approaches and the embryonic nature of asset transfer bodies in a way that 'third-sector organisation' does not.

1.2.2 What is being transferred? Asset Transfer and Assets of Community Value

Ford Green Hall, Manor House Art Gallery & Museum and The Whitaker are all museums. They are all assets too. They are part of the physical property holdings of their parent local authority and are subject to asset management plans which seek to maximise their efficient use. An important finding of this work is the centrality of this distinction to understanding how decisions are made about local authority museums. This is explored in some detail in Chapter 4. However, because of their double role - as museums and as assets - to frame the thesis, it is necessary to offer a short explanation of what local authorities mean when they speak of community asset transfer (CAT) and what members of civic organisations refer to when they describe listing properties as assets of community value (ACV).

The language surrounding these transfers is complex and subtle distinctions make a difference to the type of relationships we are studying. The vast space between these two terms, community asset transfers and listing as a community asset, and the roles they imply for local interest groups vis-à-vis local authorities was a major source of confusion for the majority of participants who were not steeped in policy developments associated with encouraging other-than-public forms of management for public services and buildings. These introductory points should ensure this discussion is not similarly muddled by terminology.

The definition of CAT is a good place to start:

> 'Community Asset Transfer is the transfer of management and/or ownership of public land and buildings from its owner (usually a local authority) to a community organisation (such as a Development Trust, a Community Interest Company or a social enterprise) for less than market value – to achieve a local social, economic or environmental benefit' (Locality 2016: 3).

A number of clarifications are helpful to bolster this definition. First, the CAT process is always initiated by the local authority. It is a power designed to benefit local authorities by enabling them to dispose of assets which have been categorised as surplus. The majority of council web pages explaining CAT use this term surplus and point readers to their asset

management, corporate and strategic plans as these policies influence the management of property stock.

Second, and relatedly, the final decision on whether to grant an asset transfer to an external organisation remains with local authority decision makers, making the recommendations of council officers an important factor in these judgements. An external group may submit a business plan but this must be deemed 'viable' for a transfer to go ahead. Although this study features groups whose business plans were approved, there are examples of plans being rejected. For example, Snibston Discovery Museum in Leicestershire and Etruria Industrial Museum in Staffordshire. There is still a degree of obscurity surrounding how these decisions are made and what viability means in this context. My original interest was to examine this selection process, its criteria and what was understood by terms such as viability, appropriateness and feasibility as judgements were made on the plans submitted by respective groups who feature in this project. However, my early empirical work revealed no selection process as such, if we take 'selection' as implying a choice between more than a single option. In the three case-studies, negotiations took place between the council and one other group.

Third, although local authorities have the option to pursue a freehold transfer where ownership of the asset in question would be transferred to an external organisation on a permanent basis, in general asset transfers (and those explored here) take the form of a long term leasehold arrangement entered into by the council and external group, which in many cases is at a concessionary rent (i.e. 'peppercorn rent') should the work of the group be deemed to achieve social, economic, environmental or other benefits desired by the council. The requirement for the external organisation to deliver these benefits is often part of the terms of their lease, meaning that the local authority can terminate the arrangement. The same is true even in the case of a freehold transfer because of something called an 'asset lock'. This applies to community interest companies and community benefit societies and again means that the local authority may reclaim the property if the organisation is deemed to be flouting its commitment to 'community benefit'. This contested term is the subject of discussion in Chapters 7 (7.4) and 8 (8.1)

Fourth, in the case of buildings which were used for museum purposes prior to the option of a transfer being tabled, the transfer relates to the building only. Although individual arrangements may be put in place to loan collections to external organisations on a long-term basis, it is never the collection that is being transferred. This can be controversial for groups

who believe the collection to 'belong' to their locale because the objects originate from there, specifically when collections are of an archaeological nature.

Fifth, there is no one answer to the question: what is being transferred? As Chapter 5 describes, groups may take on responsibility for maintenance, repairs and insurance (termed a full repair and insurance lease) or local authorities may agree to cover these costs over a specified amount of time to give groups the chance to find their feet. This thesis reports on how these responsibilities are apportioned, who decides and with what effects.

Sixth, and this is the final point relating to CAT specifically, there are various types of arrangement which tend to sit under the umbrella term 'asset transfer'. The main options are: a license to occupy, grant of a leasehold, grant of a freehold or an ownership/management arrangement. What unites these options is that they all tend to be granted on specified terms. This is significant for this study because although a decision may have been taken to remove the 'museum service' from a building, part of the terms of the lease may be that the group continues to operate the building as a museum. A central point of interest, then, is what is meant by museum in this context and whether what these museums do is different, if at all, from museums operated by the museum service.

Now we move on to a different set of legislation entirely, the process by which a building is listed as an asset of community value (ACV). In Ilkley, the Civic Society went ahead with this process whereas it did not come into the thinking of our other two groups. The listing process in Ilkley took place at the same time as the negotiations between the core group (the New Manor House Group and the Manor House Group) but ran in parallel to this work.

The policy framework surrounding ACVs is different from that which pertains to CAT. However, because the legislation and policies of previous governments do not disappear when they are no longer in power (unless legislation is revoked or amended), initiatives and projects of the new administration (in this case the coalition government) are layered on top of those of previous administrations (New Labour). Whereas CAT can be traced back to 2003 with the General Disposal Consent which permitted local authorities to dispose of land and buildings to community groups at less than market value 'provided that commensurate benefits of social, economic or environmental well-being [were] produced' (DCLG 2003), the ACV was introduced in the Localism Act 2011 and formed a key part of the coalition government's 'Big Society' initiative. For members of transfer bodies, these policies can merge into one, which is unsurprising given the similarity of the terminology.

While the legislation and potential surrounding ACVs is fascinating, the process did not feature heavily in the negotiations explored by this thesis so it is not necessary to go into detail here. In brief terms, specified organisations can nominate land and buildings as ACVs which means they are placed on a list maintained by the council. These assets can be publicly or privately owned. Once listed, should the local authority or private owner want to sell the asset, they are legally required to grant community organisations a moratorium period to enable them to develop a business plan and raise funds to bid for the asset: the group does not have first refusal (see Locality and LGA 2012: 13).[4]

Although this process was used as a campaigning tool by a peripheral group in Ilkley, it is vital that the CAT process which is a voluntary process initiated by the local authority is not confused with the ACV which is a legal right pertaining to voluntary and charitable organisations. In their negotiations with the three councils in question the groups who feature in this study have no greater legal rights (to support, funding, a reasonable arrangement) following the introduction of the ACV legislation because they were negotiating over the future management and operation of the building, rather than its ownership. Despite media reports to the contrary, in recognition of the bad publicity it would generate for the local authorities (which are political organisations) the empirics suggest it was unlikely that the buildings in question would have been sold on the open market.[5]

1.3 Accounting for the policy context

In addition to the above, there are several government policies and museum sector ethical codes and guidelines which have the potential to shape and influence how arrangements surrounding asset transfer are formulated and on what terms local authorities seek to engage with external groups.

To choose the local authority museum as a research focus is also to choose to study the influence of these wider policy contexts on your museum/s of interest as these frameworks are likely to have a greater sway on strategic decisions than cultural policy itself. It is not my intention to give an outline of the national and local policy frameworks which apply to local governments and thus local authority museums. For one, this is well explored by a relatively recent doctoral study (Gates 2012: esp. 26-84) and by other authors whose work has been

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[4] This is one of the core distinctions between the Community Right to Bid (another name for ACV) in England and the Community Right to Buy in Scotland.

[5] This is not to say that museum buildings cannot be sold. The Snibston Discovery Museum (Leicestershire County Council) was demolished in 2016 and plans are in place to sell part of the site to a housing developer with some of the money used to build a heritage/visitor centre.

important in detailing the political and policy context relevant to this category of museum (Kawashima 1997; Lawley 2003; Gray 2015). However, there is another reason why a description of the policy context is omitted from the opening parts of the thesis. This relates to the key difference between holding together a view of context as a bounded entity or container that can be pre-determined before empirical work and its opposite where part of the intellectual work of the research is 'contextualising the specific event' being investigated (Miller 1996: 362, cited in Hassard et al. 2008, see also Nespor 2003). With this in mind, the review of the literature in Chapter 2, and the policy framings it analyses, was written after the data collection period, hence its focus on broad shifts within government policy rather than specific pieces of cultural policy because they were found, through the empirics, to be more relevant to the practitioners interviewed.

On the subject of how we might understand the impact of political influences and policy frameworks on museums, Gray notes that 'there is no real picture of how these [factors] interact to affect the particular case of museums and galleries' (2011: 53). After highlighting a host of 'variables such as ideology, resources, party politics, pressure groups, dominant sector oligarchies, management practices, policy orthodoxies and many other[s]' (ibid) as important for understanding museums, Gray concludes that further study is needed. Rather than providing a generic account of 'macro' policy dynamics influencing the sector based on the assumption that the 'macro' influences the 'micro' in a universal manner, this study argues that generic accounts must be supplemented by studies which emphasise the nuances of individual museums, particularly when they are housed within local authorities.

1.4 Research focus and approach

The broad aim of this thesis is to spotlight how public sector museum provision is changing following the 2010 CSR and the subsequent austerity agenda. The phrase 'austerity agenda' is not a neutral description of the state of play of public sector spending in the UK. In his work *Austerity: The History of a Dangerous Idea,* Mark Blyth writes:

> 'Austerity is not a well worked-out body of ideas and doctrine, an integral part of economic, or any other, theory. Rather it is derivative of a wider set of beliefs about the appropriate role of the state in the economy' (2013: 17).

In other words, naming the state, public spending and government debt as a problem creates the conditions for austerity to emerge as a common-sense solution (see also Clarke and Newman 2012). These analyses of austerity as a discourse are crucial to understanding the

national political landscape but unfortunately naming austerity as a discourse changes little about the fact of budget cuts. They might be unnecessary but that does not make them any less real.

This research takes a great deal of its energy from a small body of work which focuses on how these potent cuts and the atmosphere of uncertainty and fear they create are experienced by the people whose professional work or personal lives are tangibly affected by decisions made by central government (Morse and Munro 2015; Coleman 2016; Hitchen 2016). Further, this thesis is centrally concerned with how the move towards other-than-public forms of management for public museums requires us to rethink values and concepts foundational to the distinctiveness of local authority museum provision such as accountability, universal access, museum ethics and the rationales informing subsidised cultural provision.

In addition to an overarching interest in exploring the way austerity is experienced by the public sector and those who take on its responsibilities, the research argues that the austerity moment is a productive space in which to explore local authority museum provision. This is because the decisions necessitated by public sector retrenchment magnify how local authorities view the role and purpose of their museums and how they make decisions about them, an area about which very little is known. When we unpack these decisions, we witness decision-makers favouring certain types of museum over others, one type of evidence over another, one category of impacts over another (Munoz-Darde 2013). Further, empirical material on people who step in to save museums at risk of closure contributes to our understanding of what people value in local authority museums. The question of the meanings and values people attach to the experience of visiting museums has been the subject of several studies (e.g. Falk and Dierking 2013) yet there is less work focusing on the value people attach to the existence of the museum itself (cf. Usherwood et al. 2005a, 2005b; Britain Thinks 2013). The research explores these themes using empirical material relating to three case-studies of local authorities who have worked with an external group with the view to pursuing a different type of management for an individual museum building. The next section summarises the three case-studies. However, before moving on I want to make explicit who and what this research does not cover and why.

As Ruming writes of working with an ANT methodology:

> 'While the researcher and the researched come together under the general agreement that something is worthy of discussion and analysis, there is (generally) no agreement on what or how a particular research story is presented (Pile 1999), thereby giving the

researcher a powerful position of the translation of the research environment in question. All research is, therefore, a single narrative (or translation) told by a particular person, at a particular time and to a particular audience' (2009: 455).

There are two points of interest which are omitted from this study that I would like to justify.

First, as I started to pull together the research design, specifically the proposed lists of interviewees, I begun mapping individuals and groups associated with negotiations regarding each individual museum using Coggle. These expansive webs comprised several groups and individuals who were not formally interviewed for this project. Mainly, those who do not feature in the empirics are 'Friends Of…' groups and people who campaigned against the transfer of the museum but who decided against involvement in the work of the transfer proper. Chapter 3 provides a detailed account of how I made these selections but for now it is useful to point out that a decision was taken to focus on the accounts and activities of those actors directly involved with the processes of management change, which after all, is the focus of the research. As such, there are fewer interviews with museum professionals than one might expect, as asset transfers are negotiated by staff beyond museum services.

Second, this thesis does not map the number of museums which have been involved in some form of asset transfer in recent times. While we now have some knowledge of the number of museums which have changed their governance model post-2010 (12% of respondents to the MA's 2015 Cuts Survey answered positively to whether they had changed their governance model in the previous five years, see MA 2015: 3), at the planning stages of this project, no attempts had yet been made to understand the scale of these changes, a task which was clearly beyond the scope of this doctoral project.[6,7] It was through conversations during this project that the MA begun to collect data on governance in addition to other more 'visible' changes.

Now I have made clear what this study covers and omits, the next section presents the three case-studies, their: location, ownership history and the nature of the collection housed in the museum prior to transfer. I also introduce the groups who worked with the local authorities in the run up to, and in some cases, after a new management arrangement was agreed.

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[6] The results of the 2016 Cuts Survey were published in early 2017, however they do not contain statistical information on governance hence why the 2015 survey is used as a reference point.
[7] The early stages of this project involved an attempt to map these developments. A conversation with Locality in 2013, the national development agency contracted by the Department of Communities and Local Government to support community organisations through the asset transfer process and other professional bodies (Arts Council England and the Museums Association) illustrated little knowledge of these changes. Without the input of data from these bodies, a mapping project would supersede detailed empirical work.

1.5 An introduction to the case-studies

Figure 1 Map of case-studies (Created by Rex using My Google Maps 2017)

The three case-studies are illustrated on the map as follows: Manor House Art Gallery & Museum (1); The Whitaker (formerly Rossendale Museum and Art Gallery) (2) and Ford Green Hall (3).

1.5.1 Manor House Art Gallery & Museum

Manor House Art Gallery & Museum is located in the town of Ilkley, an affluent ward within the administrative area of the metropolitan borough of the City of Bradford. Bradford Metropolitan District Council (BMDC) is a unitary authority, a council with responsibility for the majority of local services in an area. In 2014, BMDC became a member of the West Yorkshire Combined Authority, a body with responsibility for economic development.

Figure 2 Image of Manor House Art Gallery & Museum Prior to Closure (Image Credit: Tagishsimon via Wikipedia under Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license)

The town of Ilkley has a parish council (Ilkley Parish Council), the most local tier of local government. Amongst other responsibilities, IPC maintains local amenities such as signage, flowerbeds, makes recommendations to Bradford on planning applications and supports local projects through money it raises through the precept, a tax on residents which is additional to council tax.

Between 2014 and 2017, the main period covered by this research, a Labour administration has controlled BMDC. Ilkley Parish Council is largely made up of Conservative councillors, although independent candidates do appear from time to time.

In 1974, the *Local Government Act 1972* reorganised the structure of local government in England. This is relevant to the case of the Manor House Art Gallery & Museum because it was following these reforms that Ilkley became part of the metropolitan borough of the City of Bradford. Before this, both the building and the collections were owned by the Borough of Ilkley. After 1974, legal ownership and responsibility passed over to Bradford.

The political composition of BMDC vis-à-vis IPC and the reforms summarised here are relevant to the analysis because a handful of residents hold onto the belief that the collection and building rightly belongs to 'us' in Ilkley not to 'them' in Bradford. These matters of local politics help us to understand some of the motivations of local groups in more detail and their stance towards 'Bradford' (i.e. the Council). However, it should be noted that this 'us vs. them' mentality did not appear to influence negotiations in any meaningful way.

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Given the financial pressures on social and welfare services post-2010, the affluence of Ilkley in comparison to the other wards of Bradford is relevant in ways that are explored in Chapter 8.

Before the budget reductions, Bradford Metropolitan District Council's Museums and Galleries Service comprised seven museum sites whereas now there are four museums under direct management by the museums service.

Manor House Art Gallery & Museum displayed collections relating to the archaeology of the Ilkley. The collection featured artefacts relating to the town's Roman heritage, as well its heritage as a spa resort during the Victoria era and as one of the places visited by Charles Darwin after finishing *The Origin of Species.* Following the budget decision to withdraw a museums service from the building, these collections were removed in April 2015 and are now in storage.

The Manor House Art Gallery & Museum (Grade 1 listed) was gifted to Ilkley Urban District Council in 1959 along with a collection of cottages which were used for education activities prior to the closure of the museum in 2015. However, the collection was not part of this gift and has always belonged to the council.

There are two groups who feature in this study who assembled in response to the withdrawal of the museums service from the building. The New Manor House Group (NMHG) formed in 2013, and their aims and activities are detailed throughout the thesis. The Group did not become a constituted group (i.e. they did not formalise themselves). Between 2013-15, the group membership fluctuated slightly. In general, meetings were attended by a group of 10 regulars. The Group disbanded (amicably) in 2015.

In late 2015, a new group formed, the Manor House Group (MHG). This group included many of the same members of the NMHG. The main difference being the presence of a new chair and a donation of £100,000 from a local individual. Whereas the NMHG could be termed 'consultation partners' of BMDC, the MHG decided to pursue an asset transfer of the building and, at the time of writing, are in the process of registering with the Charity Commission as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO).

Unlike the group in Rossendale or the individual in Stoke-on-Trent, the group is Ilkley is composed of a heterogenous set of individuals many of whom did not know each other prior to their involvement with this project. This adds to the challenge the group face as they are

working each other out, professionally and politically, at the same time as trying to understand a process unfamiliar to them.

At the time of writing the Manor House Art Gallery & Museum is closed and has no official website.

1.5.2 The Whitaker

The Whitaker (http://www.thewhitaker.org) is in Rossendale, a borough in Lancashire. Rossendale is in a two-tier area which means the county council (Lancashire County Council) provide services that cover the whole county such as education, waste disposal and social care. Rossendale Borough Council (RBC) provide local services.

Figure 3 Image of the Whitaker (Image Credit: Rossendale Free Press. Used with permission)

Prior to 2003, RBC managed Rossendale Museum and Gallery. Between 2003 and 2013 Rossendale Museum and Art Gallery was managed by Lancashire Country Council (LCC) as part of their museum service, set out in a management agreement. In 2013, the management of the site was taken over by The Whitaker, a community interest company (CIC). Following transfer, Rossendale Museum and Art Gallery was renamed as The Whitaker.

The museum building (Figure 3) is a former mill owner's residence, built in 1840. Richard Whitaker bought the site and surrounding grounds in 1902. Both were subsequently gifted to the council (Rawtenstall Corporation).

In addition to council officers and elected members, one group features in this study, the directors of The Whitaker Group. This group of local residents registered as a CIC for the purposes of managing the museum.

Although staff from the museum service at LCC were interviewed for this research, they were not involved in the negotiations regarding the future management of the site so do not feature in the thesis.

1.5.3 Ford Green Hall

Ford Green Hall (http://fordgreenhall.org.uk) is in the neighbourhood of Smallthorne, an area to the north-east of Stoke-on-Trent.

Figure 4 Image of Ford Green Hall (Image Credit: Kate Scott Photography. Used with permission)

Ford Green Hall was part of Stoke-on-Trent City Council's (SoTCC) museum service and although a lease was not signed until 2013, the Friends of Ford Green Hall had been taking on increased responsibility for the site from 2010 onwards. Several core members of this group are no longer involved in the museum and were uncontactable for interview. This research

focuses on the work of the group who now manage the site, Ford Green Hall Limited, an independent trust formed for the purpose of operating the museum.

SoTCC is a unitary authority, meaning it has responsibility for all local services in the area. There are no parish or town councils within Stoke-on-Trent.

Ford Green Hall is a 17th century timber-framed farmhouse, located in a local park. Ford Green Hall was purchased by SoTCC in 1946 and was formerly home to a live-in curator.

1.6 Thesis outline

This thesis is divided into three core parts. In this opening chapter, I have described the financial circumstances which have led several local authorities to divest themselves of individual museums. I have singled out attempts to transfer financial and operational responsibility for these museums to other-than-public organisations as the focus of this research. In addition to outlining the research focus, aims and objectives and introducing the case-studies, I also clarified some relevant terminology. I also made my interpretation of austerity as an all-encompassing atmosphere with ideological beginnings explicit: budget cuts are one expression of this political doctrine.

The subsequent chapter is the literature review. This chapter reviews the core contributions and arguments which fed into the development of this study, and to which I refer throughout my analysis. The reading for this study has been wide-ranging taking in perspectives from, inter alia, public administration, cultural geography, social policy and museum studies. The review has three core parts followed by a conclusion: local government reform, the local authority museum and cuts to the subsidised cultural sector. Under these headings, I synthesise key issues and debates but do not exhaust the contribution of these literatures as many of their arguments will be returned to throughout the text.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology used for exploring practices of asset transfer in this enquiry. The theoretical repertoire of ANT is argued to encourage a process-orientated view of organisational change which makes aspects of museum asset transfer practice and decisions about museums visible that can be overlooked by other methods which focus on project outcomes. Additionally, I argue that ANT's conceptualisation of agency is helpful for museum studies (after Macdonald 2002, 2009; Morris 2003; T. Bennett 2013; Byrne et al. 2011) because it introduces a fuller spectrum of actors into empirical work which is generally dominated by human-centric accounts. After framing the methodology, I discuss the research

methods used to generate the empirics and go into detail about the different approaches used in relation to the three case-studies.

Chapter 4 is the first of four empirical chapters. In this chapter I consider how and why the museums that feature in this study were chosen for transfer. The chapter illustrates some of the factors which were influential in the decision to seek the transfer of particular museums and not others. Questions of valuation frameworks and decision-making logics are addressed, as well as how the purpose of museums was understood.

Chapter 5 examines how and through what means individual transfers were accomplished. Here it becomes clear that the terms on which these transfers take place are significant, particularly to embryonic organisations taking on the management of local authority museums. Aside from general overviews of the types of governance structure available to groups in these circumstances, very little is known about what is involved in saving a museum from closure making this an important contribution of the research.

Chapter 6 explores how museum work was understood, structured and practiced by members of transfer bodies, all of whom were coming to museum work for the first time. After a short review of the literature where I argue for greater attention to be paid to the practice of museum work itself, and how it is understood by those who do it, the chapter presents a series of reflective discussions of museum work in a time of change. This chapter is wide-ranging to reflect the empirics. Across the chapter, amongst other insights and reflections on emerging approaches to museum practice in the context of asset transfer museums, I illustrate how members of transfer bodies distance themselves from the identity of a museum professional. I show how this distancing is bolstered by a caricatured view of what being a museum professional involves, as well as by organisational practices such as ACE's Accreditation Scheme which shape how members of transfer bodies conceive of museum work, and their abilities to do it. Following on from this, the chapter also demonstrates how the perceived 'expertise' held by museum professionals is an effect of particular organisational practices and other contextual factors rather than something that exists as an a priori barrier to all attempts to expand museum practice.

In Chapter 7, I consider how the 'public' nature of local authority museums was interpreted by members of transfer bodies and local authority personnel. It examines their attachment to the idea of museums and civic spaces that are public, as well as exploring the way beliefs held as to how public bodies should function were applied to instances of organisational practice, or not, as the chapter goes on to demonstrate. A central observation in this chapter, which

arose throughout my fieldwork especially in interviews with members of transfer bodies and local authority personnel without strategic senior management roles) is that the public nature of these museums was important to participants. It was not always clear what aspects of being a public museum participants identified with or wanted to maintain. However, making space for the speculative perspectives of people who are engaged in projects which attempt to revive or salvage the 'publicness' of museums is a valuable contribution made by the research. On the one hand, there is limited knowledge of the perspectives of this group yet, more pertinently, political discourse seeks to encourage agnosticism towards whether a service is delivered by the public or private sector by suggesting that 'quality' and 'customer-satisfaction' are paramount rather than the financial-structure and values-held by the service delivery organisation (see Murray 2013; this thesis 2.1.3). In this context, it is important to hear from people who feel otherwise, and whose actions reflect this.

Chapter 8 expands upon the contributions of the previous three analytical chapters to explore several issues identified as important to this study. The chapter firstly discusses the empirical findings relating to the topic of accountability, where I evidence that members of transfer bodies express a strong commitment to the accountability dynamics associated with public museums, indicating that museum asset transfer attracts people with a pre-existing orientation towards such values whilst highlighting that different understandings of to whom accountability is owed are present. Furthermore, I pinpoint the use of technocratic accountability mechanisms by local authorities as a means to stipulate that transfer bodies deliver outcomes which are considered, for legislative and ethical reasons, befitting of the public nature of the asset. Secondly, the chapter takes up three matters of contention: the meaning of 'success' for public museums, the definition of the museum in the local authority environment and the role and purpose of public culture. As this research has involved extensive engagement with the provision of museums in the local authority environment, it provides useful insights on these significant topics, many of which are being re-shaped by the current financial context informing museum provision.

The final chapter summarises the research findings and in the light of the work in-between, returns to the research question, aims and objectives to highlight the contribution of the research to scholarly knowledge of local authority museums and its limitations. The chapter presents the practical outcomes of the research before concluding with an argument for the value of work which investigates the museum through organisational and institutional lenses, as well as suggesting a series of avenues for future research.

Chapter 2
Literature Review

This chapter provides an overview of the literature in relation to three topics with relevance to the research: local government reform, the local authority museum and cuts to the subsidised cultural sector.

The first section situates changes to museum governance within a larger context of public sector reform. These reforms have been led by central government and are highly politicised. To aid their presentation to the broader public, state reform tends to be accompanied by narratives which build a story around the change, positioning it as a 'good thing' or as 'natural' development (e.g. New Labour's active citizenship, the coalition government's 'Big Society'). Through a review of existing readings and empirical approaches to public sector reform, I argue for methodologies which bracket diagnosis for description. Rather than holding up the construction of discourses which attempt to legitimise public sector retrenchment through undermining the value of the public sector as a distinctive moral sphere (see Hoggett 2006), I argue that attention is paid to how these changes are negotiated and shaped by individuals and groups in the context of everyday practice.

The second section reviews literatures relating to the local authority museum. I argue that there are two strands to this work. There are authors who focus on the social and political function served by the local authority museum as an institution and those who situate museums within their organisational contexts. In reviewing this literature, I argue that the local authority museum should be read as both institution and organisation, through methods which explore how its institutional role is negotiated and shaped in the everyday organisational context. This perspective is crucial to the analyses I develop in Chapters 6 and 7.

The third section summarises academic research on the cuts to public spending on culture. Given the contemporaneity of these developments and the pace of academic publishing, work on the topic is only just beginning to emerge. However, although there might not be research which specifically addresses how decisions are being made about resources post-2010, there are several authors whose work on the rationales and valuation frameworks which inform conversations about publicly subsided culture anticipates the decision-making logics explored throughout this thesis, and specifically in Chapter 4.

2.1 Local government reform

This project is about the management of the local authority museum in the wake of successive cuts to local government budgets since 2010. The local authority museum is its point of departure and although it is concerned with themes specific to studies of museums, it is equally a study of local government reform as expressed through museums. The way local government is organised and the role ascribed to it by central government has changed substantially since the first municipal corporations of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (see Stewart 2000). Within this, one of the core shifts over the past three decades has been from centralised forms of top-down administration and management to forms of collaborative governance involving horizontal networks formed of organisational forms of various types (Rhodes 1997; Pierre and Peters 2000; O'Brien 2013). For example, several functions administered by local authorities directly are now delivered on a contractual basis by external organisations.

The explanatory power of this idea of a shift from 'government to governance' has been critiqued for its tendency to obscure rather than reveal local nuances (Bevir and Rhodes 2003). Indeed, as Clarke and Cochrane (2013) note, this shift to forms of public service management beyond the state has taken place in parallel to other centralising moves by both New Labour and the coalition government (e.g. decision-making relating to education). Yet, in the background to this study lies an undoubtable acceleration in the roles made available to non-state actors in terms of their ability to contribute to the functions of local government. This shift has been accelerated by the austerity policies of the coalition government which the current Conservative administration have continued leading commentators to suggest austerity could be with us well into the 2020s (IFS 2017).

Within this context, there are three specific moves which took place under the New Labour government (1997-2010) and the coalition government (2010-2015) which have direct relevance to this study. These are: the increasing role played by the established voluntary sector in service delivery leading to its professionalization; an expansion in public participation initiatives which broadly aim to bring 'communities' and/or service users into the *design* of public services and *decision-making* arenas (known as co-production, see Goss 2007; Gammon and Lawson 2008) and, since the coalition government, the move to involve 'communities' in the *delivery* of public services whose connection to the service or space in question may be as a service user or simply as someone who puts themselves forward as an interested party (such as those who feature in this study).

How these changes shape the work of the local government practitioners and individuals who feature in this study will emerge through the empirics. In the following four sections I focus on literature which analyses public sector reform, focusing on findings as well as the affordances of their methodologies. The four sections examine developments which are relevant to the empirical circumstances examined by the research. These are: the performative effects of performance measurement; public participation and active citizenship; the 'Big Society' agenda, localism and austerity; and community asset transfer. Each section situates the research in relation to literature which analyses themes relevant to the arguments I present in subsequent chapters whilst also demonstrating gaps in current knowledge to which the research contributes.

2.1.1 The performative effects of performance measurement

Performance management is prevalent in the public sector. Collectively termed New Public Management (NPM) these management techniques and practices were imported from the private sector into public administration from the 1970s onwards. As Belfiore summarises: NPM comprises 'cost control, financial transparency, the introduction of market mechanisms into the provision of public services, the reliance on a "contract culture" and – more importantly – "the enhancement of accountability to *customers* for the quality of services via the creation of performance indicators' (Power 1997: 43; Hood 1991 and Kettl 2000, cited in Belfiore 2004, my emphasis, see also Gray 2008). It is now commonplace to argue that measuring 'success' and 'performance' quantitively does not adequately capture the nuance, contextual impact or affective qualities of cultural engagement (Chatterjee and Noble 2013; Caust 2003; Mirza 2006). Moving away from representational critique, a large body of literature examines NPM for its performative effects, focusing on what these techniques do rather than what they say.

Following the influential arguments set out in *Do Economists Make Markets? On the Performativity of Economics* (MacKenzie et al. 2007; see also Callon 2007; Morgan and Morrison 1999), where the authors posit that economic models contribute to the construction of the reality that they describe, many authors question whether the imposition of performance indicators on organisations contributes to, say, the prioritisation of certain modes of working which fit the type of performance desired by the indicator. The core question being: to what extent does performance measurement affect the everyday practices of organisations themselves? This move is not intended to remove agency from organisational actors, hence the use of the term performative not prescriptive. Rather, it is an

acknowledgement of how bureaucratic practices are bound up in and thus have the potential to shape the everyday practices of professionals. Importantly, individuals retain the *potential* to adapt and modify these practices for their own purposes (Moor and Lury 2011).

A study of how the introduction of a new set of performance measures affected the work of a community organisation provides an example of the utility of this approach (Keevers et al. 2012). Building its analysis on empirical materials which capture the use of these techniques-in-practice, the authors follow a technique as it links up with or becomes embedded within other elements of the organisation (2012: esp. 12-13, see also Prince 2014 on calculative practices in the cultural sector). Academics interested in the knowledge politics, as in how certain forms of knowledge are appropriate 'evidence' whereas others are rendered irrelevant, note the 'social lives' of cultural impact evaluation (Newsinger and Green 2016; Campbell et al. 2016). These approaches take their cue from the relational approaches found in the early writing of ANT scholars such as Law who highlights how our interactions and actions in the world are 'mediated through objects of one kind or another', whether that is a computer or a set of KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) (Law 2003a [1992]: 3). Acknowledging the performative effects of managerial techniques is important to the analysis presented throughout the thesis.

2.1.2 Public participation and active citizenship

The second body of literature which resonates with this project responds to the apparent consensus within government that the population should participate more fully in social and political arenas. Positioned as addressing a democratic deficit (Pattie et al. 2004), these governmental framings argue that quality of life and lower than desired well-being is explained by a loss of community activity and social ties (Putnam 1995; 2000), backgrounding other factors such as structural inequality and the work-centric approach of neoliberalism.

Despite key differences in financial support, there is considerable continuity between the 'active citizenship' of New Labour and the 'responsible citizen' of the coalition government, both of which endeavour for people to become involved in civic life in ways that they are not now. These policies have been widely critiqued: for their responsibilisation of citizens as a means to reduce the size of the state (Finalyson 2003; Clarke 2005); for their framing of citizenship and rights as conditional (Dwyer 2000) and as soft forms of social control which, following Foucault's governmentality thesis, subtly configure the behaviour of individuals through discursive normative framing of what constitutes 'responsible', 'moral' or 'virtuous'

ways of being (Cruikshank 1999; Rose 1999). The concept of active citizenship is conceived of in different ways. Government policy gestures towards encouraging participation in local government decision-making, other forms of governance (neighbourhood panels, parish councils) and in civic life more generally (community projects, helping neighbours out, volunteering).[8] In terms of participation in decision-making, a variety of methods of structuring collaboration have come to the fore such as service-user panels, consultation exercises, citizen-panels and, increasingly, facilitated conversations via social media (Newman et al. 2004). The academic literature on government-led attempts to increase participation is vast and multifaceted, most useful for this project are authors who draw attention to how public participation projects are experienced by participants, as well as the lines along which participation is conceived in these contexts.

Neveu and McKee's analyses are partly useful as they note how participatory projects constitute participants in particular ways: as users, consumers, citizens, residents, actors or the public (Neveu 2011: 148). Writing in the context of processes of urban renewal in deprived neighbourhoods of France that aim to involve residents in decision-making and of social-housing tenant 'empowerment' projects in Glasgow respectively, both authors demonstrate that 'less government in society does not necessarily entail less governing' (McKee and Cooper 2008: 13). In other words, participation anticipates and attempts to constitute its participants in a series of highly specific ways. Crucially, especially for McKee, correspondence between the intentions we might read off government strategy and the way individuals identify with their roles is not guaranteed (see also Doheny 2007). Both McKee and Nevue observe that governmental projects which aim for increased levels of participation are either unspecific about the type of contribution available or seek to garner a particular type of contribution. These observations inform the analysis of empirical material as whether it was forms of public space management involving the community (Ford Green Hall, The Whitaker) or looser processes of collaborative decision-making (Manor House Art Gallery & Museum), the lack of precision regarding the contributions desired of participants from council officers was a discernible tension in the data.

It is perhaps unsurprising that individuals identify with their responsibility in ways which go beyond or challenge their assigned role. However, what I find interesting about these developments is the type of role implied for the participant: who is expected to turn up? What sort of knowledge are they expected to bring? Local, vernacular or objective professionalism?

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[8] For an analysis of competing concepts of citizenship see Gabriele Recknagel's PhD thesis: http://research.gold.ac.uk/view/goldsmiths/Recknagel=3AGabriele=3A=3A.default.html

Who are they representing, individual consumers or a collective identity based on place, interest or expertise? Is there a requirement for them to be detached from or deeply embedded in local contexts? As we see in Chapters 5 (5.2), 7 (7.4) and 8 (8.1), these questions are at the heart of why asset transfer is such a complex proposition for prospective transfer bodies.

In addition to drawing attention to the normativity of facilitated participatory practices, McKee makes a vital methodological argument which is of relevance to my research design. Noting that discursive analysis offers a means of interpreting the intended consequences of governmental strategies, she argues that ethnographic and qualitative work foregrounds how these strategies are taken up in the 'messy actualities of the empirical world' (McKee 2009: 482). This perspective, and the level at which it implies research should take place, has provided a great deal of inspiration for this work where the values, views and experiences of members of transfer bodies are at the heart of the empirical material.

Collaborative decision-making also forms a core aspect of museum practice where factors internal to the museum sector have influenced the take up of this type of work just as much as external ones. For example, for local authority museums this comes in the form of legislation which encourages local government functions to be consultative. Critique and evaluation of this work occupies a strand of museum and heritage studies in its own right, yet despite this vast body of work on the topic, the questions asked have little in common with the concerns detailed above. Rather, reflections on participatory work are usually based on representation (who is not here), control (how much control did the community have), authority/expertise (how did the authority of professionals or the institution influence the conduct of participants and the final outcome) and success (the criteria for which comes through the authors' own intellectual concerns) (see Fouseki 2010; Lynch 2011a, 2011b). As such, although I draw on the work of a small handful of museum and heritage scholars writing about participation (Graham 2012; Graham et al. 2013; Morse 2014; Knudsen 2016), my study intentionally departs from the majority of work on participation both in its subject matter and research focus.

This is a thesis about structures of museum management where an other-than-public body replaces the local authority and although there are various ways in which these two bodies collaborate, this relationship and its purpose is distinct from the collaborative practices facilitated by museum professionals such as exhibition-making, conservation, collection and interpretative work (see Witcomb 2003; Karp et al. 1992; Peers and Brown 2003; Watson 2007; Crooke 2008; Golding and Modest 2013; Waterton and Watson 2011). Further, in contrast to many existing studies of participation (cf. Graham 2012; Morse et al. 2013, Morse

and Munro 2015; Knudsen 2016) and authors who question the accountability of 'self-styled community groups whose representative character is always questionable' (Levitas 2012: 331), it is not my intention to present an evaluation of the transfers presented here with regard to 'outcome' or 'success', nor offer an abstract ideological critique of these reforms. Although there are moments in my analysis when I draw attention to the problematic effects of a specific mechanism or working practice, which I see as an important contribution of this work given that the practices of transferring the management of museums to other entities is new territory, my main concern is to understand asset transfer *at work* through investigating processes of collaboration as opposed to evaluating them (Knudsen 2016: 195) in order to explore some elements thus far neglected. The utilisation of research methods which enabled this process-orientated stance is detailed in Chapter 3.

The literature on public participation, in museum studies and public administration, is split into ideological critique and interpretative work which acknowledges the value of critique yet seeks to supplement its abstractions by empirical work which focuses on how governmental intentions play out in specific settings. This research aligns itself with the latter. A similar split is discernible in the literature analysing the coalition government's 'Big Society' agenda. It is necessary to briefly review this work because my research question developed in response to the financial (public sector cuts) and policy ('Big Society' and localism) context following the coalition government gaining power in 2010. Although several studies examine the impact of this policy environment on various sectors, there are no studies focusing on museums.

2.1.3 The 'Big Society' agenda, localism and austerity

At the time of writing, the language of the 'Big Society' has disappeared from the 'political lexicon' but this does not mean this study is in any way outdated. As Crisp writes, political rhetoric disappears from sight much faster than the rationalities, policy initiatives, legislative measures and techniques which continue to 'live on' (2015: 1) long after the rhetoric has evolved. Relatively, although the specific terminology of the 'Big Society' is no longer prevalent, discursive framings which secure public consent for austerity via appeals to collective obligation for a restricted present in the interests of a better future abound (Clarke and Newman 2012: 309). Newman captures how this ideology informs the coalition government's approach to public services, writing:

> 'Civil society is being recast, ideologically, as an alternative to public services and
> state welfare; the hoped for Big Society of David Cameron was explicitly depicted as

an alternative to the (overgrown, dependency inducing, paternalistic) Big State. Emergent civil society forms generated by the opportunities of "competition" and "choice" in previous decades are becoming more mainstream, creating important shifts in the cultural and political landscape' (Newman 2012: 165).

For me, the 'Big Society' is synonymous with, say, the 'localism' of the coalition government because both are equally vague and difficult to pin down in terms of ideological pedigree. Drawing on ideas of self-help, volunteerism and civic action, the 'Big Society' formed a cornerstone of David Cameron's early pronouncements as Prime Minster and has been cited as 'David Cameron's core intellectual idea' (Lowndes and Pratchett 2012: 30). When I use 'Big Society' I do so as a shorthand which encompasses the flagship policy (the Localism Act 2011), myriad policy initiatives and funding programmes and rhetorical moves emerging after the coalition government formed in 2010.

In his Hugo Young lecture delivered in 2009, Cameron laid out his vision for the 'Big Society' which centred on the devolution of power from central government (see Cameron 2009; DCLG 2010). The detail of where that power would shift to was broadly defined as 'communities' and 'the local level'. To give a sense of the language, policy and strategy documents speak of 'giving power away' and 'delivering decentralisation down through every level of government to every citizen' (DCLG 2010: 2). In the lecture, Cameron spoke of a 'new role for the state', one which would 'remake society' through 'actively helping to create the big society, directly agitating for, catalysing and galvanising social renewal' (2009: no pagination).

As many have now commentated, this galvanisation came in the form of unprecedented cuts to local government, stymieing their ability to deliver services and provide statutory social care (Peck 2010; Hastings et al. 2015). It is worth noting here that in parallel to their austerity programmes, the coalition government did launch a series of programmes such as £15m to train community organisers and similarly substantial grants to organisations contracted to deliver support and advice to groups interested in proceeding with projects in response to the raft of new 'powers' granted to community organisations following the Localism Act 2011. On paper, these amounts appear substantial but they do not make up for to the cuts to local governments (many of whom cut their community development and business advice teams). What is more, these contracts were won by national, London-based organisations, further removing power from local government, supporting Clarke and Cochrane's (2013) argument that the coalition government's localism attempts both decentralisation and centralisation at the same time. Notably, many of the programmes introduced by the coalition government

were located within the Office of Civil Society (transferred to DCMS in 2016) and the Cabinet Office, as opposed to the Department for Communities and Local Government, further highlighting that the turn to community is more about addressing a deficit that is financial, rather than one which is democratic, or otherwise defined.

The underlying themes in academic debate on the coalition government's 'Big Society' and other policy developments range from notional readings of the ideology to how said policies are experienced in everyday life. For example, Levitas suggests austerity and the 'Big Society' can be read through a 'hermeneutics of suspicion' or a 'hermeneutics of faith' (after Ricoeur 1981, 1987). The former treats the 'Big Society' as a discursive mask for cruel cuts stemming from a desire to entrench inequality and shore up the rich. The latter is sympathetic to several of the ambitions associated with the 'Big Society', yet would dispute the rhetorical claim that the 'Big Society' introduces forms of community activity which have been lost due to a paternalistic and over-reaching state by demonstrating that such activity is manifest in labour movements and other co-operative societies (Levitas 2012: 332-335), whilst also highlighting the structural changes needed in order that the forms of civic action pushed for in the 'Big Society' rhetoric could be undertaken by a broader demographic. Reading the 'Big Society' as an ideologically-motivated concept is useful because we see how it draws upon ambitions which organisations from both sides of the political spectrum identify with yet does so whilst simultaneously lessening the ability of those organisations to fulfil those ambitions. Through my own research on asset transfer, I present empirical material which testifies to this tension. However, my contribution is to depart from reading austerity at the level of ideology, discourse or policy. As Hitchen foregrounds, austerity is a fiscal policy and the 'Big Society' provides a narrative for public sector retrenchment yet it is also an atmosphere which pervades the lives of individuals who, whether in their personal or professional lives, must manage the consequences of central-government dispensed austerity as best they can (2016: 102, see also Clayton et al. 2015a, 2015b). This research endeavours to exemplify how austerity, localism and the 'Big Society' are managed on the ground by the public sector practitioners and members of transfer bodies who must temper its ramifications. Before moving onto the literature on local authority museums and cultural provision cuts, it is necessary to review professional and scholarly literature on CAT, in which there are several openings for a research project of this nature to contribute.

2.1.4 Community Asset Transfer

Much of the academic literature on CAT does not take an English perspective, preferring to

outline how CAT functions in Northern Ireland (Murtagh et al. 2012) and Scotland (Moore and McKee 2013; Skerratt and Hall 2011; Callaghan et al. 2011). Due to the wide legislative remit of the devolved administrations and their significant 'policy autonomy' (Haydecker 2010), schemes can sound similar yet involve very different provisions and powers for groups wishing to take over services or manage public assets. For example, the Localism Act 2011 applies to England only. Similarly, the Community Right to Bid (England) and the Community Right to Buy (Scotland) use similar language yet the English scheme does not give first refusal to a group who can demonstrate the social value of their work, whereas the Scottish scheme does. In Scotland, there is also significant financial help available to groups through the Scottish Land Fund which makes lottery money available to fund community buyouts. So, instead of entering a leasehold arrangement with the local authority, a group can purchase the property, enabling them to borrow against it and attain other benefits associated with property ownership. Although a comparison between the Scottish and English trajectories is not the focus of this research, it is interesting to note the suggestion that there is a widening gap between how English and Scottish governments are dealing with the reduction in public expenditure, with the latter displaying a 'continuing attachment to the collective provision of public services' (Danson and Whittam 2011: 361) while the former proceed with moves which stimulate the contracting out of services in education, health, heritage and culture. The focal point of this research, the transfer of museums, does not feature in current work centring on the devolved administrations either.

A small number of studies focus on CAT in England, particularly spotlighting those transfers which have arisen because of public sector cuts. In the main, these studies are case-study based, describing what CAT is and why a period of public sector cuts is a challenging environment in which to undertake a transfer (Nichols et al. 2015; Forkert 2016; Lindsay-King et al. 2017; cf. Aitkens et al. 2011). Forkert's observations are germane, as she notes why local interest groups disengage from negotiations with the council to avoid the 'normalisation' of the notion of volunteer-run services, as well as highlighting the reservations members of transfer bodies may feel given that their endeavours are amenable to being cited as evidence for the feasibility of replacing direct provision by properly compensated professionals. Both these reflections are replicated in my own data. Nevertheless, none of these authors take museum asset transfer as their empirical focus, nor do they explore asset transfer to the same level of detail as this study does. Beyond academia, consultancies have produced evaluations of asset transfer highlighting its economic (Bailey 2011; Plunkett Foundation 2013), social (Wells et al. 2011) and other tangible benefits

(Satsangi and Murray 2011: 6). Where qualitative data informs these studies, the arguments and language largely mirror that of government policy (CM International 2011: 11-12).

There has been a concern to situate CAT within historical traditions of community resource management (Woodlin et al. 2010). An awareness of these traditions is useful when interpreting the empirics as members of transfer bodies may identify strongly with the values associated with say, common asset ownership or mutual societies and use these as a reference point for their ambitions instead of the state-centric models associated with CAT. However, a small number of studies from the public administration literature are of greater use for this study as they trace a trajectory from Margaret Thatcher's (1979-1990) and John Major's Conservative government (1990-97) to where we are now with other-than-public organisations entering into public space management. Specifically useful are those studies which note the political strategies and associated legislative measures which continue to inform how relationships between local governments and external organisations are managed today.

A key development which directly informs contemporary public sector debates can be traced back to Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT) an important feature of Conservative policy during the period from 1979-97. At this point, as Stewart writes, 'the assumption that the functions of local government should be carried out by an authority's own organisation and staff' (2014: 844) came under challenge. The rationale for this challenge was framed as follows:

> 'The purpose of compulsory competitive tendering is to stimulate greater efficiency and secure better value for money by requiring full and fair competition between [public service organisations'] own in-house teams and private contractors' (Department of Environment 1995: 2).

These developments are relevant to this study because the monitoring requirements accompanying CCT still inform outsourced service delivery and space management practices today. For example, following its introduction, private contractors questioned the fairness of a tendering process where they felt public service organisations had an advantage. As local authorities and other public bodies were in competition with private companies, it mattered that the latter could not rely on discounted rents and rates, thus making their bids appear less competitive. Thus, it became necessary for those organisations receiving reduced rates or rents to justify themselves. Public sector organisations were subsequently required to demonstrate their capacity to deliver social, environmental and other benefits which the

private organisation would not (Wilson 1999), thus legitimising the discount they received from the council. Similarly, CCT introduced an emphasis on what are now known as the three 'Es' (economy, efficiency and effectiveness) for the purposes of tender evaluation. Value for money was important, but so too was the ability of the bidder to deliver good value for the 'community'. Hence, it was still possible for public sector organisations to compete with their private counterparts when the criteria extended beyond the monetary. However, their ability to do so was to be subjected to ongoing monitoring and measurement.

Despite there being distinctions which are beyond the scope of this study, New Labour reinforced several of the intentions of CCT with the introduction of the policy of Best Value (1998). This policy introduced a statutory requirement that every local authority service must evidence that it is 'provided through the sector best placed to provide those services most effectively' in terms of both quality and efficiency (Cm, 4011: Chapter 4, para 1). The most important thing to note here is, as astutely summarised by Martin (2001), is the agnosticism towards *who* delivers services: in-house provision, at this moment, was not overlooked but was not favoured per se: 'competition will be considered seriously as an option in every case' (Cm. 4310: Chapter 4, para 12, 1999). With the coalition government, policies and guidance were published which supplemented Best Value, emphasising the requirement for local authorities to 'make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness' (DCLG 2011b: 21, para 6.5). As we see at SoTCC and BMDC, the vestiges of this drive towards evidencing effectiveness, efficiency and economy can still be found in the practices of local government today, although as The Whitaker case indicates, local authorities may take a light-touch approach to these requirements in recognition of their effects. Taken together, it is clear how recognition of these antecedents leads to an informed approach to contemporary developments such as asset transfer.

In summary, then, tranches of government reform contain within them different framings of the role of citizens in the workings of local government. At the level of rhetoric, there appears to be remarkable continuity between the reforming efforts of New Labour, the coalition government and now the Conservatives. However, to fully understand the shape and character of the public sector in a time of austerity we need detailed empirical work which makes space for the perspectives of practitioners and groups negotiating these reforms on the ground. Moving away from this broad focus to the local authority museum, the next section demonstrates what my study contributes to this distinct literature.

2.2 The local authority museum

Research on local authority museums, as a specific category of museum, is relatively rare, with some exceptions (Hill 2005; Gray 2002). In recent years, many publications have taken 'the museum' as their focus. For example, Sandell desires that museums become agents of social justice (Sandell 2007; Sandell et al. 2010) and human rights campaigners (Sandell 2016). Janes (2009) envisages museums challenging hegemonic and divisive media and political narratives. Cameron (2011) sees museums as educative spaces producing reflexive and creative individuals (as distinct from self-regulating citizens) able to navigate complex problems such as climate change and inequality. Barrett (2011) draws on Habermas to position museums as spaces of democratic debate. For me, the key point here is not the variety of roles claimed for the museum and how they might stand in tension to the institutional biography of the museum (Hill 2012), but that it is 'the museum' being spoken of.[9]

My argument here is that local authority museums are worthy of consideration on their own terms. There are pragmatic and theoretical reasons for this. At present, there are substantial differences in the financial capacity of museums depending on their organisational and funding context. For example, although not immune, DCMS-supported museums are less vulnerable to public sector cuts whereas local authority museum provision is heavily reliant on the level of central government support granted to local government. This is not to say that we should gather all types of local authority museum together and claim they share similar organisational cultures, exhibition practices or that the people who work there have comparable views, experiences and values. However, for the reasons described, it does appear logical to consider these museums as a category because of the specific financial circumstances they face.

However, I would also argue that there are theoretical concerns which are common to local authority museums. Whether managed directly or by other-than-public bodies, these museums are affiliated in their organisational environment and in their institutional histories and logics, further supporting the argument that local authority museums are worthy of study as a discrete category of museum. I am not the first to make this observation, as several studies take local authority museums as their focus. This literature can be usefully categorised under two umbrella terms: studies which emphasise the museum-as-institution and those which underscore the museum-as-organisation. Reviewing both indicates that there is substantial

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[9] An exception to this is Fiona Candlin who writes on single-subject, independent museums (2015).

scope to expand current understanding of the values these museums live by, and the organisational dynamics which contribute to their perpetuation.

2.2.1 Institutional perspectives

This section makes an argument for local authority museums as acute examples of public institutions, before situating the research in relation to two strands of literature: one which focuses on the role of the museum as a public institution and the other on the institutional histories of local authority museums.

What does it mean to take the museum as an object of institutional concern? For me, what this should encourage is a heightened recognition of the museums' role as a public institution. I would argue that the local authority museum is a public institution par excellence. This is because they hold resources 'in trust' for 'the public' as a whole and encapsulate a set of principles – access, openness, inclusivity – that we associate with the very idea of the public sphere itself (Newman 2007; Gamble 2004). In many ways, the role we associate with the local authority museum, holding resources in trust for the public as a 'social totality' (i.e. general not specific, a symbolic expression rather than a means of describing a particular group) (Warner 2002: 65-6), is a role that the local authority museum shares with national museums too. But only up until a certain point. I would argue that the local authority museum is distinctive in the way its public role is conceived. Whereas the symbolic role of the national museum draws heavily on a discourse (which aids the construction of an imaginary) of common national identity, pride and interest, with the museum and the collection understood to be held in trust for the nation (see Duncan and Wallach 1980), the local authority museum is held to play a different role. Rather than holding resources in trust for a nation, these museums are viewed as holding resources in trust for specific places and their populations. This imaginary is bolstered through the circulation of narratives regarding their institutional histories (e.g. the museum was gifted to the population of 'x' in 1840) but is further determined by the organisational context within which these museums sit.

Local authorities are responsible for providing a range of public services for specified local populations. The extent of this responsibility is spatially determined through administrative boundaries. This factor further positions local authority museums as *for* specific populations rather than the public as a whole (see Morse 2014: 94; Jones et al. 2013; Malde 1994: 9, cited in Brereton and Temple 1999: 457). This has more-than-symbolic consequences for it alters which publics the museum or council personnel seek to address through their work. Chapters 7 and 8 present detailed reflections on this as coming to terms with the extent of their

responsibility (i.e. for whom does the museum function) heavily occupied members of transfer bodies.

Why is the museum's claim to be 'public' significant? This question has not been explored in relation to local authority museums. But, this is an important question for this thesis (see Chapter 7) so it is necessary to momentarily expand beyond this discrete focus. The moment at which museums became 'public' (as buildings and collections) has been described and analysed in depth by various authors (Abt 2006; Duncan 1995; Lafebvre 1991; Crimp 1995; Prior 2002), as has the work museums seek to do on the public (Rees Leahy 2012). Bennett (1995: esp. 90-92), and others who develop his arguments to demonstrate that there are 'specific institutional properties' and logics which are common to public museums are germane here. Acknowledging these properties enables us to appreciate the complex institutional dynamics people working in museums must negotiate. Graham's engagement with these ideas makes the stakes of the museum's publicness clear, especially for projects which involve groups or individuals from beyond the public sector in the work of the museum (2012; 2016).

Following Bennett's lead, Graham argues that the museum's claims to publicness gives rise to:

> 'an insatiable demand due to their rhetorical claims to be "equally open and accessible to all", and to meet the "principle of representative adequacy sustaining the demand that museums should adequately represent the cultures and values of different sections of the public". What *is* will forever not quite meet the desires for what museums *ought to be*' (Graham 2017, citing T. Bennett 90-92, emphasis original).

This diagnosis of the bind within which museums exist is crucial. For one, it explains why participatory work in museums is so vulnerable to critique. For our purposes, however, it pinpoints the challenge experienced by members of transfer bodies. As I draw out in Chapter 7 and again in Chapter 8 (8.1), frequently these individuals subscribe to the rhetorical claims for museums summarised by Graham (accessible, open, universal), taking on board the idea that they owe accountability to an abstract, plural public (see Gray 2015: 114-115). Yet, their desire to do justice to this demand becomes obstructive, as well as demotivating, given that it is impossible to satisfy.

For example, a group such as the NMHG in Ilkley are accountable to their relationship with the council and the practitioners they encounter but they are also accountable, or they imagine themselves as accountable, to the broader population of Ilkley, as well as their social

networks. For the public sector staff, they are accountable to their superiors, legislation and again, this spectre of the public on whose behalf they are supposed to work (Gray 2015, 2016) or, as is the case here, to ensure on whose behalf other entities they collaborate with will work. I examine how these multiple forms of accountability – which stem from the museum's nature as a public institution – play out in the work of practitioners across the analytical chapters of this thesis as part of an argument that attention to the specific dynamics within which local authority museums are placed will help us to understand their institutional role, and its consequences, more fully.

Moving on to their institutional histories, in what way do these studies inform this project? The local authority museum has been the subject of various historical accounts which return to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century to provide us with evocative narratives of what these authors argue was a 'unified museum movement that operated through the art, ideas and social networks…as a profound response to industrial society [and the challenges it was believed to pose to populations]' (Woodson Boulton 2012: 17; Black 2000). These works are historical in nature and focus on the collection and display practices of museums in the Victorian period so whilst they are informative of the generic narrative surrounding local authority museum histories, they have limited relevance to contemporary concerns because they locate these histories firmly in the past rather than recognising how the past informs and is shaped by the present.

Hill's (2005; 2012) work on municipal museums provides a useful counter to this by emphasising that each municipal museum has a unique institutional biography. Whilst it is interesting to learn of the myriad objectives of their founders (i.e. the societies or wealthy individuals who established collections which were subsequently donated to municipal corporations) and the local authorities who were their owners and operators at the time, Hill's notion that museum history or 'institutional biography' plays a role beyond that of factual historical information is most relevant to my concerns. Indeed, as Chapter 7 points towards, the institutional history of a museum can play an important agentive role in shaping which trajectories of change are seen as appropriate. In other words, the future use scenarios of individual museums are shaped via a continual re-configuration with its past for the purposes of the present (see Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1995). In addition to their distinctive institutional form, this thesis argues for engagement with the museum as an organisation.[10],[11] The next

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[10] The arguments here have formed the basis of a call for papers for a special issue on 'Museum Methodologies', to be published in *Museum & Society* (~2018) edited by myself, Nuala Morse and Sarah Harvey Richardson.
[11] As this thesis seeks to contribute to the discipline of museum and heritage studies, where empirical work has overlooked the mundane, operational side of museums, when I refer to the museum as institution I refer to its

section argues for local authority museums to be approached as organisations by distinguishing this focus from others which emphasise their organisational contexts.

2.2.2 Organisational perspectives

Several studies aim to situate the local authority museum in its organisational context through explaining how they are funded, the policy context within which they sit and the political make-up of the organisations they are managed by. There is a scholarly strand to this work (Gray 2002, 2015; Kawashima 1997, 1999) which provides a nuanced account of this organisational context with limited studies questioning how practitioners negotiate organisational factors on a day-to-day basis (McCall 2016).

There is also another body of work on local authority museums written by consultants and former-practitioners (Lawley 2003; Babbidge et al. 2006). This work evidences the rapid evolution of how other-than-public models of museum management are viewed by commentators. Lawley (2003) wrote that transfers to other entities lay outside of 'political favour' (77), a statement which is now obsolete. It is also in Lawley's work that we find the argument that the impact of government policy on how museums function at the local level can be described to be 'on the whole…consistent' (83). Again, this statement is challenged by the variety of responses local authorities have mounted to the budget cuts, as well as by Gray who has made a strong argument for analysis to focus on the 'inter-action between a range of structural variables, the precise exercise (or not) of individual agency, and the ways in which museums staff manage [negotiate and resist] organizational complexity' (2016: 117, my additions). One of the core interventions made by this thesis is based on the argument that situating the museum within an organisational context can only take us so far. Museums are also places where organisational work takes place. By organisational work I mean the bureaucratic practices, rules, norms and codes of conduct through which museum work is

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positioning as part of an apparatus of governmental institutions, in the Foucauldian sense, partially orientated towards rendering societies as governable via the ordering of knowledge. Differently then, the museum as organisation refers to those mundane features which museums share with other organisations, with the term mundane connoting the operational, routine, standardised and habitual components of museum work. As I argue fully in 9.3, this dual framing enables fuller accounts of museums, making a clear distinction between the two points of focus crucial to the contribution of the thesis. I make this point here to avoid confusion between my use of the term institution compared to what the term connotes for public administration scholars, a discipline linked to this project by virtue of its focus on local government. Whereas I see a need to use the terminology of organisation to encourage an expansion of empirical and analytical focus, these scholars prefer to cluster a range of issues under one headline term in institution (Cairney 2012). For the purposes and clarity of this thesis, I omit further reference to perspectives from public administration, whilst recognising the potential of this literature for future studies of museums with a relationship to local government.

organised, as well as the routine administrative dimensions which make up the organisational worlds of museums.

Adopting this focus, as is crucial to my analysis of the empirics across this thesis, I follow several authors who have offered empirically grounded accounts which delve behind the scenes of the museum to account for the values, views and experiences of those who are working away there (Macdonald 2002; Sandino 2012; Munro 2013, 2014; Geoghegan and Hess 2015; Harrison et al. 2013; Morse 2014). I cite this work not because its authors offer conceptual arguments which are directly relevant to this thesis but because in focusing analytical attention on the routine and/or the 'behind the scenes' aspects of museum work, they have been able to offer new insights and perspectives to the field of museum studies. My focus on the mechanisms and routine aspects of museum work has resulted in a research design and analytical focus which responds to Gray's call for 'detailed empirical work on the processes and mechanisms by which decisions and policies are made within the museums and galleries sector… [as well as providing] specific knowledge about the basis on which these choices are made' (2011: 53).

However, it is not only decisions and their logics which I aim to investigate, in Chapter 6 I demonstrate the effects of bureaucratic processes when they become part of the working practices of people new to the museum sector. As Turner writes in an editorial to a recent special issue of *Museum Anthropology* which contains a series of contributions which adopt a similar stance towards museum cataloguing process as I do to the various documentary practices within which the practices of public sector staff are embedded in, documents have 'often formalized some ways of knowing and occluded others' (2016: 107) meaning we must remain attentive to their effects. My focus is slightly different from the papers in this special issue in that they tend to focus on 'what becomes normative practice and why' (ibid) with regard to museum documentation, whereas I prefer to consider the agentive capacities of other organisational structures and protocols as they play out in practice. The methodology chapter following this one explains how these interests were translated into the research design. Before that, it is useful to summarise current literature on public sector cuts to cultural provision, as this study contributes to an ongoing conversation in academic and professional spheres.

2.3 Cuts to the subsidised cultural sector

Research associated with austerity's impact on the cultural sector has begun to emerge in the past few years, yet considering the scale of the cuts and the pervasiveness of their

consequences, there remains a paucity of empirically informed studies of museum provision post-austerity.

A special issue of *Cultural Trends: Election Special*, published before the 2015 election (when the coalition government was replaced by the Conservatives) contained a series of invited commentary papers from 'contributors, thinkers and practitioners' positioned as contributing 'empirical evidence…[of] the pragmatics of policy and its outcomes' (Selwood 2015: 1). Across the papers, we learn of changes in radio regulation leading to a loss of local content (Starkey 2015), increased expectations of philanthropy in theatre (Harvie 2015) and archaeologists struggling to fund professional development (Aitcheson 2015). Sharing his observations as a 'chair and member of boards', David Pratley reports 'the contraction and cessation of services' and 'a vacuum of ideas, passion and commitment about culture', a statement which is partially challenged by the people who participated in this study both with and without local authorities (2015: 67). Most pertinent are the observations of those authors who remind us that the coalition government produced a mere handful of small-scale cultural policies (e.g. National Lottery reform and tax incentives for cultural gifts), leaving the sector to come to terms with the outcomes of broader political strategies and policy programmes based on ideological commitments, the latter having significantly more impact on non-national museums than the former (Bull 2015; Gordon et al. 2015). Each contribution provides a bird's eye view of impacts and outcomes on their area of interest, as well as indicating that these cuts will 'have far-reaching consequences that have yet to be properly debated' (Naidoo 2015: 26). This is useful, but if we consider the different local contexts within which each cultural organisation exists, then it needs to be the specificity of responses to the decline in cultural funding that need to be investigated. Within the main analytical chapters of this thesis, I attempt to address the sector *as is* rather than speculating too heavily on *what might be.*

Writing of the fate of local authority museum services, Babbidge, the director of a consultancy firm that has produced multiple reports on museum governance for sector bodies MLA (abolished 2012) and ACE, presents a vague and imprecise picture of the sector. In the same paper, Babbidge claims there is 'little evidence' of new business models being implemented (2015: 25) yet goes on to later summarise a 'retreat' amongst local authorities to be 'core services rather than developing to meet the needs of modern-day communities' (26). Babbidge is right to warn that local authorities are reducing the extent of their service provision and in Chapter 4 we learn something of how the split between 'core' museums and the rest is realised, but he is incorrect to suggest that new business models are yet to emerge.

Independent trusts or the sort of mixed arrangements investigated in this study may not be the norm but they are 'an ongoing trend among local authority museums' (MA 2017: 10). Indeed, authors such as Hewison (2014) and Lagerqvist (2016) have signalled towards the possibility for responsibility to the transferred to other entities beyond the state, but do not investigate how this plays out in practice. As such, my study contributes vital insight into local authority museum provision post-2010 and it is the first contribution which subjects these developments to an analysis which goes beyond description or evaluation.

2.3.1 Sector-led research: mapping and reviews

It is worth mentioning the contributions of the MA and ACE to our knowledge of the impact of budget cuts on cultural provision. Given the nature of this work, it omits a level of detail and reflective analysis which my work aims to offer. The reports discussed in this review were published after this project's data collection and as such, they did not contribute to the formulation of this project but do provide useful insight into the parameters of the debate taking place within sector bodies. Of course, there is a difference between what is published and what is discussed within organisations, suggesting an important role for establishing relationships with staff involved in authoring and commissioning these studies (see 9.2).

In late 2014, ACE commissioned consultants TBR to carry out what is internally known as a 'rapid review' to understand 'the resilience, and challenges to this, of Local Authority museums' (2015: no pagination). The scope of this review was extensive and the report should be evaluated with this in mind. The report is broad and struggles to grasp the scale of the challenge facing local authority museums. The report takes a pragmatic view, arguing that consideration of 'legal status' is a 'red-herring', as well as that an 'entrepreneurial culture' will be 'vital to future resilience' of museums. This entrepreneurial culture is positioned in opposition to 'traditional approaches' which are 'incompatible with changes to governance and management structures (ibid: 3). Whilst I concur that the current financial circumstances require museums to increase their income, these approaches do not negate the importance of museum ethics or public sector values to people working in museums, as I discuss in Chapter 7.[12]

As I have already indicated in the Introduction, the work of the MA has played an important role in raising awareness of museum closure via their annual Cuts Survey. More recently, the

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[12] This report was published online via the ACE website but with the author as the external consultants. It is worth noting that ACE may choose to 'claim' commissioned research by publishing it under their own branding. Although it cannot be evidenced, this subtle difference does indicate how the research was received by ACE.

organisation has turned their attention to producing guidelines for the sector on how to respond to the budget cuts 'ethically'. It remains to be seen what the MA's guidelines on ethical closure will look like, and what impact this will have on decision-making in local authorities, particularly since the membership of the MA is largely made up of museum professionals as opposed to the asset managers, strategic managers and elected representatives who hold the decision-making power.[13]

At the time of writing, DCMS are conducting a museums review to:

> 'gain a deeper understanding of the sector, the issues it faces and how it can be best supported by government. In particular, the Review will cover increasing and diversifying participation; developing local communities; supporting soft power; and creating a resilient museum sector' (DCMS 2016: no pagination).

The Review is the first review into the museum sector since the publication of *Understanding the Future: Priorities for England's Museums* (2006) and accompanying consultation. While it is too early to say what the Museum Review will provide, it appears clear that this thesis addresses lacunae in our understanding of the issues facing local authority museums.

These two sections show that there is a body of work which emphasises the extent of the cuts to public spending on culture, particularly at the local authority level. But, there has been less work that has engaged with how these cuts are effecting individual local authorities and their museums nor how decisions are made regarding how to deliver the required cuts. This study is the first to explore this, but it is not the first to investigate how decisions are made about public culture. Several authors have drawn our attention to the criteria and frameworks according to which decisions about museums (and culture more broadly) are made, as well as how the value of culture is understood by decision-makers which I will briefly review next.

2.3.2 Academic research: emphasising pre-existing approaches to valuing culture

In times when financial resources are scarce, which cultural resources are kept in the public realm and which are transferred to other entities? What information are these decisions based on? What can a study of decision-making in relation to publicly-funded museums reveal about how museums are conceptualised in local government? What type of impacts and values are prioritised at times when it is no longer possible to maintain the status quo of a museum service? Building on work which has drawn our attention to how culture is valued by policy

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[13] The author is a member of the MA working group on ethical closure.

makers and funders (Belfiore 2004; Snowball 2008; Crossick and Kaszynska 2016), it is questions such as this that I address in Chapters 4 and 7.

Belfiore's work has been influential in arguing that assessing the value of arts and culture using the techniques of economics is problematic. This is not because culture does not have socio-economic impacts or outcomes but because a language of justification based on economics in the name of advocacy, which Belfiore and Bennett position as distinct from research (2010), is dominant to the extent that it crowds out the articulation (and thus support within decision-making circles) of other benefits. Lagerqvist, writing on the heritage sector in Ireland since the 2008 financial crisis, hints at how certain anticipated impacts and values generated by heritage have been prioritised since the cuts, namely: 'job creation, capital leverage, and heritage tourism…economic values and business logics' (2016: 67). It is beyond the scope of Lagerqvist's study to provide detailed accounts of how this plays out at the level of specific local authorities or museum services as she develops her arguments via a discourse analysis of how 'useful' or 'good' heritage is framed in national policy contexts (2015; 2016). Although the prioritisation of the types of impacts named above is certainly present in the empirics, local authority decision-making about how to provide museums post-2010 is also an arena in which nuanced acknowledgements of the value produced by the existence of these institutions is being worked out, observations I detail in Chapters 7 and 8.

Following time spent in Whitehall, Donovan and O'Brien detail how the working practices and guidelines (namely HM Treasury's *Green Book* and New Labour's *Modernising Government* agenda) set the terms on which decisions about policy should be made, creating what they name 'Whitehall's NPM regime' according to which the cultural sector must narrate its value (Donovan and O'Brien 2015: 27; see also O'Brien 2012). Crossick and Kaszynska's report for the AHRC *Understanding the value of art and culture* further demonstrates the influence of economistic approaches to decision-making and their impact on the cultural sector, yet signals that the cultural sector has '*in the past [been required]to* concentrate on benefits that were thought to have most traction with governments and other funders, neglecting other benefits that might have longer-term significance' (2016: 159, my emphasis). This research argues that the pressure to concentrate on these benefits is still present at local authority level, as well as investigating how decision-making works among local authorities, an important domain to focus on given that the previously cited works spotlight central government practices, implying that they diffuse across the sector in a straightforward manner.

Although Belfiore's distinction between research and advocacy is not cited here, Donovan and O'Brien offer a convincing definition of the way in which these two fields are distinct, arguing that 'it is in the position of the academic, their role and function with regard to state power, which we can hope to monitor the effects of calculation' (2015: 32). I write in response to this call through developing an analysis of how instrumental and economic approaches to valuing culture, where debate and discussion are replaced with 'straightforward facts', are creating the conditions for a local government regime of valuing museums wherein museums that do not easily fit into current modes of assessment and understandings of 'success' are cut off from this support. Taking previous work on how the value of culture is understood, my empirics also enable me to question whether there might also be more basic factors and routine procedures whose influence on how decisions are being made about the future of individual museums are altered by contemporary conditions, which the published material on museums is yet to foreground. These considerations about, say, maintenance costs and future financial risk, may be ordinary or 'mundane', as one interviewee put it, but they are influencing the type of museums and heritage which is kept into the future and are thus an important site for analysis (see Chapters 4 and 8).

2.4 Conclusions

This review has argued that studies which adopt a strictly critical stance towards austerity and policy interventions only take us so far. Whether it is narratives of 'active citizenship', the 'Big Society' or participatory paradigms in the museum, contributions which have sought to unpack the ideological contradictions of these developments or to provide generic overviews of the 'state of play' tell us little about how these changes are experienced by individuals and groups, nor their consequences for museums and museum work in the here and now. Following this, the review makes an argument for the different points of emphasis pursued in this study.

As the first part of the review acknowledged, the transfer of responsibility for museum management to entities other than the local authority is part of a series of broader moves made within policy over the past three decades to enrol voluntary organisations and groups of individuals ('communities') beyond the local state in the practices and products of local government. Through analysis of my empirical material, the chapters that follow build on important contributions which have sought to highlight the experiences of individuals and practitioners as they negotiate the roles, subject-positions and possibilities granted to them following these government interventions. Empirical examinations of the experience of

central government moves to encourage populations to take on increasing levels of responsibility by the people engaged in these projects and duties are numerous, yet this is the first study to draw out how these discourses are negotiated in the context of the museum (see Chapter 7).

This review has also argued against viewing recent changes to museum management as a mode switch. Although the specific move to transfer managerial and operational responsibility from local authorities to other-than-public bodies is an approach to museum management that we have not seen before, both the rationales on which these decisions are being made and the way local authority/transfer bodies relationships are formulated should be viewed as emerging out of logics and practices which are already in place within the sector. Dominant modes of valuing and evidencing the role and purpose of publicly-funded culture shape how decisions are made as to how to achieve the cuts. Chapter 4 will provide a careful examination of decision-making logics and how museum futures are decided within individual local authorities. While I develop these ideas more fully in Chapter 7, it is important to note that whilst local authority decision-making post-2010 utilised modes of valuation already present in these organisations, local authorities should also be researched as 'spaces for agency' (Newman and Tonkens 2011: 21) for as Chapter 7 (7.2) illustrates, alternative conceptions of and attachment to the value of public culture may be present and drive change.

This review has highlighted gaps in the literature that I aim to fill through this research. There are limited studies which assess how the financial cuts have influenced museum provision at the local level. There are no studies which detail how asset transfer works in a museum context, or how these new responsibilities are engaged with by members of transfer bodies. I am not the first to recognise this, as in professional reports and the work of Lagerqvist (2016) and Gray (2002) we find calls for more detailed case-studies which spotlight how the prioritisation of certain outcomes/values play out at the local level, as well as how decisions are made in local authorities and the effects of austerity on museums.

Finally, this review has argued for a dual approach to empirical work on museums comprising a focus on their organisational and institutional qualities as discrete topics. Museum and heritage studies has tended to overlook the mundane, operational side of museums in favour of a well-developed scholarship positioning museums as part of an apparatus of public institutions exercising an ordering role within society (Hooper-Greenhill 1989; Bennett 1990; 1995), and the dual framing of organisational/institutional is offered to encourage equal emphasis on each.

Throughout this research, then, I view the local authority museum as both institution (Chapter 7) and organisation (Chapter 6) and through my review I have demonstrated what I mean by this (see note 11). Following the lead of Graham in her development of Bennett's arguments regarding the 'specific institutional properties' of the museum-as-public-institution, I suggest that the local authority museum be usefully understood as subject to its own series of distinctive dynamics, logics and institutional histories which influence how decisions are made about their futures, as well as bestowing a set of stymieing accountabilities upon those individuals who are coming into managing them from elsewhere. Switching to a consideration of the museum-as-organisation, I outlined why local authority museums are not all that specific when it comes to their organisational properties. As places where bureaucratic practices, rules, norms and codes of conduct through which museum work is organised, administrative dimensions and various other activities which make up organisational life take place, museums are also spaces of technique. Foregrounding the capacities and effects of the organisational practices within museums is supported by engagement with the early work of ANT scholars whose agnosticism towards which organisational actors feature in research is based on the argument that human and non-human actors shape organisational practice. By focusing on the detail of case-studies, it is possible to engage with their institutional and organisational components with specificity, guarding against the obscuring of difference which some of the literature on local authority museums leans towards (Kawashima 1997; Lawley 2003). The next chapter outlines how the methodological ideas of ANT enabled the research design to foreground specificity and organisational practices, as well as detailing the process of the research itself.

Chapter 3
Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodological approach of the study as well as presenting a description of the research methods used to generate the empirics. The methodology of this thesis is grounded in a view of the world and of research practice as articulated by actor-network-theory (ANT). This thesis is not by any means alone in proposing that ANT be understood as a source of methodological guidance for the practice of research rather than a theoretical framework to be applied to empirical data (Mol 2010; Nimmo 2011; Law 2003a). Yet, as a methodological perspective, ANT does not feature prominently in studies of the museum (cf. Yaneva 2003; Stuedahl and Smørdal 2011; Waller 2016; Graham 2017) and where it does, the implications and blind spots of this body of theory for methodology have not been foregrounded. As such, the description of the distinctly ANT informed methodology of this thesis is an important contribution to the literature.

The methodology is outlined as follows. First, the broad value of carrying out ANT informed research of the museum is explored. This is followed by the presentation of two specific concepts associated with ANT which were found to be most applicable to the concerns of this thesis and how they informed the research design, these are: a process-orientated approach to organisational change and decision-making (Chapter 4-5) and the agentive capacity of material actors (Chapter 6). Following this, a description of the research design is presented. This description examines the affordances of the research practices used, these are: interviews, participant observation and document analysis, and also explores how ANT informed the selection of methods and their application.

3.1 Actor-network-theory: keeping the social flat

Since its emergence in the early 1980s, work positioning itself under the ANT umbrella has flourished across several disciplines, leading many to describe the approach in such porous terms as: cloud (Fenwick et al. 2011: 95), as a disparate family of tools, sensibilities and methods (Law 2008: 141) or as an arsenal, kaleidoscope or repertoire of terminology and techniques. The terminology of the method, or methodology more accurately, most aptly describes the way I have drawn on ANT in this project. For this research, ANT has been used as a way of seeing the world which encourages a methodological approach which involves a gradual reading of organisational change, as well as one which is attentive to the effectivity of material processes. To attempt a definition of ANT would be contrary to the character of the

approach which is more of a methodology than a set of hypotheses to be tested via empirical work. As Law states: 'it is <u>possible</u> to describe actor-network-theory in the abstract…but this misses the point because it is not abstract but is grounded in empirical case-studies' (2009: 141, emphasis in original). ANT is not a theory in the conventional sense in that it refuses to change scale from the set of circumstances being studied to general statements which are posited as also relevant to a universal domain (Latour 1999b: 18-20). Particular attention is given to the details of the case-studies in ANT, enabling new insights and reflections to emerge from therein. The analytical chapters hope to illustrate the value of ANT to empirically-based studies of the museum.

This is an important distinction as what makes ANT useful to this inquiry is that it is a 'theory of action' (Latour 2005: 58) where insights and reflections arise from empirical cases. Abstract theoretical texts do exist (e.g. Harman 2009; Latour 2013; J. Bennett 2010) but for most, ANT is a theoretically-informed methodological repertoire which provides a means of writing otherwise about the world and acts as a mandate to generate and work with empirics differently. A crude outline might say there are philosophical approaches and those firmly grounded in the social sciences. My engagement with the approach is that of a social scientist. Although the ontological stance of ANT does alter the type of observations research aims to make, as I go on to show in 3.1.1 and 3.1.2, I leave making substantive claims about the nature of being or 'modes of existence' (Latour 2013) to other authors. My engagement with ANT has more modest aims: to take a different approach to this study of museums.

Despite the multiplicity that comes from a body of work to which several authors have attached their name, there are certain characteristic arguments made by ANT which have shaped this study. The first of these, as signalled in the title of this section, is that ANT conceives of the social world as flat.

What does conceiving of the empirical world as flat mean? To begin, it means refusing to 'explain something you can see by something you can't' (Graham 2015: 101, citing Poovey 2002 and Latour 2005). It is primarily in Latour and Law's work where we find the call to 'reassemble' the social such that we no longer conceive of it as being composed of a series of stable composite parts or layers (Latour 1983, Latour et al. 2012, Latour 2005, Law 1999). These authors do not conceive of underpinning or overarching social structures, nor structural forces which exist 'above the level of interaction' acting upon and shaping the micro-dynamics of everyday life in a way which is beyond our comprehension (Latour 1996: 228). A good example of this from museum studies is would be as follows: observing an activity in the museum where a facilitator provides strong direction to the group and instead of

describing the nature of that direction, the research prioritises explaining these circumstances under the umbrella term 'organisational culture' (Lynch 2011b: 20). Nimmo offers a succinct summary of these ideas: ANT's flatness is its refusal to seek recourse to any kind of 'depth-ontology, any concept of "underlying" or "overarching" structures, or any rigid distinction between "micro" and "macro" regarded as distinct ontological levels' (2016: xxxiii; see also T. Bennett 2007). Instead, ANT is more interested in associations and the relations between entities in networks.

Crucially, these authors suggest that it is no longer productive to picture the world as composed of *a priori* structures, containers or hierarchies. The argument is that the world is not actually this way, yet through our incessant theorising we have convinced ourselves that it is so. The intervention made by ANT is to step away from this. Instead of jumping between levels or scales, the lifeblood of analysis becomes tracing process and associations between entities of all types. This is most fully developed by interventions in human geography where authors have called for an abandonment of the vocabularies of scale (see Marston et al. 2005) Analysing organisational change in this mode means focusing on the dynamics and nuance of transitional periods.

The consequence of this shift in the unit of analysis is significant for the accounts of organisational change presented in this thesis in two ways. First, instead of grouping together all examples where local authority museum management has changed as 'alternative governance' or 'community management', as the policy and professional press tends to do (MLA 2010; Grant Thornton 2014; MA 2015), an ANT perspective foregrounds difference in order to emphasise local variation. Second, new management arrangements for local authority museums clearly emerge out of a context of austerity politics which, as described in the Introduction, is borne out of an ideological ambition to reduce the size and scope of the public sector. It would be easy to dismiss the individual examples of management change/asset transfer studied here as expressions of that wider ambition. Although not inherently problematic, using the language of public sector reform/retrenchment encourages a certain 'interpretative distance' (Graham 2012: 568). That is to say, instead of focusing on the intricacies of individual cases of transfer to other-than-public forms of management, research focuses on describing the wider context, the general supplants the specific. This preference is discernible in museum studies also, where enquiry tends to focus on 'the museum' as an abstracted institutional entity rather than 'museums' as individual settings of museum practice worthy of study in their own right.

As discussed in Chapter 2 (2.2), academic work investigating museums in the aggregate dominates the field (Kawashima 1997; Lawley 2003; Gray 2008, 2012, 2014, 2015, 2016). Those who approach museums from this standpoint do so in order to produce generalisations on a range of issues, from the relationship between policy and practice to the role of public institutions such as museums as productive of social relations and identification. This is useful for informing overall theories of how museums function. For example, with the theory of 'policy attachment', Gray (2002) wants to argue for an image where publically funded museums mould their practice to the vagaries of government policy and the funding climate. Empirical work conducted in relation to specific museums informs generalisations of this type, which are then suggested to be broadly applicable to the sector as a whole. The validity of these findings aside (cf. Nisbett 2012), this type of inquiry is situated at a distance from museum practice because of the methods employed.

In terms of methodology, studies of this type focus on textual policy analysis combined with interviews with museum staff. In both, there appears to be a focus on what museums (either via policy documents or mission statements) and their staff *say* about their work, not what they actually *do* as part of it. Much of this work is about articulating (or uncovering) an overall narrative of museum work, an ambition which is often achieved through variations on discourse analysis of policy documents and interviews during which *longue durée* accounts of a changing sector or lists of factors impeding the development of a properly expansive museum practice prevail. Mirroring a lack of discussion of methods in museum studies and their consequences, how these texts were selected or analysed do not generally feature in the text. Yet an approach where policy documents or mission statements are read 'independent from the processes and agents through which they are performed, negotiated and materialised in diverse forms' during the cut and thrust of museum practice (Shaw 2008: 9) is problematic because documents can have effects beyond the intentions of the author and can matter beyond the level of rhetoric. We do not get to see, for example, how such statements of policy intent come to matter during the day-to-day work of practitioners nor how 'policy attachment' might be enacted differently during a conversation between a community engagement worker and a third sector organisation than in the necessary posturing of a senior manager advocating for their service during a funding meeting.

There are small pockets of literature which aim to counter this bird's eye view by getting up close to the everyday, lived experience of museum work (Macdonald 2002, Morse and Munro 2015, Gurian 1995, Munro 2014). Whereas other work foregrounds the museum's role as a governmental social technology (Bennett 1995; 2007; 2013), the literature from which this

research takes its inspiration focuses on the 'bureaucratic struggles, creative negotiations and practical actions' (Morse 2014: 7) of museum staff, which are argued to have been overlooked. My own work is situated within this strand of museum and heritage studies, as it does not seek to make general claims. The empirical chapters (4-7) focus on specific case-study analysis, using this space for discussion of a range of issues accentuated by the empirics. The critical reflections offered in latter stages of this text adopt a more expansive mode in that they are informed by the empirical material gathered in relation to each of the three case study museums, using this as a point of departure for the implications and roots of these changes to be considered. For example, Chapters 8-9 volunteer a discussion of the expectations placed on the museums featuring in this study as a means to speculate whether similar logics might inform decisions about museum provision in other local authorities, and the impact of these logics on the nature and spread of museum provision. As such, the efforts of this investigation are directed towards detailing specific examples of museum practice, and using these to draw attention to a range of issues about museums (e.g. how the constraints of austerity accentuate instrumentalism or the way standardisation practices circulate claims about museums) and the methods of museum and heritage studies. While it is hoped that this study will contribute general reflections on the affordances of its methods and stimulate discussion on ongoing debates related to museum provision under austerity, finding theories which 'fit' all the cases or offering claims only if they can be said to have applicability across cases is not the purpose of this inquiry.

This approach has much to offer to a study of this nature because when we get comfortable in the thick of museum practice, when being 'amongst it' becomes part of the work itself, we gain the ability to pay due attention to aspects of museum work that are elided elsewhere. Secondly, a commitment to tackling those 'big subjects' (Graham 2012: 585) proximately requires an entirely different reading of hitherto totalising concepts such as 'neoliberalism' or, more pertinent to this study, 'public sector reform' (see 2.1). Structuring factors such as these are often mobilised as explanations in a way that suggests they are 'given in the order of things' (Law 1999: 3). To put it differently, these concepts give us a vocabulary through which to explain and when viewed at a distance it becomes easy to explain away tensions or intriguing moments in the empirics through recourse to a pre-given list of concepts. It is now clear that the task of this thesis is to trace the associational activity, instances of ordering, the coming into relationship of human and non-human elements and to bear witness to the effects that the resulting arrangements make in the settings under study (Nicolini 2009: 1394). In the

following section I draw on early ANT texts to clarify some concepts which informed my analysis of the empirics.

3.1.1 A process-orientated view of organisational change and decision-making

Texts associated with early ANT such as *Pandora's Hope* (Latour 1999a) *Laboratory Life* (Latour and Woolgar 1979) and Callon's earlier papers (1980; 1986a) termed their approach to tracing 'the details of scientific practice' (Latour 1999a: 24) a 'sociology of translation' (Callon 1980, 1986a, Latour 1983). These texts aimed to show how statements about the world as observed by scientists were transformed into knowledge and fact, a process they argued involved social and non-social things. The crucial contribution of these studies was to describe the process of knowledge-production and how observations, often contingent upon the conditions of the laboratory and various other factors, were mapped into knowledge. An attention to process is important to this study as it enables us to draw out how decisions were made and what an umbrella term such as 'organisational change' or 'public sector reform' actually involves.

The use of the term 'change' to describe episodes in the life-course of a museum paints a picture of a mode switch which has taken place and which we view in retrospect. From this perspective, it becomes difficult to see the numerous activities, alterations, adjustments and 'happenings' which create a shift sufficient that we recognise it as a 'change'. This inquiry studies instances of transition where groups and individuals with differing ideas, beliefs and working practices are entering a setting that was previously relatively stable. Hence, a methodology which foregrounds the full range of actors involved in producing 'change' is useful because it enables the research to illustrate how management arrangements which are provisional and tentative become stabilised such that the museum remains open to the public.

Commonly, we might think of change as a planned program of action which, after being implemented by an innovative manager or specified in a circulated document, simply diffuses throughout an organisation, its practices and people in a fashion akin to a disease spreading amongst a population. Here, change is implemented from above through traditional hierarchical management structures (Pallett and Chilvers 2015: 148) and success or failure is often attributed to individuals. As we will see in Chapter 4, it is not only people who are involved in these periods of negotiation. In each instance of management change, intense effort was required such that these mixes of human relations, mediated and altered by material entities and vice-versa (Nimmo 2016: xxxii) established a state of being stable enough that diverse actors and their energies were transformed into an open museum.

3.1.2 Bringing the effectivity of the material into the foreground

The attribution of agency to non-human actors is frequently seized upon as one of ANT's more outlandish propositions. Sayes notes that the most vociferous debates surrounding this claim miss the point because they conflate agency with intentionality, notions of free-will and personhood (2014: 1-16, esp. 8-9). Agency is re-imagined in ANT as the ability to make a difference (Callon 1987, see also Nimmo 2016: xxvii). This is part of an objective to claim a non-deterministic role for non-humans via a decentring of the human in analyses of the social. Agency is best understood as an effect or achievement not just of human beings but a distributed network of agentive entities which coalesce to generate effectivity.

The claim that material things and technical processes critically shape museum practice, entrenching normative practices and discouraging change is an important contribution to work in the field. As such, there is a need to be explicit about how actor-status can be feasibly claimed for the non-human and what such a claim affords our analyses. Although ANT's re-imagining of agency has been widely challenged, taking note of the distinctive relational ontology of ANT diminishes much of the potency of the critique.

To foreground the material is not to claim that objects have innate value but to attend to the way the 'capabilities and potentialities of all manner of social objects and forces' (Whatmore 2006: 604) are an effect of the associations of which an object is a part (Sayes 2014: 7). The term 'relational materialities' was introduced by Law to emphasise that entities take form and acquire their effective qualities because of the type of relations they have with other entities (1999: 3). Within this distributed conception of agency, agency is an emergent quality. This is because agency is an effect of the micro-negotiations between the actor and the network of associations of which it forms part, hence the inextricable link between the actor and the network implied by the concept of the actor-network (Callon 1991; Latour 2005: 63-87; Sayes 2014; Fenwick et al. 2011). It is not the actor or material by itself that acts but the actor-network. Although the analysis that follows will often begin with a specified 'thing' it is not these entities that are of interest per se, they merely provide a foundation from which the analyses will proceed to consider questions such as: what kinds of connections exist between this entity and its surrounding web of relations? What are the politics through which these connections are negotiated and sustained, obstructed or recalibrated? What are the effects of the type of connections that link up one entity to another, are these relations of instruction, open possibility or indivisibility (Nespor 2003; Thompson 2012; Maurstad 2012)?

For me, the embrace of a 'relational materialities' perspective contains the potential to strengthen our analytical purchase on the material phenomena at work in and around the museum in a number of ways. Firstly, it forces us to appreciate the material elements and practices that constitute museum work in their entirety: calling attention to the material cannot be about the museum object alone, it must take into account those mundane 'background' materials which remain unacknowledged in the field. Secondly, it recognises that materials (and this is particularly relevant to the place of the document in this research) have consequences which go beyond the intention of the author and which cannot be read off via textual analysis which privileges language and its use (Ahmed 2012; Hunter 2008; Hull 2012). Thirdly, and relatedly, there is a deliberate decentring of assigning a priori meaning to objects which is replaced by an emphasis on what objects do and their effects on museum practice (Fenwick 2010; Navaro-Yashin 2007; Darling 2014).

Foregrounding the non-human aspects of organisations is challenging because it is commonplace to prioritise the human subject based on a view that the human subject is distinctive in some way (Fenwick and Edwards 2010). This approach changes how we view the empirical setting and thus has direct consequences for the methods used, the questions asked of participants and the way empirical material is analysed. The rest of this chapter details the research design, and notes how an ANT repertoire informed the methods.

3.2 Research design

A qualitative approach was selected for this study as the nature of the research questions demanded the set of methods conventionally associated with such an approach. As an exploratory study of a novel form of public museum provision based on transfer to organisations outside the public sector, a process about which little is currently known, the kind of work I wanted to produce would use the proximity encouraged by ANT to produce insights on the processes, activities and negotiations surrounding the establishment of such forms of management. Such empirics would not have resulted from a quantitatively orientated study.

3.2.1 The case-study approach

This research employed a multiple case-study design. Yin has developed several criteria which state that research projects which lend themselves to the case-study approach are motivated by 'how' and 'why' questions relating to phenomena over which the researcher has

little control but that its 'unique strength' is the possibility of drawing on a wide variety of methods to generate data (2009: 11). This strength is most relevant to this project and was the basis on which the approach was selected. The other two criteria do not apply because the 'live' case of Manor House Art Gallery & Museum tests Yin's notion that the researcher has no influence on the unit of analysis.

The research looked at three cases of local authority museums in periods of transition from direct to other-than-public forms of management excluding transfer to large-scale charitable trusts (see Introduction). Whereas others note that multiple case-studies enable systematic comparison (e.g. George and Bennett 2005) or theoretical replication (e.g. Yin 2003: 5), this is not the kind of contribution aspired to here where each case-study provides the starting point for an exploratory and close examination of three instances of individual museums at a fascinating time in their histories and museum work at a time of rapid change. As such, each case is posed as having value in itself. This thesis seeks to contribute findings which are relevant to the case study being discussed, and which may go on to inform further empirical work in similar settings. It is part of the argument of the thesis not to limit the discussion of findings to those which can be said to be relevant across the three cases only. As I hope to show, this makes space for findings which are grounded in specific instances of museum practice, affording a discussion of the factors influencing the nature of museum provision and its emerging function in three distinct settings and spaces. This is an implication of an analytical approach informed by ANT, where relational notions of agency and influence necessitate situated analysis.

However, given the context within which the research takes place where the imperative for local authorities to reduce spending on discretionary services looks unlikely to cease, arrangements of the type explored here look likely to multiply. It would be naïve to imagine that certain audiences would not seek to extract 'lessons' or examples of 'best practice' from the project. This is particularly the case given the paucity of research on this specific type of management arrangement. Because of this, although I rely on ANT to facilitate a detailed exploration of how things (in the broadest sense) come to be the case and endeavour to avoid the interpretation of this work as inferring a predictable or causal relationship between certain factors and their effects, the implications of the project for practice will be detailed in the Conclusion. Researching multiple case-studies is advantageous when the research seeks take-up by non-academic bodies as it lends the project credibility.

3.2.2 Case-study selection

At the time of writing there is no national database of public assets which have been or are in the process of being transferred. It follows that no list of transferred museums was available either. Although one of the outcomes of the research has been the inclusion of a question relating to governance models in an annual survey conducted by the Museums Association which aims to measure the impact of spending cuts on the sector, this data was gathered after the exercise to identify potential case-studies was conducted (late 2013).

Preliminary research was undertaken to compile a list of potential case-studies. This list included all examples of local authority museums where the prospect of transfer to an external organisation had been proposed, was in process or had been implemented. This process was not straightforward. As summarised in detail in the introduction, although the provisions of the Localism Act 2011 require local authorities to publish a list of nominated-assets (subsuming museums) which meet the definition of an asset of community value, they are not required to publish a list of proposed asset transfers. As such, various sources were consulted in order to identify local authorities in the early stages of transfer including iterative searches for stories in local media using search engines and social media, informal enquiries to heads of museum services, as well as funding and development bodies and organisations with responsibility for supporting asset transfer as part of their remit. It was acknowledged that this list would be partial likely omitting museums managed by local authorities with little web presence (purposively or otherwise) or disconnected from the key bodies just mentioned. Yet, after a period of several months it was felt that all avenues for identifying potential case-studies had been exhausted.

This list comprised 15 potential examples (were this list to be compiled anew it would number significantly more than this). To conduct the detailed explorations of happenings leading up to the possibility of transfer and the ensuing transfer itself within the timeframe of the project, this list was reduced to three cases. At this point the inclusion of examples of 'negative cases' where a group's plans to manage the museum had been rejected became out of the question. The intention was that this would generate important insights as to the criteria used by local authorities in making decisions as to what deemed a group appropriate to manage a public space. Initial contact with a number of people (both officers and community members) at sites which fit this description revealed a reluctance to participate in research to explore these decisions in the context of a research project.

With this category of case-studies ruled out, inclusion in this final list was based on the following criteria:

- Be an individual museum site (not a service) where management and/or leaseholder responsibilities have been transferred outwith the respective local authority;
- Be located in England as opposed to the devolved administrations (due to substantial differences in infrastructure and policy development relating to asset transfer);
- Be located within geographical proximity to the research base (Leeds) to allow for multiple site visits and observation where appropriate.

No more than the basic detail of these transfers was accessible via the preliminary research (detailed commentaries on their nature is one of the objectives of the research) therefore it was not possible to add further criteria based on the precise nature of the management arrangement. Taking into account geographical proximity, three appropriate cases were identified. These were: Ford Green Hall (Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire), The Whitaker (Rossendale, Lancashire) and Manor House Art Gallery & Museum (West Yorkshire). Basic details of the case-studies are provided in the Introduction and will be the subject of further description throughout.

3.2.3 Gaining access: where to start and negating audit cultures

After identifying the preferred cases, it was necessary to invite their participation in the research. This was a lengthy process as details of named person (s) involved in these arrangements were not always readily available. In addition to the various interest groups, societies and individuals with connections to the museum, the process via which a museum is selected and proceeds through transfer involves multiple council departments and people working in an officer and senior management capacity as well as individuals acting in an elected capacity. An important contribution of the research is inclusion of these groups whose work impacts on museums but who are currently absent from museum research where the voices of curators, educators and directors dominate (cf. Morgan 2012 on cleaners and Morse 2014 and Munro 2014 on community engagement practitioners). Yet, this ambition resulted in an extensive list of potential interviewees (see 3.3.1) and the problem of who to contact first.

It was important to establish contact with those people whose involvement in these changes was not a requirement of their employment by an organisation and ensure their interest in participating in the project prior to introducing myself or the project to council officers or elected representatives, particularly senior officers. This latter group are usually regarded as

being the ones who would 'grant access' to the research site but, as Feldman et al. (2003: 31) note, the 'top' of an organisation is relative to the study. In this project, the priority was gaining permission from members of transfer bodies as without their participation it would have been difficult to appropriately address the research question. Face-to face meetings at a time and place of the participants' choice gave me the opportunity to present the research in brief, and to discuss any aspects of the project which provoked their interest. Prospective participants were provided with a comprehensive description of the project during this meeting (Appendix D).

This purposive sequencing of gaining access served a further important function regarding the research objectives, one of which was to explore which entities (persons and things) these groups or individuals encountered at each stage of their contact with the local authority. From this I was able to be rigorous about where data collection stopped. As has been noted, ANT includes actors as 'participants' that would not conventionally be defined as such (Ruming 2009). In theory the number of entities in networks is extremely large because the terminology associated with the criteria for inclusion is loose. However defining my starting point early on expedited this process as the list of proposed participants was derived from preliminary face-to-face meetings with members of transfer bodies. This list included persons and things such as written documents and administrative processes. Iteratively, this was shared with participants for feedback so as to triangulate my own perceptions as to who or what required inclusion.

Following these informal meetings, it was necessary to initiate contact with officers and other official actors. Invitations to this group took the form of an email with a description of the research project (Appendix D) and an option to arrange an informal phone call or meeting as per the previous group. Willingness to participate was sought from senior officers (where appropriate) first. This was not based on an assumption that senior staff would be purposively obstructive, merely that they would not see the project as a priority which would raise issues with re-directing my enquiry to another staff member working at a different level in the council hierarchy (where organisational structures are commonly vertical) as such a request may have put them in a challenging position.

Perseverance and framing the research project sympathetically were required to establish some of these relationships. Although various concerns were raised in these initial conversations, a common assumption was to view the research as an evaluation or an audit to which there were 'right' and 'wrong' answers. Certain individuals conducted themselves in this mode throughout the research period, which Goffman (1969; 1971) understands as

'impression management'. Indeed, given the difficult and challenging environment in which these senior officers were working (making decisions between which front-line services to cut, for example) and the strength of 'audit cultures' (Strathern 2000) it was not expected that all participants would see the value, be willing or feel able to reflect on the more 'messy' aspects of entering into relationships with transfer bodies. However, after discussing the particulars of the project, the majority of participants welcomed the opportunity to reflect on the complex processes and negotiations which gave rise to these arrangements. My interest in hearing 'stories about "how" relations assemble or don't' and of 'the messy practices of relationality and materiality' of organisational worlds (Law 2007: 2) was oft-understood using the colloquialism 'the devil is in the detail' by officers who understood the importance of a process-orientated view, a statement well-suited to the focus of this thesis, the design of which is the topic of the remaining sections.

3.3 Data generation and analysis

Data was generated using a combination of empirical methods to enable detailed examination of the transfer process, these were: ethnographic observation including participant observation, interviews (ranging from semi-structured conversations at a specified time and place, audio-recorded and transcribed to informal interactions after meetings the content of which was written up as field notes) and document analysis. This section examines the methods in turn, data analysis and the writing up process.

3.3.1 Semi-structured interviewing

Between December 2014 and August 2015, I conducted 24 semi-structured interviews across the three case-study sites. Appendix E provides a list of the respective roles of the people interviewed and where appropriate their institutional or group affiliation. Interviews lasted between one to two hours. There are various recommendations regarding the number of qualitative interviews required should a study be 'valid' (e.g. Kvale 1996), as well as the view that interviews exploring a pre-designated topic say, attitudes to minorities among specific socio-economic groups, should continue until saturation is achieved (i.e. interviews no longer yield new insights) (see Kvale and Brinkmann 2009). Such approaches were not relevant here, as respondents were selected on the basis of the techniques summarised in Section 3.2.2. The fact that the case of Ford Green Hall involved only one interviewee from the newly formed transfer body points to the stark changes in how certain public spaces are being managed and

how responsibility is distributed, and is a finding of the project rather than a decision based on requirements for participant numbers.

These interactions were guided by an interview schedule which had two discrete parts. The first was a conventional interview schedule complete with questions and prompts designed to generate a data set which was relevant to the research aims and objectives, while the second part was directed towards encouraging reflection on the part of the interviewee regarding what aspects of their involvement in these projects they had found most intriguing, challenging or pertinent to my project which they had not had the opportunity to mention. Interviews focused on encouraging participants to narrate detailed accounts of their involvement in the processes relating to asset transfer, both the circumstances of their involvement and the specifics of what happened throughout. Additional foci were: their understandings of 'community management', 'localism' and 'museum work', their perspectives on this approach to managing museum spaces in terms of their 'publicness' and descriptions of what they did in their work as part of an attentiveness to the specific accountabilities/responsibilities of this work. A sample interview schedule is provided in Appendices A and B.

It is important to note that these interviews were understood as sites where particular narratives of individual or organisational involvement in the transitions studied were produced. The accounts narrated during the interview were not understood as representations of activities *as they happened* or *as they were*, rather mobilisations of those events made visible for the purpose of an interview, with all the assumptions of appropriate content, demeanour and address associated with the particulars of such an encounter. The purpose of the interview was not to glean 'true' accounts but to create a space for the active production and re-production of narratives between the interviewee and the interviewer (Guba and Lincoln 1994; Thrift 2003; Latour 1999a).

Interviews were scheduled at a time and location of the interviewee's choosing. For example, in the museum, cafés, council offices and on occasion in interviewees' homes in the Manor House Art Gallery & Museum case where the long-term nature of the relationship lessened concerns over personal safety. All interviewees were provided with an Information for Participants document (Appendix D) and a copy of the consent form (Appendix C). Both were also provided via email beforehand. Participants were encouraged to ask any questions they had of the document, and to reflect on whether they wished to be named in the research, were happy for the interview to be audio-recorded and if they wished to receive a transcript of the interview. No interviews were conducted without obtaining consent. However, the meetings observed in Ilkley were often attended by people who arrived part way through

meetings, as well as members whose attendance was sporadic. It was not always feasible to obtain signed consent prior to my observation of meetings, although verbal consent was confirmed via the chair. In such instances, contact details were sought and consent to participate was confirmed as a follow up, although as 3.3.3 details the nature of participation was different in this context.

3.3.2 Following documents

Documents are often placed 'at the margins of consideration' (Prior 2003: 4) whereas this study considers them as actors in their own right. This statement is qualified in Section 3.1.2 where I explained the specific methodological angle taken towards the document and other administrative processes in the research.

There were two rounds of document gathering which served different functions. The first was a collection of national-level policy documents and reports produced by think tanks relating to community management of public services which were crudely coded according to themes such as 'responsibility', 'accountability' and other loose terms which emerged as of interest from the literatures. This set of data informed the early stages of the project (for example refining the research question and developing the interview schedule). The second round was more extensive and purposive as it involved gathering key local policy documents, and other types of document that were mentioned or shared with me by participants. As I have already mentioned in Section 3.2.3, the archive of documents was generated with participants. First, participants were emailed a speculative list of documents which was compiled from my early research into the asset transfer practices of the respective local authorities. Participants were asked to highlight those documents which they had encountered during the project. Where publicly available, these documents were added to the archive. In other instances, documents were obtained via personal requests and, when necessary, FOI requests were submitted. Where I refer to documents that are not in the public domain, I refer to these documents as 'internal'. These documents were sent to me from participants who were aware that they would be used to inform my analysis. Following Ahmed (2004), Law (2009) and others, texts were not read for what they 'said' rather my interest was in how these documents travelled within and beyond groups and organisations, with the goal being to gain an understanding of their effects. The References includes separate headings for each case-study with their relevant documents listed underneath.

3.3.3 Participatory-ethnography

Participant observation involves the researcher entering a 'social system to observe events, activities, and interactions with the aim of gaining a direct understanding of a phenomenon in its natural context' (Liu and Maitlis 2010: 610). This material was not considered as more valuable than the accounts generated via interviews, but it did provide an opportunity to observe first-hand the details of practices relating to a transfer without the mediating influence of an interviewee. Research of this nature is commonly located on a continuum from complete observer to complete participant, yet a fixed point on such a continuum does not reflect the nature of my involvement with the Manor House Art Gallery & Museum in Ilkley as my participation fluctuated from complete observer to collaborator although mainly my position was somewhere in the murky waters in-between. As such, the title of this section is somewhat of a misnomer. It best describes my method of engaging with this case-study but the reality involved fluctuating types of participation and observation.

My observations were certainly 'close' (in contrast to remaining at the level of perceptions) and my attention was fixed upon rendering the mundane researchable by observing its effectivity from a perspective afforded by 'being there' (Ybema et al. 2009: 103) and then developing these observations into meaningful accounts using concepts from the literature. My involvement extended beyond observation into participation and as such, can be understood as having a distinctly ethnographic feel (Neyland 2008). It also had some of the characteristics of an organisational ethnography, yet as my observations took me from council chamber, to kitchen table, to hired meeting room rather than taking place in a specific setting the addition of the qualifier 'organisational' did not seem entirely accurate (Ybema et al. 2009: 4). Tentatively then I describe my approach as participatory-ethnography: I attended numerous meetings, 'hung out' before they begun and was invited to the drinks which frequently followed, was copied into email chains where documents were drafted and was the recipient of emails wherein participants informed me of informal meetings and goings-on they felt I 'simply had to know about'. I made detailed field notes throughout.

This project did not begin with explicit participatory commitments. However, during my long-term observation of the Manor House Art Gallery & Museum case, it became clear that it would be inappropriate, in my view, to remain as an observer at moments in the data collection where my contribution was specifically sought.

Later chapters will draw upon these moments in more detail, for now it should be noted that my decision to respond to these requests either in the form of contributions to meeting

discussions or via email form an important part of my research practice and personal ethics (see Thrift 2003; Banks and Manners 2012). My involvement with this group took place against a backdrop of substantial cuts to public sector workers which made it difficult for this group (and others) to access the support they needed from officers, sometimes requesting my advice on subjects which I had some knowledge of following extensive preliminary reading of policy documents and toolkits. On numerous occasions, participants would ask me about the specifics of the asset transfer process, request that I might be able to signpost them to organisations who could provide support and guidance or ask me for my opinion as someone they perceived to know 'about museums'. Of course, I exercised my judgement. I would read documents on the basis of having partial knowledge of the priorities of particular funding bodies, signpost to relevant support organisations and offer my opinion when asked, although I strongly resisted the subject position of the 'museum expert', for numerous reasons which come through in later chapters (esp. 6.2).

Table 1: Details of data generated during the period December 2014 – December 2016

Research site	Data generated
Ford Green Hall	4 interviews Internal documents, including lease documents, minutes, business plans including draft versions, cabinet reports and email communications External documents including executive reports, policy documents and drafts, consultation responses, media communications, circulated minutes
The Whitaker	7 interviews Internal documents as above, also including licence arrangements between RBC and The Whitaker Group and original management documents between RBC and LCC External documents as above

Manor House Art Gallery & Museum	13 interviews
	Observation of 6 meetings of the NMHG (took place in chair's home)
	Observation of 1 committee meeting of the Friends of the Manor House Art Gallery & Museum
	Observation of 3 meetings between NMHG and BMDC
	Observation of 12 meetings of the MHG
	Internal documents as above, including draft versions of Memorandums of Understanding (discarded), constitutions for CIO and communications between group and BMDC
	External documents as above

3.3.4 Data analysis

Different analytical strategies were used according to the themes pursued in each chapter and according to the type of data being analysed. Documents were read but this was not a textual analysis as such, rather a preparatory process to inform interviews which were designed to understand how a document's content influenced action and/or understanding, as well as to trace how a document was produced and in what circumstances. Although my analysis involved looking at what was said in a document, my priority was to explore how this text was received as opposed to analysing the text itself. Analysis of fieldnotes 'involves analysis through writing' (Neyland 2008: 125) in the sense that analysis does not begin after observation but takes place throughout. Fieldnotes taken during observation report on themes identified as interesting following engagement with the literature meaning that summaries of these meetings include verbatim quotes alongside reflective commentaries on topics deduced to be worthy of further exploration and that meeting observation involves analysis. Likewise, writing fieldnotes into thesis text involves analysis as I moved back and forth between the

thesis text and my fieldnotes to ensure the final text retained the texture or atmosphere of the circumstances as they presented themselves to me during observation.

All interviews and fieldnotes were transcribed in full and inputted into the coding software NVivo. The findings presented in Chapters 4-5 draw on systematic coding of interview, document and observation data utilising the theoretical vocabularies associated with ANT. Coding for these chapters was based on Callon's (1986a) four moments of translation paper which traces the development of a research project over time, using specialised terminology to assess how disparate groups of actors (both human and otherwise) end up pursuing one course of action as opposed to the myriad others available at the beginning of a project. The paper also highlights the importance of obligatory passage points: channels through which people must flow in order to achieve a goal and the effects of these movements through say, organisational protocol, on their sense of possible action. Although this vocabulary has been omitted from the text to enable the findings to be presented with clarity, as I read through transcripts I used Callon's four moments, as well as other ANT vocabulary, to build an understanding of how asset transfer proceeded at each case-study, highlighting moments of decisive action, controversy, changes in direction or perception and other key aspects relevant to the research. This coding stage generated multiple moments of interest so in the next step I produced diagrams of decision-making processes (Chapter 4) and transfer negotiations (Chapter 5). Importantly, these functioned as illustrations of important moments and influential encounters between people or between people and organisational processes or routines rather than providing linear timelines.

The analysis of data informing Chapters 6-7 involved reading the transcripts and fieldnotes for instances where specific themes were discussed, a process of coding I carried out manually. For Chapter 6, particular attention was paid to discussions of ideas of museum work, and the relationship between members of transfer bodies and the museum sector. In line with the approach to organisational practices informed by ANT, data was read for instances of interaction between participants and professionals, as well as between participants and the infrastructures of museum practice. For Chapter 7, the analysis looked for instances where the public nature of the building and/or museums more generally was discussed, in both interviews and meetings. Across both of these chapters, the analysis selected moments in the data where participants used the space of the interview to describe how they made sense of their role and responsibility, both as new museum managers and as governing bodies responsible for public spaces. These descriptions were taken as narratives made available for the moment of the interview so are illustrative of how participants made sense of and talked

about their encounters and interactions following the event rather than as accurate descriptions of what happened, as the following section highlights.

3.3.5 Writing-up and anonymity

The act of producing a piece of written text from the materials generated, literatures read and observations undertaken is understood in this thesis as a process of creation (Massey 2003, citing Latour 1999a). This process is posed as transformative as the analysis contained in the following chapters is the result of an act of construction. I do not wish to suggest there is anything false about the work, merely that there is a gap between the interview encounter, the transcript, the quotes highlighted, memos related to themes deduced from the literatures and those that emerged inductively throughout this process and what then makes its way onto the page (Crang 2003: 138).

As I distilled the material generated into a text, the purpose of which was to generate an argument which illuminated an aspect of museum practice which was felt sufficiently distinctive to invite further reflection, the transformative nature of working up the spoken accounts of participants into text meant I became uncomfortable with attributing their 'real names' to my re-description (Massey 2003). Further consideration on the issue of anonymity was required.

Discussing the consent form with participants, I made clear that the specific museums would be named in the research (given the focus on specificity this was imperative) meaning I could not guarantee that individuals would be unidentifiable despite efforts on my part to use pseudonyms or remove identifying information. I asked participants if they would consent to being named in the research and all gave their permission for me to use their 'real names' in the thesis and subsequent publications. For organisational participants, this permission was given on the recognition that their names were in the public domain as being associated with the project in question. I was aware that this would impact on the type of information shared in the interview, but as part of my interest was in how local government practitioners performed in their roles, the potential for an 'institutional account' was not considered problematic. Those participants whose involvement began as a voluntary commitment spoke of attaching value to being named in the research. Knowing being named meant something to this group made the decision to identify participants only by departmental membership or

group affiliation difficult. However, for the reasons mentioned, a decision was taken to anonymise participants.

3.4 Summary

The methodological approach of this study was designed to detail the practices involved in museum asset transfer, examining the experiences of those involved, as well as how decision-making about museums works in a time of austerity. The methodological repertoire of ANT has been summarised, as well as its utility for the research objectives, and the research design has been detailed.

When a methodological approach is embraced in its extremity, as Law notes, it amounts to the 'simultaneous enactment of presence and absence' (2003b: 3): making certain aspects of the world visible necessitates that others are backgrounded. Whilst ANT brings the bureaucratic organisational worlds of museums to the fore, in seeking to decentre the human, accounts which take a strict ANT approach, particularly those which frame the discussion around its esoteric vocabularies can crowd out the perceptions, experiences, emotional attachments and social or political commitments of human actors. I have purposively left the vocabularies of ANT outside the analysis, apart from at specific points where they aid my argument, to allow the voices of members of transfer bodies and other participants to be heard. Whereas the empirical materials presented in Chapters 4-6 were read with specific theoretical approaches in mind, Chapter 7 takes a more exploratory stance. Chapter 4 explores how decisions were made about which museums would be transferred.

Chapter 4
Influential Factors in Decision-Making

The current period of public sector retrenchment has called the future of several local authority museums into question. As Gray writes, there is minimal work focusing on how decisions are made within the museum sector (2011: 53, see also Chapter 2). This chapter addresses this gap through answering the question: why was each case-study museum chosen for transfer instead of the others they continue to subsidise? Questions of valuation frameworks and decision-making logics are addressed, as well how the purpose of museums was understood across the case-studies.

Working with empirical material from across the three case-studies, this section has four parts. In each I discuss a factor which was influential in these decisions. Unlike BMDC and SoTCC, RBC own one museum only meaning the decision to transfer did not involve the prioritisation of resources in the same way. Although these four influences will be presented as though they are separate from one another, in the context of organisational decision-making, these criteria and frameworks form part of a network of influential factors that together come to add up to a decision. However, for the purposes of investigating how decisions are made about local authority museum provision, an arena about which we know little, I present each factor in turn. Given that this parcel of original empirics is a key contribution of this study, these decisions emerge from logics which are explored further in Chapter 8.

While methods of public consultation provided an opportunity for the public to contribute to these decisions, this chapter clearly demonstrates that decisions regarding which museums will be made available for transfer are made by the local authority. The summary I provided in the Introduction (1.2) of how asset transfer differs from other policy frameworks which aim to give external groups the opportunity to engage in these processes anticipates this. As the empirics demonstrate, external groups (e.g. Friends of the Museum, local pressure groups) struggle to have their voices heard in these debates. As I argue in Section 4.1, this is because only certain types of knowledge or evidence gain traction within local authority decision-making procedures. Techniques such as visitor surveys, routinised public consultation, risk analysis and property management plans are influential protagonists in designating which museums have a future within the context of austerity. This analysis demonstrates that decisions about local authority museum provision can be based on pragmatic factors, for example maintenance costs. However, it also demonstrates that undergirding these decisions

are multiple assumptions as to which museums should be subsidised when resources are scarce. Exemplifying these assumptions is crucial to our understanding of how the role and purpose of public museums is perceived by the people making decisions about their future.

To a degree, decisions to continue subsidising museums which have had a greater amount of resources devoted to them over time can be understood as a case of path dependency, or as evidence of historical contingency. As Cairney writes, both notions emphasise how decisions or commitments made in the past limit the possibilities for action in the present, with path dependency making a specific point about the devotion of resources over time effectively locking decision-makers into established paths of investment, to the concomitant exclusion of others (2012: 76, see also Gray 2015). While these framings shed light on the vulnerability of museums which have been overlooked as candidates for government spending, implicit in this analysis is the suggestion that past decisions predetermine or govern the actions of individuals in the present. While the findings presented in this chapter are usefully understood as examples of how decisions made in the past influence the present, there is a need to add further nuance and empirical detail so as to avoid neglecting the agency exercised by individuals as they purposively call forth particular pasts to do work in the present (see also the discussion of institutional biography in Section 7.2). Furthermore, the language of path dependency generates an image of a singular decision-making trajectory, whereas this chapter seeks to do the opposite, demonstrating the range of factors which coalesce into a decision, or are grouped together as justification of the legitimacy of one. Hence, although I would acknowledge the influence of past investment decisions on those made in the present, these are not the only factors informing which museums were selected for transfer across the three case study local authorities, as this chapter will now demonstrate.

4.1 How numbers stand in for organisational performance and public value

There are two key observations to this section. In the first, I focus on how a museum's perceived value was calculated using limited statistical evidence. In the second, I argue that the preference given to forms of evidence viewed as 'objective' limits the agency of stakeholders beyond local authorities to influence decisions.

In the case of Manor House Art Gallery & Museum the 'budget decision to take the budget away and effectively to end the running of a museum service' (BMDC Museum and Galleries Manager, interview February 2014) was partially underpinned by an evaluation of its performance based on limited visitor statistics. These statistics were used during interviews to

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evidence that the museum was not sufficiently valued to justify its continued existence. In what follows, I present a granular account of how these visitor statistics travelled throughout the council, becoming accepted as one of the bases on which the budget decision was made.

BMDC commissions an annual exit survey of all sites. Using qualitative and quantitative measures these surveys evaluate the visitor experience. Part of the data gathered (visitor numbers and dwell times) found its way into the Budget Reference Document for 2013-14 (a document outlining the services delivered by the council mainly including finance and performance information) (see Figure 5).

Museum & Gallery Visits 2008/9 to 2012/13

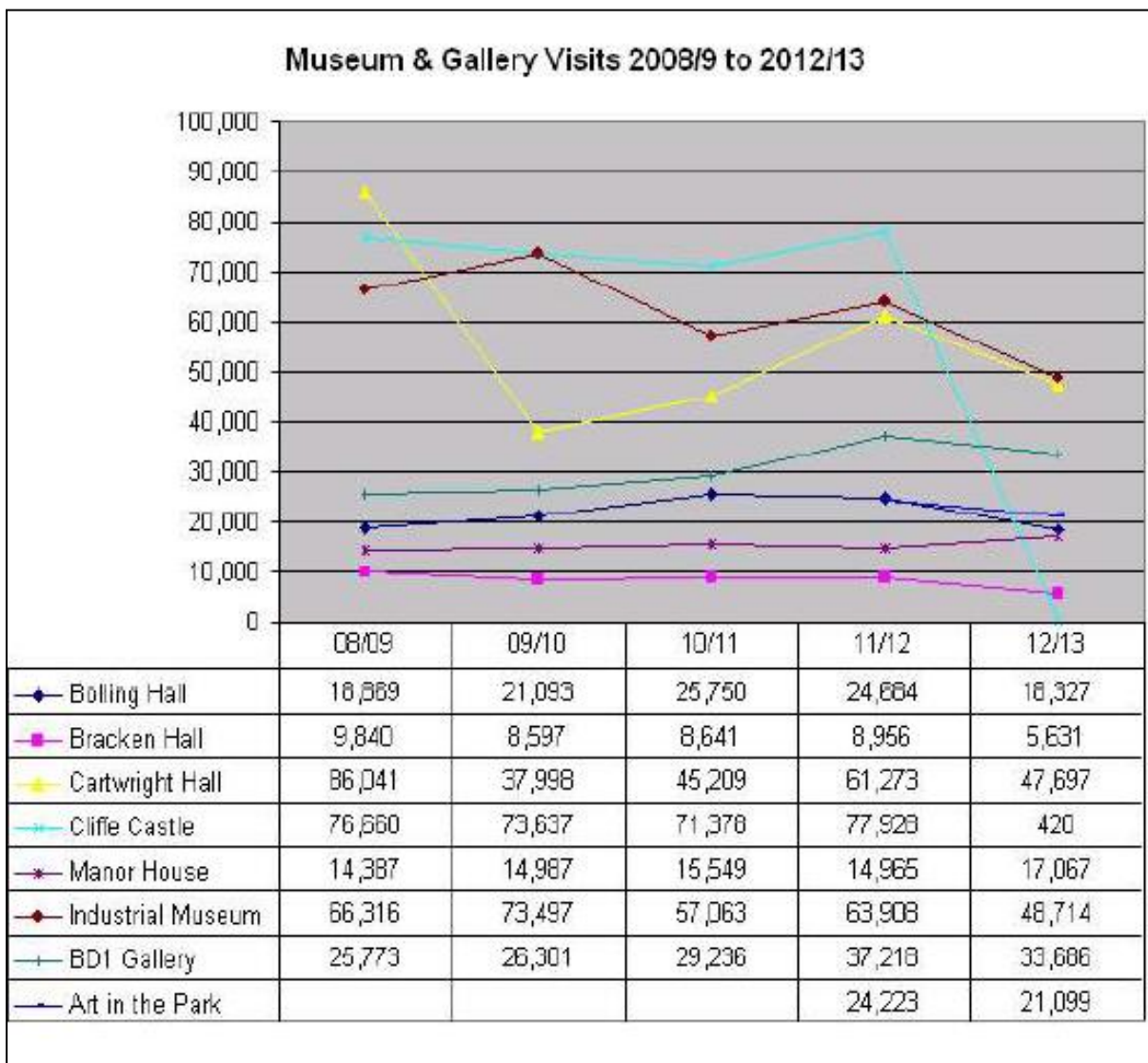|	08/09	09/10	10/11	11/12	12/13
Bolling Hall	18,869	21,093	25,750	24,884	18,327
Bracken Hall	9,840	8,597	8,641	8,956	5,631
Cartwright Hall	86,041	37,998	45,209	61,273	47,697
Cliffe Castle	76,660	73,637	71,378	77,928	420
Manor House	14,387	14,987	15,549	14,965	17,067
Industrial Museum	66,316	73,497	57,063	63,908	48,714
BD1 Gallery	25,773	26,301	29,236	37,218	33,686
Art in the Park				24,223	21,099

Figure 5 Graphic representation of visits to Bradford Museums and Galleries 2008/9-2012/13[14]

The Manor House Art Gallery & Museum does not come off well in this survey and this failure to 'perform' has an impact. The document in which Figure 5 is cited is a starting point

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[14] Quality of image as presented in original document.

for future action but also represents a moment of closure, reduction and erasure where the graphic representation of visiting practices produces an image of the 'museum-as-problem' (an image which becomes incontestable). In Latour's terms, it is a 'common place for many other inscriptions to come together', with inscriptions for Latour being matter transformed into written forms capable of travelling beyond the contexts of their production (Latour 1986: 25). A document condenses contested information into one 'finished' output and has the effect of flattening out inconsistencies in the information it summarises. Importantly, then, documents channel decisions rather than expressing decisions (Freeman and Maybin 2011: 3).

Figure 5 presents the visitor figures as evidence of underperformance, a problem which needs to be corrected. As Miller and Rose observe, drawing on Latour, a concern with language and other forms of representation should not be about pointing out the gap between 'reality' and what is said. Whether a representation, such as the graph, is 'true' or 'false' does not take us very far. Texts have an active role in 'rendering reality amenable to certain kinds of action'. Our concern should not be with the truth of descriptions of the world, but whether (and how) certain statements take hold, and what these statements about the state of things then go on to do (1990: 7; see also Latour 1987). In the story of the 'problem' museum, this graph and the information it presents, is a key protagonist.

The graph sits in the appendix as further detail on the museum services' performance summarised in the main body of the text. The financial imperative to spend less on the service is to be achieved by delivering a core offer from fewer sites (BMDC 2013: 113). Comments made by the Museum & Galleries Manager are indicative of how the fate of the Manor House Art Gallery & Museum became known and incontestable from the moment the visitor figures were placed alongside those for the rest of the service. The certainty about the status of the museum is discernible in reflections on the decision to proceed with the transfer of the Manor House Art Gallery & Museum over and above any other museum in the service:

> 'There were two key pieces of information or thinking that informed our decision. One was when we looked across the service, we were looking at the audience we were attracting and linked to that, and then we looked at what potential there might be for growth. The visitor figures were quite poor, and resources to improve that would have had to have been significant' (BMDC Museum and Galleries Manager, interview February 2014).

In this rationale, we see how the 'facts' are marshalled to speak for themselves: it is the number of visitors to this museum that matters, and because it would take such investment to

increase them, this museum is a mountain that cannot be climbed. From the point of view of groups such as the Friends of the Manor House Group, BMDC's conflation of the extent to which the museum is valued with the number of visitors it attracts is problematic because it does not consider the experiential or symbolic value of a visit or the role of the museum for those groups who use it:

> 'They challenge the visitor figures and the surveys that say the dwell time is less than 20 minutes. They get a really warm welcome, they reference the Visitor Attraction Quality Assurance Survey, which really compliments them on the welcome, but I'm sorry, because the staff have been sat there waiting all day for a visitor, when they do come in, they practically hug them!' (BMDC Museum and Galleries Manager, interview February 2014).[15]

In this statement, aside from the rhetoric, 'challenge' is used to indicate that the Friends, as a group with a substantial history (more than a decade) of engagement with the museum, resist the truth of these figures because they did not want to believe them. However, what I want to suggest in the second part of this analysis, is that this 'challenge' was not about refuting the credibility of the figures in terms of their content by calling attention to the terms of their production but can more faithfully be understood as a 'challenge' to the uses that these figures were put to, and the significance of relying on this mode of knowing the museum over and above another.

Although these findings are limited to this specific case, given that much research on the topic of value tends to be orientated towards the 'cultural' (see Crossick and Kaszynska 2016) or 'heritage' (Lagerqvist 2015, 2016) sectors in general, acknowledging the local variation in how decisions about cultural provision and public subsidy are made is important for increasing our understanding of how the value of culture is assessed at the local level by actors whose decisions have the potential to alter the shape of public museum provision in the areas for which they have responsibility.

When asked to describe the decision to close the Manor House Art Gallery & Museum, and at other points in the interview where the conversation moved on to the public reaction to the proposed closure, the Museums and Galleries Manager made frequent reference to the visitor numbers, as indicated by the quote above. The comparison of visitor numbers at the Manor House Art Gallery & Museum with other museums in the service is methodologically

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[15] The Visitor Attraction Quality Assurance Scheme is a VisitEngland initiative involving a visit from an assessor who produces a report and a scoresheet marking their experience of the visit against a list of pre-defined universal criteria.

problematic as this museum is significantly smaller and has received considerably less investment over the years than the other sites, making the argument that this is a demand-side problem not robust. Of greater significance is the inference that a lack of bodies through the threshold can be taken as evidence that the public do not value this museum enough. Discernible in the following quote is the suggestion that there is a valid way to express the value you place on the museum which is through visiting and visiting in the right way:

> 'We started in November 2013 with press coverage about potential closure, we expected at least an increase in visitors as a result because people would visit it for the last time or the first time, it hasn't made a stick of difference. The Friends took 600 signatures on The Grove [main street in Ilkley] one Saturday as a petition. If every one of those people had then visited on that day, or half of them, we'd have got more than the 34 visitors that we did get. I've been disappointed. All publicity is good publicity at the end of the day but we've still got one man and his dog visiting' (ibid).

Although there are limited studies which contribute to our knowledge of how the public value museums (Scott, Dodd and Sandell 2014; cf. Usherwood et al. 2005a, 2005b; Britain Thinks 2013), there is a well-developed literature providing various typologies of the values that individuals and groups attach to museums and heritage (Macdonald 1997, 2003; Scott 2009; Jones 2017). The underlying theme in much of this work is the idea that the 'meanings and attachments that underpin aspects of social value', the term Jones (2017: 26) uses to capture the broad range of ways in which specific heritage environments, of which museums are part, become of value to people (e.g. place-making, memory-practices, communal identity, civic pride), might just as well be gained by the existence of the museum as by visiting it. For example, the 'physical presence' of a museum acts as a statement of 'civic identity and pride' (Macdonald 2003: 11), a benefit clearly articulated by respondents in Rossendale (see 7.2) where we see how the values attached by officers and members of the transfer body to the museum were rooted in the symbolism of its architectural presence as evidence of what life in the town was like prior to the shift to a post-industrial society. We might argue here that, given the magnitude of a decision to close a museum, visitor statistics are an insufficient proxy for the value the public place on the museum. Significantly, the suggestion that certain expressions of value are considered more substantive than others (i.e. visiting is preferred to signing a petition) indicates that there are limited routes available to members of the public who wish to counter the way value is assessed by the local authority. Relatedly, Donovan and O'Brien suggest multi-criteria analysis as a means of assessing and illustrating the value of culture. This holistic approach includes criteria such as sociocultural value, public opinion,

usability and local response (2016: 29-30). Although it is not pragmatic, at a time of austerity, to suggest local authorities or concerned members of the public utilise such time-consuming methods, methods beyond outdated visitor statistics should be considered given the significance of the decisions being made here or, at best, members of the public should be aware that certain activities or modes of expressing value have greater agency than others. In the next section, we see how museums need to generate specific forms of value, as well as needing to be valued in particular ways by audiences, in order to be granted continued subsidy.

4.2 The importance of being more-than a 'community museum'

This account of how Ford Green Hall was selected for transfer demonstrates a case where museums which contribute to the strategic objectives of the local authority are given priority. This may seem unsurprising. However, when we take a closer look at what those objectives are, it becomes clear that in this case, being a museum whose role and purpose is to participate in the lives and networks of individuals and groups local to the museum is not enough to qualify for subsidy. To conceive of public subsidy in museums, or investment as might be more apt here, in such terms should trouble us because it indicates an approach where the social roles fulfilled by museums are neglected.

SoTCC sought two forms of feedback before starting the process of agreeing their budget for 2011/12. These proposals are relevant for this study because they contain proposed changes to the museum service as a means of delivering budget savings.

One of the forms of feedback used was a six-week public consultation where people were asked to rank ten service areas (e.g. children's centres, shopmobility) or specific sites (e.g. swimming pools, museums, community centres) in order of importance. It was not clear whether consultees were being ask to rate these services in terms of importance to them as individuals or their importance as social goods to the collective population of Stoke-on-Trent. However, it should not come as a surprise that when pitched against services more explicitly linked to social impact, care and vulnerable groups, a mere four per cent of participants ranked Ford Green Hall at the top of their order of importance (SoTCC 2011: 8). Relative to the population, the survey attracted a small number of respondents (approximately 1,000) and although it only represents how people feel about these museums relative to other services, its findings were drawn upon to support the idea that Ford Green Hall could be cut loose from the council via an asset transfer.

In addition to this, and with a greater degree of influence, a series of consultations were undertaken with the council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee. An information pack circulated to members of the Committee ahead of a meeting during which it was agreed that the proposal to explore the option of transferring Ford Green Hall be approved on the proviso that it would be sold on the open market if a suitable group could not be found (SoTCC 2010a: 5) contained a series of briefing documents which laid out the possible ways in which the council might deliver a legal budget (i.e. avoiding a deficit as per the Local Government Finance Act 1992). It was one of the documents in this pack which a member of the Friends of Ford Green Hall came across during his regular trawl through the agendas, reports and minutes for committee and sub-committee meetings available on the pages of SoTCC, in response to which he launched his campaign against the proposed transfer and budget cuts. Amongst other things, this document details the proposed options for changes to the museum service necessitated by a projected budget overspend identified in 2009/10 (SoTCC 2010b: 2). Within the document is the following statement, authored by the Director of Adult Social Care, Health and Communities and the Director of Central Services:

> 'The options for change within the Museums Service contain a range of proposals including the introduction of charges for entry into The Potteries Museum and Art Gallery (PMAG). This will bring PMAG in line with the City's other museums. Other proposals include the possible closure or disposal of two of the smaller community museums. Options to identify alternative ways of delivering these services through possible asset transfer or creation of a local trust will be explored. It should be noted that the Museums Service is discretionary' (SoTCC 2010b).

This classification does not appear in publicly-available council documentation produced prior to or after the specific meeting for which this document was prepared nor was the notion of 'community museums' mentioned during interviews. It is not my intention to claim that naming Ford Green Hall as a community museum brings the closure of the museum into effect but it does appear to be a central, constitutive factor in the thinking of the document's authors leading up to their proposals that museums classified under the 'community' label (Etruria Industrial Museum and Ford Green Hall) are appropriate for transfer whereas other, by implication, 'core' museums (The Potteries Museum and Art Gallery, Gladstone Pottery Museum) are subject to efficiency proposals but are not considered for transfer. Introducing this distinction in this specific document creates the conditions for a line to be drawn between which museums are considered appropriate for asset transfer, and those that are not and raises

questions of why it is deemed appropriate that 'community museums' should be most vulnerable to the loss of council support.

The logic behind the formulation of these two distinct categories was problematic for the Strategic Manager of the Museum Service at the time:

> 'I knew Ford Green Hall was always escaping cuts. I think, and this is not my view, but it was the view of the people who were making the decisions at the time, that they saw a ceramic thread that weaves the others together and is attractive to external visitors and Ford Green doesn't really fit that. Although I look at our collections in a different way, ceramics are very important but we're just not that, we've got the Hoard, the Natural History Collections, so that was the simplistic way they were looking at it, Ford Green Hall is not a natural fit' (SoTCC Strategic Manager Museums, interview March 2015).

Although the interviewee does not name 'the people making the decisions at the time', it is possible to infer that this comment points towards both elected members and officers attached to departments such as Economic Development and Culture because key strategy documents pertaining to the cultural provision of the council and in which we find narratives attached to tourism and business-logics were produced by this department. This preference for a single umbrella brand for the museum service focusing on the city's ceramic heritage followed a corporate restructure of the council which resulted in the museum service shifting from being part of the Adult Social Care, Health and Communities directorate, specifically falling under the remit of Community Services to being part of Economic Development and Culture. With a division description as follows and when the potential of a museum is assessed according to their ability to earn income or attract external visitors, directing investment away from a museum like Ford Green Hall becomes irrefutable:

> 'Our priorities for the coming year are to attract new businesses to the area and place people into the jobs created by this as well as supporting existing industry in the city with a sectoral focus on ceramics, creative industries and the low carbon economy. We will also attract more visitors by ensuring we have a diverse cultural offer including festivals, events, great museums and other visitor attractions' (SoTCC 2012a: no pagination).

Lagerqvist's work on heritage in Ireland observes a similar prioritisation of tourism and economic returns (2016: 68).

The frustration discernible in the following comment can be read as a reflection of a feeling of impotence that might stem from someone who is no longer in a position to challenge or dispute the prioritisation of museums which attract tourists as well as which straightforwardly feed into plans to 'brand' places along singular narratives of local distinctiveness:

> 'Every time these departments are merged, museums go further and further down so the museum professional, if you like, their voice is further away from where the key decisions are made – that is an issue' (SoTCC Strategic Manager Museums, interview March 2015).

This comment echoes an observation made in Lawley's paper which reports on his experience as a manager in Stoke-on-Trent museum service wherein he describes local governments' staunchly vertical organisational structure and the stakes for the influence of museum managers as museum services become small sections sitting within much larger directorates with broad remits (2003: 77). In the case of Ford Green Hall, now the museum service is part of a department with a mission statement centred on attracting inward investment, enterprise, tourism and employment, the sort of outcomes generated by a 'community museum' become low priority.

Of particular interest here is the construction of a set of objectives against which a museum's contribution can be evaluated, resulting in the prioritisation of one type of museum with particular qualities over another. After these criteria become common-sense and part of the language, the prospects for museums which fall outside of these criteria are poor.

Although council committee members do not challenge the proposed transfer of this museum, nor the grounds on which such a transfer was rendered possible, the member of the Friends group mentioned at the beginning of this section does. In a series of petitions, with the Friends of Ford Green Hall and the local residents' organisation the proposed apportioning out of the museum to a community or voluntary group is contested. Multiple petitions circulated, all of which were reactionary and did not make suggestions as to what action they proposed of the council, merely that signatories objected to proposals that created the conditions for the building to close if no group came forward to take responsibility for the transferred building.

The petition was about more than opposition to budget cuts. From the point of view of the petitioners, it was specifically because this museum was seen as a community resource with 85 per cent of visitors coming from the administrative area of Stoke-on-Trent (SoTCC Strategic Manager Museums, interview March 2015) that they felt it should continue to receive local government support. We have already seen how a museum attracting a majority

local visitor base fell outside the ambitions of the council. Further, new guidelines which meant that the lead petitioner for petitions receiving less than 5,000 signatures (but more than 99) would:

> 'be allowed a maximum of three minutes to speak to the petition. This is confined to reading out, or summarising the substance of the petition and making relevant further supporting remarks. The petition will not be the subject of a debate, and Members will not ask questions of the Lead Petitioner' (SoTCC 2010c: no pagination).

The moment the petition closed without receiving the required 5,000 signatures to signal a debate, the formulation of a notion of the 'community museum' as distinct from those museums which operated as tourist attractions rather than community-orientated spaces and as such, appropriate to be considered for transfer, was consolidated and became the basis on which future action was built. The member of the Friends Group spoke of losing the campaign; a loss which can be read as a failure to challenge classification above anything else. In the next two sections I move onto the practical factors which influenced resource prioritisation, arguing in this next section for attention to be paid to how such logics disrupt the public good rationale for museum provision, an issue I return to in Chapters 8-9.

4.3 Ability to generate income

Two out of this enquiry's three case-studies of museum asset transfer were the result of a decision to withdraw public subsidy and public services from the museum in question, a decision which transforms the museum's identity from 'museum' into 'site', a point I articulate fully in Chapter 8. The importance of the museum's ability to generate income for its chances of surviving this current period of austerity is an influential factor in local authority decision-making practices. Again, at first this does not come as a surprise. However, a logic which directs public subsidy to those sites which can cover their operational costs is a challenge to the idea that public subsidy is supposed to support activities which would be underprovided by the market. This argument is contestable on the grounds that directing public subsidy towards those museums which people have, over the years, decided not to 'pay' for (i.e. visit), is 'paternalistic' because it assumes that 'individuals, left to their own devices, will not make the *right* decisions about how to spend their resources [time is a resource here]' (Quong 2011: 91, my emphasis and additions). However, as the following analysis demonstrates, it is simply not the case that people are deciding not to use or value museums such as Ford Green Hall or Manor House Art Gallery & Museum. These museums are used, but not in the way that they need to be used in order to qualify for public investment

(Manor House Art Gallery & Museum) and not by the people with the ability to pay for the pleasure of a visit (Ford Green Hall).

There was a general consensus in the interview data from council officers that individual museum sites needed to present opportunities for income-generation in order to be considered viable. As summed up in these quotations, income-generation is about bringing in external funding as well as bringing in income to cover the costs of operating the site:

> 'all of this is about saving money…but it's not just about saving money, it's about considering how that space can grow and access other funding whereas others can't' (SoTCC Strategic Museums Manager, interview March 2015)
>
> 'There were two key pieces of information or thinking that informed our decision. One was when we looked across the service, we were looking at the audience we were attracting and linked to that, and then we looked at what potential there might be for growth. The visitor figures were quite poor, and resources to improve that would have had to have been significant' (BMDC Museum and Galleries Manager, interview February 2014)
>
> 'It's an issue for me when people are talking about profit, whereas we're used to talking about income, but now it's all about profit' (ibid)
>
> 'I don't think it was financially viable, I do not think there was an ability to make money out of running that museum sufficient to pay for the cost of running the museum even working with volunteers' (BMDC Strategic Director of Regeneration and Culture, interview July 2015).

The key point to remember here is that these interviewees are talking about a public service. These assertions of the need for museums to generate income point towards an environment where judgements are being made on the basis of commercial value or potential to generate commercial value rather than social worth. What is more, in the final quote the suggestion that the museum should 'make money…sufficient to pay for the cost of running the museum' is an explicit turn away from the public good rationale for museum provision.

The questioning of local government's role in the provision of public services, the marketization of public services and the forsaking of commitments to universalistic museum access provided on the basis of need or right rather than ability to pay (see Newman and Clarke 2009: 79-80, citing Esping-Andersen 1990; Cochrane 2015: 453) have their roots in Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government (see John 2015). The influence of these

attempts to re-shape the state of public service provision in the UK on publicly-supported cultural provision have not gone unnoticed (see Throsby 1998). Although this is beyond the scope of this study, it remains unclear why local authorities appear to have shielded their museum provision thus far, only moving towards closures when post-2010 budget cuts forced their hand. Rather than exploring this, several academic and professional studies illustrate the increasing pressure on museums to generate income to support their activities, noting that many services have developed a commercial orientation (i.e. McLean 1997: 66; McPherson 2006; Woodward 2012; Museums Association 2015). However, what this study illustrates is that the ability of a museum to house experiences which are first and foremost of a commercial nature is one of the factors deciding its fate.

The turn to income-generation is more likely to yield results for authorities in affluent areas populated by people with disposable income or in popular areas for tourists. The distribution of funds from national funding bodies such as HLF and ACE could provide some insulation from this inequality, yet it cannot replace revenue from local councils who are the largest single source of revenue for the cultural sector. Here, we have seen that within the current financial climate, questions regarding square footage (i.e. is there space for a shop or café) and location (i.e. does this museum receive high footfall from visitors with a propensity to spend) take priority over the broader set of benefits generated by the museum. The next short section emphasises how public sector cuts, and the atmosphere of austerity, disable local authorities from considering this broader set of benefits.

4.4 The potency of the ordinary under austerity

At a time of austerity, emphasising the restrained financial environment within which council officials are making decisions about museums is vital if we are to avoid implying that council personnel are facing anything less than an unprecedented challenge to their ability to continue to administer certain functions. Decisions about which museums to transfer involve calculations of value, assumptions about worth and the desire to keep sites with potential to generate economic returns within the council. Yet, they also involve highly ordinary concerns, as the following extracts from interview transcripts make plain:

> 'what happened, because the council have to be more efficient and effective, they've got to maximise the use of their buildings…with the budget cuts, every year in the budget review we're assessing where we're going to save money, and thinking about what is going to cost us money (SoTCC Voluntary Sector Policy and Strategy Officer, interview March 2015)

'Mundane things, electricity, gas, insurance, all those things have to be worked through…once the lease was signed, we then started working through handling everything over…the City Council wants to encourage groups and organisations to take these on wholeheartedly as part of budget savings…it's a sea-change, that why I don't think in the next election there will be a major shift in how central and local government work…I think it might just slow down but this is the way it is going, in another 10-15 years' time, it will be the norm won't it' (ibid)

'the service is separate from the asset…the museum service is not in control of that building, it's the control of asset management and whilst that sounds not joined up, the council owns a massive amount of assets so it does need to be managed efficiently' (BMDC Portfolio Holder for Education, Skills and Culture, interview June 2015)

'a very substantial cost of things like the Manor House Art Gallery & Museum are the costs of running the buildings and the council's budget position is clear. It needs to remove the financial liability of operating that building so we will be pressing for them to take on the full responsibility for the building, including repairs, insurance, heat, light, everything because if we end up in a position where we outsource all these buildings but we retain all of the financial liabilities that go with it then we are not making any budget progress and we have to make budget progress, we have to take a total of £200m out of the budget. If they can't take on the financial liability then there's no point doing it' (BMDC Strategic Director of Regeneration and Culture, interview July 2015)

As has been made clear throughout this chapter so far and is explicit in these quotes, recognising that decisions about museums, especially those owned by county, unitary or metropolitan councils, involve asset management teams is essential. This is because these teams are focused on reducing council costs and liabilities in an effort to work towards broader income-generation, full-cost recovery and commercialisation strategies (see LGA 2014).[16] As such, buildings which represent a high financial risk to the council in the future ('what is going to cost us money') are more likely to be considered for closure. Clearly, listed buildings and historic sites are at greater risk because they require regular specialist maintenance and it seems highly unlikely that small museums such as those which feature in

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[16] An example from BMDC where the objectives of the Estates and Property Service are listed, inter alia, 'to reduce the running costs of Council's buildings; to maximise the performance of the Council's investment portfolio, generating additional revenue to support the Council's finances' (BMDC 2016: 9).

this study could ever reach levels of income generation which would cover the cost of maintenance and upkeep.

Yet, I would suggest that there is something else discernible in these quotes which is indicative of how local authority personnel imagine the future of local government as an institution. On the one hand, there's a sense of urgency and panic ('we have to make budget progress') but there is also a sense that this is just the way local government finances will be from now on ('it'll be the norm won't it'). This is interesting because the austerity measures are a central government initiative and the financial circumstances facing local authorities are a consequence of decisions taken by central government and government administrations come and go. However, these quotes indicate a mood of resignation or defeat within local authorities where the expectations for any change in the future seem to have evaporated. In the next section, I draw conclusions from these analyses before moving on to the next chapter which moves from the moment prior to transfer to post-transfer.

4.5 Conclusions

The analyses presented in this chapter were generated by fulfilling one of the thesis' research objectives: to generate richly descriptive accounts of the processes leading up to asset transfer. The chapter responds to the call from the literature for further case-studies which provide insights as to how budget reductions are being delivered in local contexts (Moore and McKee 2013; Lagerqvist 2016).

My first finding speaks to a well-rehearsed debate in cultural policy research, that of the dominance of certain modes of knowing the value of cultural organisations such as museums. Specifically, the weight given to seemingly transparent 'numeric data as a means of assessing performance' (O'Brien 2013: 71; see also Belfiore 2004) is spotlighted. Most relevant for this discussion is how the use of such techniques 'make political decisions into technical decisions' (2013: 79) because they are presented as offering an 'objective' perspective as information is translated into evidence.

The analysis in Section 4.1 expands these commentaries in two ways. First, I argue that what is particularly troubling about the dominance of numerical modes of knowing the museum (its value, success, contribution to public life) in the context examined by this study is not that they fail to represent what they proclaim to measure but how impenetrable they are to the experiences and knowledge of others, even when those knowledges are solicited by bodies such as local authorities. Second, through tracing how this data gains power as it travels throughout the organisation, I argue, following Prince (2014: 748) that technologies of

assessment/measures of value contain within them the potential to influence future courses of action but only garner their agency via the specific organisational dynamics in which they are situated. In other words, abstract critique of calculative practices can only take us so far.

The second finding relates to the division of museum services into core/non-core components, illustrated by the empirics relating to Ford Green Hall and Manor House Art Gallery & Museum. Whilst the process by which local authorities transfer entire museum services to trust reveals little about how the role and purpose of museums is understood by local-authority decision makers, a decision to continue funding some museums whilst cutting others loose involves judgements of this nature. Since this project began in 2013, an increasing number of local authorities have made such decisions. Studies which investigate how decisions are made as to which museums to keep and not keep for the future resonate with current concerns.

As the findings from Ford Green Hall and SoTCC indicate, as councils emphasise the operationalisation of museums for council strategic policy priorities centred on driving inward investment, tourism and growth, the future funding of museums which serve an altogether different purpose looks increasingly uncertain. This reflection expands our current understanding of what is at stake when museums and culture in a broader sense become seen as valuable only in terms of their contribution to economic or tourism objectives. Where once museum managers may have felt compelled to narrate their value in meetings or in funding applications in terms of their contribution to council-wide strategies relating to employment, tourism and economic growth as a way to justify public subsidy, an imperative which Gray highlights through the idea of policy attachment (2002) and others have critiqued for its capacity to lead to the prioritisation of 'non-core' museum work (Arts & Business 2007), the current situation indicates the prioritisation of museums (rather than aspects of museum work) which speak to these agendas.

The third finding relates to the way the contemporary financial climate changes the status of particular details about individual museums. The characteristics of the museums selected for transfer discussed in sections 4.3 and 4.4 of this chapter did not appear with austerity, in a basic sense Ford Green Hall was always a small museum in a location unfavourable to tourism. The way austerity works on the decision-making practices of local authority officers and elected representatives is to increase the significance of factors previously manageable under former financial conditions. To clarify this argument, it is helpful to position the factors influencing decisions as existing on a continuum moving from factors which determine to those which shape decisions, with the point a particular factor occupies on the continuum

being influenced by a range of factors, including present-day financial conditions and the purposive efforts of individuals to dampen their effects on service provision. It is in this sense that factors that would have previously been thought of as mundane or peripheral become consequential. For example, whereas the distinctive collections displayed at Ford Green Hall may have been relevant insofar as the museum may have been excluded from projects focusing on the ceramic history of the area, this distinctiveness becomes an issue because of the desire of decision makers to construct a singular narrative thread for their museums which is attractive to visitors from further afield. Likewise, factors that retain their mundanity such as floor space, geographic location, proximity to transport links and location relative to the priorities of external funders garner force when funding is prioritised on the basis of visitor numbers and future return-on-investment potential. Similarly, previously manageable forecasted maintenance costs for listed buildings start to look increasingly threatening as the possibilities for a return to pre-austerity spending levels diminish. These findings point to the impact of austerity as a constraining framework within which decisions about museums are made, and the analysis details factors that influence spending decisions which tend to be overlooked in the literature. Relatedly, a smaller number of scholars are investigating how decisions are made about collections and disposal (Macdonald and Morgan 2017), but do not focus on museum buildings, making this an important original dataset.

This chapter has raised several questions regarding the role and purpose of publicly-subsidised museums, and how ideas about this are changing in response to public sector retrenchment. I return to these questions in Chapter 8. To follow up this chapter which has considered how the conditions for transfer were constructed, the next chapter explores how museum asset transfer arrangements work in practice.

Chapter 5
Who and What Does Museum Asset Transfer Involve

This chapter examines how and through what means individual transfers were accomplished, as well as illustrating who was involved. Here it becomes clear that the terms on which these transfers take place are significant, particularly to embryonic organisations taking on the management of local authority museums. As Moore and McKee note, the specifics of the 'differences in the constitution and governance of community asset ownership in different places and spaces' is yet to be detailed (2013: 9). Unlike a relationship between, say, a consultancy firm and a local council's procurement department where there is a clear sense of due process, the control and ownership of assets such as museums by other-than-public organisations is an unfamiliar arrangement, making this detailed analysis of how this way of managing museums is formalised (or not as in The Whitaker case) an important contribution of the study. This chapter's four sections marry data from interviews with document analysis. Each case-study has its own section because the way the transfer worked in each setting was different.

The analysis presented in this chapter draws on ANT's attention to the material detail of interpersonal relationships or, as Richie Nimmo puts it: how are social relations mediated or shaped by non-social things? (2016: xxxi). The chapter allows technical processes and organisational practices, as well as their effects to come to the fore to argue that decisions to impose one lease type over another (5.1 and 5.3) or which consultation technique to use (i.e. the feasibility study presented in 5.2) are important shaping factors in these relationships. This is an important parcel of detail because this is the first study to understand the nature of these arrangements in relation to the museum and to consider how contractual forms might play important enabling or limiting roles. This study's focus on the museum is important because other studies take a broader view of asset transfer and do not consider the significance of the transfer for the specific building or service in question (De Magalhães and Trigo 2016; Nichols et al. 2015; Findlay-King et al. 2017). As a corrective to the substantial literatures which take the form of lists of the possible organisational structures available to groups (Babbidge 1998; Babbidge et al. 2006; Bussell et al. 2010; Kelly & Bond 2010), the presentation of this empirical material demonstrates how certain forms of documentation and organisational procedure have generative effects, encouraging certain practices to be carried out and others foregone. There is a politics in presenting an account where specificity is

foregrounded (McGuirk et al. 2016) as it produces insights which have the potential to inform future decision-making of groups such as those who feature in the study.

The frequency with which I came across phrases such as 'a group has come forward' in the media (e.g. Lancashire Telegraph 2015; Bradford Telegraph & Argus 2014) led me to focus on the specifics of museum asset transfer[17]. This phrase struck me as an interesting formulation. Not only did it infer that groups were well-formed when they entered dialogue with the local authority, but it concealed the complexity, friction and hard work involved in agreeing the terms of these arrangements; for many this went on for several months and in some cases years after these groups made initial contact with the respective councils. Although it became clear that these groups did not always wait until the terms of their relationship were formalised (i.e. a contract signed or management agreement confirmed) to begin their work in the museum, the specific basis (lease, freehold, licence, management arrangement, none of the above) of the transfer was a point of interest for all interviewees.

Establishing these relationships can be laborious and is often slower than both parties expect (see Bailey 2011). Paying attention to the specifics of the relationship explains this, which is particularly relevant to the case of Ford Green Hall and the Manor House Art Gallery & Museum where councils rely on routine ways of working and an arsenal of bureaucratic procedures as they seek to formalise arrangements. As I will demonstrate, these may be inconsistent with the group's wishes, yet some councils offer no alternative to groups should they wish to fulfil their ambition to save the building from closure. The tension ensuing from this is then exacerbated when discussion of ethical and moral matters raised by groups are foreclosed as institutional agendas relating to formalisation and 'closing' projects are pushed to the fore.

There is limited evidence of individual machinations here. As such this must not be read as a critique of the actions of individual practitioners. Rather, my focus on habitual ways of working demonstrates how they become commonplace to the extent that there is limited

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[17] Informed by the ANT stance to only feature actors which influence action, further discussion of media sources is omitted from the thesis. The progression of the transfer of the Manor House Art Gallery & Museum in Ilkley was the topic of multiple local media stories, whereas reporting on the other two instances of transfer was limited until the new managers were installed. In both cases, however, the spectre of negative press was not discernable as an influential factor, on decision making or the type of arrangement settled upon, with the bulk of news stories appearing only after the period of interest to this thesis. On the topic of local news reporting on asset transfer, the individuals involved in the Ilkley case made a conscious decision to avoid the use of the media to gain leverage out of a desire to maintain a productive working relationship with the council. Whether this is an example of the diminished antagonism that asset transfer as a process requiring good relations with government necessitates is worthy of further discussion, particularly with regard to whether the equity issues raised by asset transfer are backgrounded in the interests of productive procedural relationships.

recognition of their capacity to restrict how a project might move forward, as well as a lack of acknowledgement regarding the human cost of reliance on such methods of formalisation.

5.1 Signing on the dotted line: Ford Green Hall

Following the collapse of the campaign group's efforts to halt SoTCC from withdrawing funding for Ford Green Hall, group membership suffered an immediate contraction, leaving only a small group whose determination to avoid the closure of the museum meant they were willing to explore all options to achieve their goal. In 2010, negotiations began between SoTCC and ten individuals who had formed into a loose management group. The focus of these conversations was the potential for the museum to be managed differently, at this stage it was not clear what the options were for the group nor what a new management model might look like. In 2013, when I first spoke to the resident who was most prominent in the campaign and is now chair of the independent trust with responsibility for the museum, only him and another member of the Friends of the Potteries Museum and Art Gallery who was a long-serving volunteer for the museum service were still actively involved in the museum. Although both were happy to have informal, unrecorded conversations about the museum and the lengthy negotiations with the council, it was only the chair who was willing to be formally interviewed. For the member of the Friends group, reflecting on the arduous process would 'bring it all back', an act of recollection which was undesired. As such, interview material from the chair only is integrated into this text (along with SoTCC officers). This is a powerful illustration of the extent to which extensive responsibilities are being shifted to nascent, very-small 'organisations' as a way to avoid museum closure.

The transfer of Ford Green Hall to an independent trust was part of the first tranche of asset transfers initiated by SoTCC. Unlike the other councils who feature in this research, SoTCC's corporate property team already had in-depth knowledge of the asset transfer process prior to entering negotiations with the chair. Following the publication of the Quirk Review in 2007, the DCLG allocated funding to the Development Trusts Association (DTA), Community Matters and the Local Government Association (LGA) to establish the Asset Transfer Unit (ATU), which was officially launched in early 2009.[18] The ATU was the delivery partner for the DCLG's Advancing Assets for Communities programme. The programme had four rounds between 2007/08 through to 2010/11 and was designed with a remit to implement the recommendations of the Quirk Review. Document analysis illustrates that the programme of

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[18] DTA and bassac merged on 1 April 2011 to form Locality.

activities initiated by the ATU was heavily weighted towards supporting local authorities to adopt a strategic approach to transfer by developing policies and linked processes.[19] SoTCC was part of the third round of this funding.

A decision was taken during this period which would become key for defining how all asset transfer processes at SoTCC would function: the positioning of the Strategy and Policy Officer for the Voluntary and Community Sector as the central point of contact for all parties involved in transfer. The council established this officer as an obligatory passage point, an actor who/which (Callon 1986a), as is implied in the name, all actors involved in transfers are required to travel. It is significant that this officer is part of the corporate property team. First, it becomes taken as read that the priority in asset transfer is to achieve the passing over of ownership or management of a *building*. A strategy document from SoTCC corporate property team illustrates this distinction between *buildings* and *services:*

> 'Our assets are corporate, with individual directorates "occupying" them for service delivery. Their use, management and change will be overseen by the corporate centre' (SoTCC 2007: 36).

The long-term impact of proceeding to establish relationships with transfer bodies in the context of this approach, with the public sector body as landlord and the third sector organisation (replacing the work of individual directorates) as 'overseen' tenant is yet to be seen, although in assigning this task to the corporate centre the effect is immediate. The corporate property team's priorities are, as the Strategic Manager noted:

> 'The council, we've got something called the Mandate for Change, which is all about the city being a working city again. Our ambition is to move from dependency in terms of what comes in from government grants to being a net-wealth creator, which is not quite the right terminology but you know what I mean...' (interview March 2015).[20]

This clarification of priorities was followed by this unambiguous statement:

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[19] A comparative reading of the Quirk Review (where extensive proposals were put forward to build capacity across local authority and third sector organisations to support asset transfer) and the final evaluation of the work of the Asset Transfer Unit makes instructive reading. Although the former made proposals which, if implemented, would have seen a relatively balanced approach to supporting councils and community organisations, a large share of the funding (and ensuing benefit) appears to have been directed towards local authorities (see Quirk 2007; SQW 2011).

[20] The Mandate for Change was launched in 2011 and prioritises attracting external business investment in the area. See: http://www.moderngov.stoke.gov.uk/mgconvert2pdf.aspx?id=29184

'…That community empowerment, all those sorts of words, we mean it and we are trying but it is hard. We try to be totally transparent and open with groups but they expect the council to do it all' (ibid).

With the Strategy and Policy Officer at the heart of brokering relationships with groups interested in transfer, these priorities are filtered down with ease. As such, the asset transfer process is led by a number of guiding principles, all of which are linked back to the corporate priorities where the influence of the concept of Best Value dominates, an approach focused on cost-effectiveness and value for money (see Martin 2001). For the council, CAT delivers six main benefits which are listed in the Community Asset Transfer Policy:

'delivery of city council corporate priorities; improved and or new local service delivery; economic development, employment and social enterprise; capacity building of local communities and the VCS; increased volunteering hours and social capital and value for money' (SoTCC 2012b: 235-236).

As the chair noted, in relation to the development of the policy and procedure, opportunity for small community organisations to influence or interrogate the suggested framing of asset transfer was limited, with the impact on groups taking on assets being of secondary concern:

'it was introduced part way through our negotiations and it hadn't been thought out that well, it was just a cover for some issues that had cropped up. When they [council] decided to close entities, saying 'you do it if you want it to stay open', they should have had a policy in place at that moment, it should have involved more of the community sector, instead of prescribing one process, driven by the needs of the council, it should have been driven by the needs of both the council and the community, that would have been beneficial for the long haul. It's not in their interests to put someone under so much pressure that they eventually say 'we're going to give up' (FGH chair, interview April 2015).

In effect, because the negotiations relating to Ford Green Hall were firmly underpinned by SoTCC's fixed approach to asset transfer, the chair was left with little option but to sign the lease – drawn up by legal services – if he was to achieve his desire to keep the museum open to the public. His account of the moment he signed on the dotted line – a lease which imposed the full repairing and insuring obligations on the newly formed trust, relieving the council from all liability for the cost of insurance and repairs, makes clear the sense of discomfort which accompanied the realisation that this was to be a contractual relationship: an imbalance of power secured by material means. Here, the lease – deployed at this moment, by a

corporate property team concerned with their own priorities – acquires the capacity to configure the chair and his colleagues in a particular way. The lease becomes a potent paper object, tying the group into a relationship of management and monitoring by the 'corporate centre' whilst binding them to a substantial level of responsibility:

> 'Well again that [the full repair and insurance lease] was something we took on that we weren't meant to have. The officers we negotiated with understand that but as soon as it went to the legal team they changed it, I think it's important people learn from that, because you might think you're negotiating with one lot of council, it doesn't mean they control the end result. They wanted to turn it into a commercial lease, which we didn't want of course but that's the only thing they understood. The legal section did not understand asset transfer, the museum staff partly understood it, so again that was another complication. We got this lease thrust at us which we didn't agree with but it was a take it or leave it situation, there were other add-ons too. It's sad' (FGH chair, interview April 2015).

The terms of the relationship are clear, particularly when we attend closely to the practices and material means by which the negotiations ended. For SoTCC's corporate property team, the moment the lease is signed, the transfer is complete. Throughout the interview, the phrase 'signing on the dotted line' was used by the Strategy and Policy Officer as a metonym for the formal nature of the asset transfer process. For the group, it was the moment when the relationship with the council became contractual in nature, with corollaries which will be examined in subsequent chapters.

5.2 Putting 'all the facts' in one place: Manor House Art Gallery & Museum

In early 2014, the NMHG formed. The core group included: chairman of Ilkley Parish Council (acting in a representative capacity), a member of the Friends of the Manor House Museum and seven residents from the town and surrounding areas. These residents contributed their professional expertise (surveyor, creative director, curator, academic) yet their primary motivation was a loose (and for some, ambivalent) desire to 'do something' about a building earmarked for closure.

One of the primary means of communication between BMDC and the NMHG were monthly meetings at which a council representative was present, supplemented by a feasibility study commissioned by BMDC and jointly managed by the council and the Group. My observations centred on these meetings, plus formal meetings at BMDC's offices, as well as interviews

with key group members and the consultants commissioned to deliver the study. The decision to commission a feasibility study, its management and the methodologies employed by the consultants provoked debate and moments of heightened controversy. For the most dedicated group members it became increasingly clear what was at stake in proceeding with a study of this nature, especially when the knowledge claims it advanced appeared to repel inspection or challenge.

The study of working practices and techniques as knowledge practices is now well-established (e.g. Law and Mol 2002). As a corollary, scholars across multiple disciplines have developed a vocabulary through which to embark upon empirical projects tracing how knowledge produced through practices (involving assemblies of human and non-human actors) gains the status of incontestable knowledge, with consequences for how decisions about matters as diverse as environmental policy (Whatmore 2009; Whatmore and Landström 2011), medicine (Singleton and Michael 1993; Mort, Roberts and Milligan 2008), energy (Guy and Shove 2000) disasters and human influenced crises (Easthope and Mort 2014) and culture (Prince 2014) are then made. This is a productive means of analysing the practices and knowledge politics involved in the feasibility study which is important because it was frequently cited as evidence for decisions made long after its publication. Before discussing the forms of knowledge accepted by the study's authors, it is important to detail how the commitment to funnelling all ideas and information about the museum through a study of this sort arose.

In the period between January and March 2014, BMDC held a series of four meetings at their offices where residents with an interest in being involved in the process to find an alternative solution to direct management could pose questions to a panel comprising the then portfolio holder for Education, Skills and Culture, the museum and galleries manager and the assistant director for Culture and Tourism. A member of the NMHG relayed to the panel that a group had formed with an interest in the continued operation of the Manor House Art Gallery & Museum but that it was not their desire to take on the management of the space, rather they saw their role as overseeing an 'expert feasibility' which would generate the necessary 'evidence and research' on which emerging visions for potential uses for the building could be appraised (BMDC 2014). This suggestion was taken up by BMDC who agreed to fund such a study. The Group chair viewed the study as a necessary neutral mediator between different individuals and organisations whose deliberations on the future of the museum had reached an impasse stemming from the resistance of the Friends group and the local civic society to the withdrawal of council funding to those who had reluctantly accepted this and

were willing to consider alternatives as a means of avoiding the sale of the building on the private market. The value of the study was as an 'objective', 'evidence-based' appraisal tool through which all the ideas for the future use of the building could be funnelled. It was felt an open consultation would generate an unmanageable swarm of ideas whereas the study would answer questions as to what was 'financially viable' (NMHG chair, interview June 2015).

Later, the NMHG became united in their dissatisfaction with the study, particularly the selection process leading to the awarding of the contract. The Group were reassured they would have equal input into this process when, as it happened, they were restricted to sending a representative to the selection meeting during which it became clear who would have the final say. Although interviewees voiced various levels of frustration relating to this, the core group members who had been most extensively involved spoke of the 'about-face' of the council whose initial commitment to a 'spirit of collaborative working' was belied as 'policies and procedures' were cited as justification for the group 'not being allowed' to contribute to decision-making in the substantive way previously agreed (NMHG, interview November 2014). Resulting from this, the contract was awarded to a firm comprising surveyors, architects and management consultants. The Group were the first to acknowledge the practical utility of some of the information uncovered by the team (building condition reports, original deeds and so on) yet became increasingly uncomfortable as the process progressed and it became clear what sort of report would be delivered.

One way to view this sense of dissatisfaction might be to pit the consultants against the Group as two stakeholder groups with irreconcilable aims. Interviews with the consultants would support this verdict where phrases such as 'expectation management', 'a journey in realism' served a double function. The NMHG were portrayed as unrealistic and inexperienced for the task in hand, bolstering the legitimacy of the role of the consultant as a necessary corrective to local residents unable to think 'practically' (Management Consultant Surveyor, interview February 2015) whilst also undermining the confidence of a group who cannot be expected to know whether or not their ideas or preferred consultation methods are feasible. Again, this speaks to previous work where the consultation practices of local government have been critiqued as processes with educating the populace at their heart rather than as open forums where respondents can challenge the parameters of projects or contribute knowledge which may disrupt current thinking (Newman et al. 2004).

As I observe it, this tension emanates from the consultants' desire for closure and certainty contrasted with the NMHG's spirit of enquiry and alternative possibilities. Because of the budget-setting process (mapping onto the April-April tax year), the phrase 'day of execution'

was used by officers to refer to the cut-off point by which the short-term future of this building and who would be responsible for it after the 'day of execution' needed to be secured. This desire for a solution which fulfils the requirements of the immediate-present controls and colonises what 'practical' and 'reality' look like in this context. Whereas local authorities are working towards short-term timetables (i.e. to remove costs associated with the museum from their balance sheet as soon as possible), groups who are motivated to give their time to exploring options which avoid closure or sale of a building which is valuable to them have the long-term prospects for future managers and users in mind. That the feasibility study did not make space for long-term thinking was a problem for the NMHG on both conceptual and practical levels. Conceptually, it was problematic that the question of the museum's future was assessed in terms of its ability to 'wash its face' by generating income (Management Consultant Surveyor, interview February 2015). Practically, the only reason why the NMHG were discouraged from exploring grander options for the museum (which were not unrealistic given the availability of HLF support for capital works to buildings such as the Manor House Art Gallery & Museum) was because of the need for the consultants, for reputational and contractual reasons, to deliver the study on time and on budget. In addition to the tension of time-frame, the study became problematic for the group as it became clear that its findings would stand in the stead of the views of the wider population of the area.

During my conversations with group members after formal meetings, many expressed their embarrassment at being associated with a report that they felt to be partial. For some, their regret stemmed from having assembled as a bounded group altogether, believing that they had made a mistake in enabling BMDC to claim extensive consultation and community engagement when the reality was quite the opposite.

Here, I find Sarah Whatmore's (2003: 94-97, citing Stengers 1977: 117) notion of the 'knowledge event' useful as a way to think through why the use of techniques such as a consultancy-led feasibility study as a way to manage the decision-making process here removes agency from groups such as the NMHG to challenge the knowledge claims it makes, as well as transforming ideological and political questions into concerns over 'practicalities'. For Whatmore, a knowledge event occurs when all the heterogeneous bodies, things, protocols, uncertainties, biases, researchers and participants involved in any process of knowledge production disappear as all of knowledge production's contingency is 'mapped into' a document (such as the final report from the consultants) which becomes the basis on which future decisions are made. These decisions are lent legitimacy by a documentary form

which gives the impression of certainty because all the uncertainty and provisionality involved in the process by which that knowledge was produced has disappeared.

The publication of the feasibility study might be read as a 'knowledge event' during which a highly circumscribed way of knowing the possible futures of this museum triumphs over the vernacular, equally partial and provisional knowledges of the museum generated by concerned groups, including but not limited to the NMHG. An online search for terms such as 'Manor House Art Gallery & Museum', 'community management of Manor House Art Gallery & Museum' and so forth returns the feasibility study (hosted on BMDC's website). This is the only tangible outcome of multiple meetings, lengthy formal and informal consultations, extensive time spent visiting other museums and reporting back, scrolling through comments on a well-used Facebook page posting hyper-local news during which solutions were brought to the table. An example from the consultation process further illustrates my point.

One of the questions addressed by the study was: 'does the museum element have a value for the town of Ilkley and is it worth retaining? Can/should it be retained?' (Tomorrow Advisory 2015: 6). Here, a normative, perhaps moral issue is transformed into a technicality (a shift observed at numerous moments across all case-studies) but moreover the means by which answers are sought to these complex questions takes the form of an exercise during consultations (which were primarily with organisations rather than individuals affected by the proposed closure) where respondents were asked to rank a list of 'themes relating to the Manor House Art Gallery & Museum' in order of importance. The list comprised: 'arts use; community use; a museums service; the heritage building; the Roman era heritage; and "other"' (ibid: 8). The final output contained the following claim: 'there was precious little support for a museums service other than from the Parish Council', a body who exist to represent the views of the local population. This statement was followed up by a further note reporting that a significant number of respondents had ticked the 'other' category, adding that this category was 'populated by interest groups' (ibid). The inference here is that they were a biased source of evidence given they were strongly wedded to the building as a result of their historic contribution to the museum, their emotional ties to the space and the role of the museum in their social lives.

Without detailing the methodological problems of the way the survey pitted, for example, museum use against community use, there are nuances in this data which are made invisible in the final report. A good example of this is the finding that there was 'precious little support for a museums service', a finding which was frequently referenced as justification for

removing the collection from the building and repositioning its future as a 'heritage centre' as opposed to a museum. Although I was not granted access to the consultations conducted by the consultants, in observed meetings and during interviews, it became plain that what the consultants understood by a 'museum service' was akin to traditional thinking about museums as static displays of a collection (cf. Vergo 1989), a perspective which can partly explain why such a small number of people prioritised this function, perhaps selecting 'other' out of a feeling that the role and purpose of the Manor House Art Gallery & Museum, as a museum, was to fulfil collections-based functions as well as to facilitate community-based activity and to interpret the town's heritage for the purposes of the present.

As a 'knowledge event' the publication of the final feasibility report was a moment of distillation when the potential for debate and discussion between different groups became out of reach. This is problematic because of the study's claims to representativeness. However, of greater relevance to my interests, is the type of contribution sought from participants by the timeframe, the mode of questioning and the limitations on thinking introduced by the study: how it lays claim to what is 'practical' and 'realistic' thinking and its offhand dismissal of attempts to open up questions such as the meaning of the idea of the 'museum' for further discussion.

When the decisions being made relate to the loss of professional museum staff or the permanent closure of a museum, it is vital to ask on what basis these decisions are being made.

5.3 Keeping things casual: The Whitaker

The case of the proposed asset transfer of Rossendale Museum and Art Gallery (now The Whitaker) to an external organisation is a compelling illustration of how minor adjustments to practical arrangements can make a difference. First, the decision to pursue a management arrangement instead of a full asset transfer alleviates the pressure on transfer bodies to find money to pay for maintenance and insurance, freeing up their resources and mental energy to focus on reviving the building's museum function. Second, in comparison to the other two cases where the signing of the transfer lease marks the end of negotiations, the selection of a temporary agreement which requires annual renewal necessitates that the local authority and the transfer body remain in dialogue with one another. An asset transfer agreement makes plain on paper who is responsible for what. However, being without these clear guidelines appears to be beneficial as it avoids transfer bodies being confronted with responsibilities

which they feel were forced upon them. Rather, matters of roles and responsibilities remain open for discussion rather than being decided by an unwilling signatory.

The following discussion highlights the purposive efforts of a council officer to make the transfer work for both parties by avoiding imposing unnecessary pressure on the newly formed group. It would be a mistake to claim that the calibration of these relationships in this way was always the result of deliberate, conscious acts by group members or officers. Although such acts were storied as purposeful, an impulse which can be attributed both to the positionality of the researcher and researched in this particular setting and the desire of a heavily criticised local authority to have a good news story to tell (see Llewellyn 2001) this does not take away from the point I want to make here.

As I have previously stated, although the extent and uneven distribution of budget cuts is obviously problematic, the discretion available to local governments in terms of how they formulate their response to this resource problem means, as I see it, that we must pay attention to how local authorities formalise (or not) their relationships with newly formed groups. It is in these small alterations that the agency of officers and members of external organisations to adapt national policy framings and ideas about how services should be delivered in ways that are appropriate to specific contexts and promote a considerate approach to asset transfer are brought forth. The case of The Whitaker is a good example of this considerate approach in action.

One of the members of the group who would later become The Whitaker Group had experience as a senior officer for a large urban unitary council working in their community services team and was familiar with the asset transfer process. Based on this experience, he approached RBC with caution. His previous employment by a council where asset transfer had been a foil for straightforward outsourcing of responsibility for public services and buildings resulted in an atmosphere of suspicion. Despite not wanting to reflect on the specifics of this, the following statement is as revealing as it is measured:

> 'I can see the game; I can see what we are getting ourselves into sometimes'
> (Managing Director, interview February 2015).

It was not only the incoming party who were cautious about what an asset transfer would mean for the parties involved. The Head of Health, Housing and Regeneration spoke of the first transfer he worked on prior to the museum, specifically the tensions generated by the unfamiliarity of external bodies with asset transfer, compounded by the opacity of the term. Equally memorable was his first encounter with the team who now manage the museum:

'I remember it [their first meeting] very well because, well for two reasons, I had one of the best ham sandwiches I've ever had when I went upstairs into their gallery.[21] But also I remember the degree of suspicion that I think there was at the time. I think they wondered whether we were trying to rip them off somehow: you have the museum and we'll run away' (RBC Head of Health, Housing and Regeneration, interview February 2015).

It became up to the officer to alleviate this supposition, a task which became doubly important as during these initial weeks of negotiations the local individuals had contacted Locality, an organisation with a remit to support and encourage asset transfer who believed a full transfer would be the most appropriate way for the group to move forward with their plans. The officer saw the restrictive ramifications resulting from a full transfer and as such sought to explore alternative permutations of how the relationship might be formalised:

'A full asset transfer has not taken place because the group, including us as a council, don't feel it's the right time to do that. We will be working towards a lease arrangement in the coming years but at the moment it just wouldn't work for them as a business and I think that in some ways, I'm not saying this is the case and it would be interesting to see how it played out, but if we give someone a lease, we *could* walk away and say "you've got the building now it's down to you". As it stands, because they've got a licence, it's easier for them, they're not worrying about rates, water rates, how do things like that work, so it's a comfortable arrangement. We do repairs and maintenance…We don't want to put a new business into a position where it's going to fail' (RBC Head of Health, Housing and Regeneration, interview February 2015).

Later, the officer infers the capacity of the contract to interfere with and shape human-human relations, placing himself in a position of responsibility to ensure the group is shielded from such avoidable interferences:

'With a contractual relationship it can be a bit, well sign this and we'll see you, off you go now. We've never done that and we don't do it. It's something that we see as our role. I want to see that it succeeds and that won't be because of what I do but because of what they do. Our role, sometimes I say this to people, it's about, within Regeneration, it's about being the one who gets rid of the hurdles, if you will, and councils can, not individuals, there are processes and policies that can be scary to

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[21] Gallery here refers to a small private gallery run by two of the current directors from their front room.

people. So I see it as our role, not for all things, but if it's about business or regeneration, our role is to unpick that' (RBC Head of Health, Housing and Regeneration, interview February 2015).

The difference between a lease arrangement of the type we saw at Ford Green Hall and the licence to operate (effectively a management arrangement enabling The Whitaker Group to deliver a museum service from a building owned by RBC for a fee) is subtle. Yet, the former sets in motion a series of monitoring procedures with which the newly formed trust must comply, as well as delegating substantial financial responsibility onto groups which is not necessarily the case with other types of arrangement.

This was an issue for the local individual with experience in asset transfer too, noting:

> 'Once the solicitors get hold of it fully in the council and we're asking for a lengthy lease, they won't mind the length of the lease as much but they'll put all little pitfalls in there, lots of checks and balances' (Managing Director, interview February 2015).

There seems to be a sensitivity here towards establishing a distinction between a contractual relationship of the sort the council may use to procure refuse collection and that which it uses for museum provision. As I see it, this is about more than contracts, it is a part of a decision that responsibility for buildings and services should not be delegated away from local government wholesale. As this discussion has shown, this decision stems from a recognition of what signing a contract means for the signatories and for the character of the relationship going forward. In this case, it is possible to discern how and under what conditions transferring operational responsibility for museums to groups from without local authorities can be an example of something other than a transfer of liability. The material constitution of these relationships can be just as important as the people involved. As I will discuss in Chapter 7, it is also a subtle act of refusal to governmental framings which valorise the idea of civic organisations and individuals taking responsibility for services by denigrating the role of a relationship between local government and locality. In the closing section, I offer a short outline of this chapter's key findings. These observations inform the practical outcomes pursued during the research project, which I cover in the Conclusion (9.2).

5.4 Summary

As we might expect, given the unfamiliar nature of this way of managing museums, the empirics for each case reveal a different way in which the process of management change was conducted and the final arrangement formalised. At the time of writing (June 2017), the

management arrangements for The Whitaker and Ford Green Hall have remained the same and BMDC have agreed to transfer Manor House Art Gallery & Museum to the group who have registered with the Charity Commission as Ilkley Manor House Trust.

In all but one case (see 5.3), the switch in model of service provision was not accompanied by a change in the set of practices, procedures or rules used to administer these relationships. The difference between a newly formed group and a well-established voluntary sector organisation must be remembered here. By critically examining the shaping role of these practices we see how, despite the vast gulf between the larger scale multi-purpose trusts and the burgeoning organisations studied, the methods for managing these relationships are limited to practices designed with mature organisations with access to resources in mind. The close attention paid to how these new forms of governance are conceived and the modes of interaction between local governments and transfer bodies is an important empirical contribution made by this research. This is because it highlights how although local communities and residents are being called upon as a viable solution for museums at risk of permanent closure, there are limited instances where they are simultaneously afforded the capacity to shape the material terms on which these relationships are founded. As is argued in this chapter, and as I will further elaborate in the following chapter, this matters because specific administrative practices and contractual forms have shaping effects on their signatories, and other personnel caught up in their administration.

In the next chapter I examine how members of asset transfer bodies engage with their new roles as museum managers. As this chapter has made clear, devolving responsibility for public museums to embryonic organisations is unfamiliar terrain for council personnel and members of transfer bodies alike. However, it is also productive terrain on which to conduct an examination of how museum work is perceived by the people being asked to do it in place of professional staff, as well as how these two groups relate to one another through considering the factors which lend structure to their relationships.

Chapter 6
Museum Work Post-Transfer

This chapter focuses on how members of transfer bodies identified with their new roles as museum managers, and how these understandings were shaped and negotiated during the early stages of their work relating to the museum or, in the case of the Manor House Art Gallery & Museum, during the negotiations leading up to their potential management of the museum.

It was suggested in Chapter 5 that shifts to new models of museum management involve organisational practices and procedures that would have been used by local authority personnel prior to the introduction of these other-than-public approaches to managing public resources, suggesting continuity in local authority practices prior to and following budget cuts. In this chapter, rather than emphasise continuity and its effects, I emphasise the potential for change. This is because all three of the case-studies which feature in this study are examples of a situation where a museum service, and its staff, have been removed from a museum and replaced by members of transfer bodies with no experience of working in a museum. The extent to which this potentially changes the way museum work is practiced within these museums cannot be overstated. Although the 'what' (procedures, routines, documentary practices) of local authority museum management may stay the same, there is no question that the 'who' alters in examples where management is transferred. As this research investigates new management models in their nascent stages, it is too tentative to say whether these case-studies are sites of museum practice which offer something valuably different from before from a museological perspective. However, it is possible to comment on how members of transfer bodies, being new to museum work, understood their roles, as well as the factors which influenced these understandings.

This chapter explores two topics frequently found in the museum studies literature: expertise and the authority of the museum professional. On the surface, such terms are 'easy-to-grasp' (Latour 2005: 186) but a desire for overarching explanations can take precedence over tracing the organizational practices, techniques, documentary forms and local circumstances which lend what we later name as 'expertise' or 'authority' their ordering potential. In the literature, expertise or authority tend to function either as explainers used toward the end of an analysis rather than forms to be described through detailed empirical work or as characteristics which are claimed to matter crucially in the context of museum work yet the precise and multiple ways they come to matter is concealed. It is a shift from explanation to description that a

perspective on expertise and authority afforded by the relational materiality of actor-network theory encourages, and which this chapter brings forth. To paraphrase Latour (2005: 68), the ideas of expertise and authority have taken on the character of 'big container ship[s]' which we know are aggregates of material and non-material elements yet whose contents we are yet to explore. It is vitally important to unpack the contents of these containers if we are to engage with museums in their entirety, a task which has been acknowledged (Brattli and Steffensen 2014), but is yet to take hold in studies of museums. In this way the chapter contributes to our knowledge of museum work in the context of asset transfer and other new management models, as well as offering an alternative analytical approach for empirical studies of museum practice.

The chapter has three core parts. In Section 6.1 I focus on Arts Council England's Accreditation Scheme, illustrating how it structures relationships (6.1.1), as well as disperses a normative articulation of what museum work should look like and what the priorities of museum work should be (6.1.2). These empirics are presented conventionally via reflective discussion interspersed with interview quotes. These reflections are revisited in Chapter 9 as part of an argument for the value of further empirical analysis of museum work which builds on theoretical work on materiality and practice-orientations to spotlight the very doing, practice and activity of museum work itself (Morse 2014; Geoghegan and Hess 2015).

In Section 6.2, drawing on my long-term ethnographic observation of a process of asset transfer in train in Ilkley, I illustrate how the perceived expertise of the museum profession, embodied in this case by the Museums and Galleries Manager's presence at the meetings of future members of the asset transfer body, influenced decisions made by the group regarding whether to maintain a museum function for the building. In addition to illustrating how this deference to the professional happened in practice, I argue that members of transfer bodies should be encouraged to engage with expansive questions about the purpose of maintaining museum functions for these buildings, given that they are the ones responsible for their day-to-day operation and survival. Reflecting the participatory ethnographic methods used in Ilkley, here I switch registers between the first and third person as I weave together first-person descriptions of meeting observation with interviews.

For Section 6.3 I take a brief detour away from a focus on the micro-detail of organisational practices to present an account of how members of a new management group sought to position themselves in opposition to 'traditional' practices and approaches they associated with the 'museum profession'. I present this parcel of data to emphasise that the way members of transfer bodies view themselves, and their relationship to the museum sector,

might be constituted through practices (Accreditation at Ford Green Hall), people (Museums and Galleries Manager in relation to Manor House Art Gallery & Museum) or narrative (the caricatured professional in The Whitaker).

The following analyses all illustrate how understandings of what it means to be a 'museum professional' and what it means to be a 'museum' are context-specific effects which are variously mediated through local material, narrative, interpersonal and organisational practices. In all cases, 'expertise' and 'authority' are influential factors, either in encouraging deidentification or in bolstering claims to novelty. However, through the chapter's analytical approach, it is possible to be more specific as to what is happening on the ground which adds up to expertise (as a relational effect), as well as to comment on how it affects the practice of these nascent museum workers.

The closing part of the chapter focuses on this latter point, what should we make of how new museum managers view their roles? What impact does this have on their ability to contribute to their respective museums? I address these questions in the final section in relation to the extant literature on collaborative forms of museum practice in order to suggest that what we find in new management models, at least in the examples I have studied, is a boundary of sorts between these groups and the idea of being a museum professional. I address the impact of this boundary in terms of how it constrains transfer groups' ability to shape the future direction of their respective museums.

6.1 The authority of the Arts Council England's Accreditation Scheme

This section illustrates the mediating effects of material processes, specifically ACE's Accreditation Scheme, on relationships between incoming museum managers and extant members of the museum profession. Through this discussion, I illustrate how this practice configures understandings of museum work and how it is practiced by newcomers to the sector. The analytical lens I adopt here references arguments made by Fenwick which arise out of empirical work attending to how professional practice is mediated by social-material practices, to suggest:

'once a practice has become stabilized, new adherents are inducted into its routines and objects in ways that do not necessarily enable, or even endorse, transformative energies of resistance, creative adaptations or subversion' (Fenwick 2012: 68).[22]

My purpose is to draw out how Accreditation informs and shapes museum practice. There is a significant role for context and circumstance here as through my discussion we see that Accreditation should not be positioned as having a deterministic role. However, it does appear to be effective in circulating a normative understanding of the priorities of museum work as well as providing a template within which relationships are organised.

In this section, I want to explore the relationship between an incoming museum manager and his staff and their Museum Mentor, assigned as part of the requirements of Accreditation. In doing so, I explore the effects of Accreditation on designating who is permitted to conduct certain museum functions (6.1.1), as well as its role in perpetuating certain conservation and preservation logics (6.1.2). Rather than presenting an extensive discussion of these logics and how they might be adapted for the present circumstances, my observations relate to the way these logics and other traditional ideas around museum practice are accepted as given by people new to museum work. As I observe it, this encourages a separation between the collection and collections-based functions and work of a relational nature (community engagement, volunteering programmes, adult learning). The prioritisation of posterity, achieved through the maintenance of environmental conditions which benefit objects not people, impacts on decision-making, encouraging an orientation towards maintaining the museum as it is rather than making it work for those who use it in the here and now.

6.1.1 Relationships between museum professionals and transfer bodies

In the appendices of the lease agreement between SoTCC and Ford Green Hall Museum Limited is a list of outcomes that the newly formed Trust must achieve to fulfil the terms of the lease. Here, outcomes achieved via asset transfer are monitored using the Social Return on Investment (SRoI) tool. This is effectively an apparatus of targets (increases are required to visitor numbers and income generation, a certain number of funding applications must be submitted and one event per month must be hosted by the museum) designed to justify the discount the incoming organisation receive on market rental rates (foregoing rental income is

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[22] Fenwick does not cite Foucault but her work is an empirical development of Foucault's (1980) theorisation of the mutually reinforcing relation of knowledge practices and power structures. See Footnote 2.

the council's investment). In this case, the list of outcomes was drawn up by the council and included the requirement that 'the FGH Trust must maintain museum status'.[23]

Forms of managerialism and 'calculative practices' (Shore 2008: 278) are critiqued for their ability to turn substantive areas of political, moral or ethical dispute into technical matters (e.g. Belfiore 2012; Strathern 2000). The key observation to take forward is that tools and techniques used to measure organisational outcomes are neither neutral nor innocent. Further, their main failure is not only one of representation (i.e. the qualitative outcomes of public sector work are under-represented, see Arvidson and Lyon 2013). This is because techniques have performative, shaping effects. As Fenwick and Edwards summarise:

> 'things are performative and not inert: they are matter and they matter. They act together with other types of things and forces to exclude, invite and order particular forms of participation (2013: 53).

As the imposition of SRoI monitoring aptly demonstrates, the means of measurement give shape to action and bring about effects such as how we become involved with others and the formation of our sense of self, who we are and feel able to be (subjectivity). The outcome demanded of the chair of Ford Green Hall Trust (herewith the chair) to evidence his maintenance of 'museum status' by fulfilling the aims of the Arts Council England's Accreditation Scheme (herewith Accreditation) was key to how relationships between the paid museum professionals employed by the council and members of the transfer body were composed and choreographed, at points shaping the capacities of both parties to act. This is demonstrated in the following descriptive analysis.

It is late 2013 and the lease has been signed. Five months until the Accreditation application deadline. It is one of the first tasks that the chair sets his mind to. Accreditation is viewed as important because many of the larger funding bodies require that a museum has this status, as well as because it is often (although there are exceptions) a requirement smaller organisations need to fulfil in order to borrow objects from other institutions. The form and guidance documents, downloadable from the website, set out the terms for what it is to be a museum. They also advance a set of criteria which draw a line between the museum profession and other 'non-professional' peoples. The first quotation from the Accreditation Guidance captures the assured tone of the documentation. The second illustrates the series of claims made by the text which lend bounded status to the museum professional, providing a clear specification of who constitutes an 'appropriate workforce, in numbers and experience, for the

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[23] Internal document.

museum's responsibilities and plans' and limiting who can and cannot provide the 'access to professional advice and input to policy development and decision making' (ACE 2014a: 9) articulated as a fundamental requirement of the 'organisational health' (ibid) of museums who wish to gain Accreditation:

> 'Accreditation is the UK standard for museums and galleries. It defines good practice and identifies agreed standards, thereby encouraging development. It is a baseline quality standard that helps guide museums to be the best they can be, for current and future users' (ACE 2014b: 3)
>
> 'Within Accreditation, the term "museum professional" is defined as:
>
> • a minimum of five years' experience working in museums, with recent experience at curator/manager level. At least three years should be in an area of competence relating to Accreditation – organisational health, collections, or users and their experiences
>
> • a relevant or linked qualification
>
> • a commitment to career-long continuing professional development. This could be through participation in formal CPD channels, such as the Museums Association's AMA and CPD+ schemes, or through logging CPD activity on a CV' (ACE 2014a: 24, all punctuation in original).

Accreditation does not require the same of all museums. The requirements are scaled by museum type (independent, local authority, university, national) and characteristics. Ford Green Hall submitted and gained Accreditation as an independent museum. A requirement of all accredited museums is the employment of a museum professional or the appointment of a Museum Mentor as the museum professional (ACE 2014a: 27). Before printing off the forms quoted above, the chair already attached importance to the support of someone with experience of working in a museum. As the museums manager commented:

> 'It was before even doing Accreditation that they felt it was important to have a museum professional on board. Of course, Accreditation is a lot of forms, but it was before that so it wasn't even that. I think they probably respected what the service was doing and felt they were skills they wanted to pull in. I know why! They had done a skills matrix and they found out that they didn't have that input yet. They had a discussion: do you want to run it as a museum? Or do we want to run it as something else, a community centre perhaps? They decided museums so

on their skills matrix, they put that they needed to know somebody who knows about museums so that's where that originated' (SoTCC Strategic Museums Manager, interview March 2015).

Expertise and professional experience, then, can be welcomed as part of a mutual respect for a technical knowledge acquired via a long career in a domain unfamiliar to one's own. This would be fundamental to the creation of a synergetic atmosphere borne out of recognising the value of 'bringing together different kinds of expertise' (as per the vision of co-production put forward by Mason et al. 2013: 173-174). Whilst there is a point to be made here regarding the priority given to curatorial experience and conventional qualifications in ACE's classification of the professional, it would be wrong to claim a role for Accreditation as part of a conscious endeavour on the part of the 'museum profession' to secure professional status for museum work thus 'seizing' ownership of conservation, interpretation, and the myriad other arenas of activity which take place at the museum for a codified professional group.[24] There is no evidence to say whether the authors of the documents which constitute Accreditation, or the staff who manage the process would put forward such an aim for this set of standards whereby the work of non-professionals is thought of as requiring validation by professionals. What there is evidence of, and what I would like to demonstrate is the mediating effect of Accreditation on the practices of the paid staff employed by the council and assigned to Ford Green Hall to fulfil the requirement for a Museum Mentor.

This mediating role comes through in the descriptions offered in interviews with both the chair of Ford Green Hall ('they've been once or twice in the past six months, you know to check the monitoring equipment, to keep an eye on that') and the council's Museum Manager ('they know that they can get onto the phone to [them] if there's an emergency conservation issue on site, [they've] advised them on environmental monitoring, been down to lay the pest traps'). What is plain here is the paradoxical effect of Accreditation's 'baseline quality standard' (2014b: 3) which might be designed to put minimal pressure on smaller, less well-resourced museums to achieve standards of conservation practice which are beyond their means, yet what we see here is how those minimum standards lock the mentor into a particular pattern of work: installing the equipment, checking its working, taking the temperature, light and humidity readings. The requirements transport the mentor to and from the museum on a regular but infrequent basis. With the core museum service experiencing unprecedented cuts, demands on individual staff time are increasing. As the Museum

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[24] It is still tentative to say whether or not a profession is an appropriate descriptor of museum work, see Tlili 2015.

Manager commented, being a mentor 'isn't explicitly in their job description, it's sort of a duty we have as a larger museum to help smaller museums'. For the chair this amounts to having a mentor who 'can rarely fit us in because their budget cuts mean that their job has increased, they find it difficult to fit us in, they are too busy to spend time with us'. In the scant time available the requirements of Accreditation need fulfilling and act as a channel through which the knowledge and experience of the mentor is directed. Through paying critical attention to the agentive capacity of standards we have seen how Accreditation acts to direct the relationship between the staff of Ford Green Hall and their assigned mentor. It provides a basis for the assertion of a boundary between those who are authorised to do certain types of museum work (albeit a caricatured version) but, more pertinently, underscores a habitual suite of museum practices which appear to be present in the everyday decision-making of the Ford Green Hall staff even after the mentor leaves the door. It is to this that I turn next.

6.1.2 Deference to professional standards

Continuing the discussion of standards wherein they are considered as an actor of sorts for the way in which they hold the potential to shape organisational practices and make themselves felt amongst organisational actors who build their practices around them, I now consider how the Accreditation process, and its associated documentation, was experienced by the chair.

The discussion serves two functions. It implicitly illustrates the utility of the methodological orientation towards an ANT approach to materials such as documents for studies of the museum by demonstrating how organisational work is fundamentally a mediated process and that administrative processes play an explicit role in this mediation, supporting my argument that they require our analytical attention. Furthermore, it makes a specific argument relating to pro forma (Riles 2006) practices such as Accreditation in relation to the delegation of operational responsibility for museums to groups such as Ford Green Hall Trust. Such groups are motivated to bear these responsibilities (which are not inconsequential and which they may carry with them beyond the workplace) by their emotional and embodied ties to places and the people who inhabit them, as well as out of an uneasy acceptance of the changes necessitated by the political project of austerity. However, in the case of Ford Green Hall what we see is an opening up of operational responsibility for a museum to a different type of individual. As will come through most potently in Chapter 7, we find an individual committing to thinking (and feeling) differently about the museum and the type of relationships and contributions it should be pursuing at this time. Yet, what we also see are

the constraining demands of a routine administrative practice like Accreditation. As I illustrate, this practice informs the personnel the chair employs as well as providing a series of statements regarding the priorities of museum work. The chair spoke of the structuring effects of this organisational protocol. However, given the circumstances in which this interviewee is going about his management of the museum, questioning the role and purpose of the museum is precluded. What I want to demonstrate here is how administrative practices which are conducted as a matter of course do act to frame museum work and ensure the continued prioritisation of certain ways of working, whilst ensuring that different ways of thinking about what constitutes 'best practice' or 'baseline quality standards' (ACE 2014b: 3) for this highly particular category of museum is neglected. This is problematic considering the terminology of autonomy, flexibility and responsiveness surrounding this method of managing museums.

There was a certain serendipity to the timing of the chair's first encounter with the documentation associated with Accreditation. As mentioned, the forms demanded his immediate attention as maintaining Accreditation was a term of the lease. The chair has extensive experience in the voluntary sector (in a previous report a council officer was quoted as describing him as a 'nuclear reactor of community activism', see Asset Transfer Unit 2012: 28) but has not been involved with museums before. He spoke of gaining Accreditation as making him 'feel a bit more confident' in that he wasn't a 'museum person' but had a 'reasonable amount of common sense'. It made him feel that he was on the right track at a time when uncertainty abounded. However, as the following quote captures, it bound the chair to a highly particularly understanding of what the focus of museum work ought to be, presenting in a tightly bound package (faceless and accessible by anyone with an internet connection) what it meant to 'do' museum work. In response to a question about how he would describe Accreditation, the chair observed:

> 'When we first came into the museum, it was like a set of guiding rules, a system
> which told us precisely what standards we should be hitting. It forced us to ask:
> am I doing things properly? Are we doing all the things we should be doing from
> a museum aspect? Are we sticking to the Accreditation list? When I came into
> the museum I didn't have enough basic knowledge of what the key concerns of
> working in a museum were. I have learnt what they are through Accreditation but
> it's a bit like learning from a textbook and regurgitating it, like you do in exams'
> (FGH chair, interview April 2015).

Coming into contact with Accreditation elicits an ambivalent kind of experience then. Accreditation was seen to offer a neatly packaged prescription of what 'the key concerns of

working in a museum' are. The ambivalence flowed from the interviewee's simultaneous appreciation of its simplicity (given the turbulence of those early months of being responsible for a museum) alongside a heightened awareness that answers to the substantive questions that one might ask of oneself as a newly engaged practitioner vis-à-vis the role and purpose of this specific museum were being translated from the substantive to the superfluous, aided by a system of documentation. The intelligibility and apparent neutrality of language found in documents of this nature, as well as their aesthetic qualities (more on this below) encourage a procedural approach where being a museum and doing museum work can be reduced to a set of criteria. Again, the specificity of the conditions in which this interviewee is conducting his management of this museum is perceptible for the way it makes the experience of completing accreditation and the meaning attached to it markedly different from the way an extant 'museum professional' might experience such a process:

> 'With Accreditation, it wasn't about understanding the rationale for why these policies are in place, you're not asking questions like "what is a museum for?" it was just telling us precisely how to do museum work, and, you know, when you're thinking about survival, when you are just trying to keep your head above water, it becomes more about ticking the boxes really' (FGH chair, interview January 2016).

In presenting this quote, it is important to note that I am not claiming a causal relationship between, say the aesthetic qualities of documents and the individual construed as being 'at the mercy of' (Winner 1989: 14f, cited in Schraube and Sorensen 2013: 4) the pervasive document or standard (Riles 2006: 18-20; Strathern 2006: 181-205 are both useful reference points on the need to consider documents for their formal qualities as much as for their use of language). Crucially, what Accreditation does is provide a mechanism that is at once comforting and constraining. For the interviewee, there is work involved in gaining Accreditation but equally there are practices which become essential in order to maintain Accredited status. With varying degrees of potency, Accreditation becomes present in the everyday rhythm of museum work. For example, in fulfilling the demands of the 'Accreditation list' and 'ticking the boxes' the chair spoke of being stuck behind the scenes doing all the 'paperwork behind museum work', desiring of more contact with the visitors he described his role largely as 'doing policies, collecting them together, making sure they're all in one place'. There are substantial time demands which emanate from Accreditation which are manageable in the context of a museum service with a paid workforce but become restrictive in asset transfer models.

More pertinently for my purposes, however, is how this suite of guidelines and documentation conveys and ensures the prioritisation and maintenance of a set of traditional museum practices even when museum work is being achieved via non-traditional means. As I note above, Accreditation extends itself into those spaces where the chair might have imagined alternative ways of carrying out these practices or those moments at which he might have made a decision based on prioritising making life easier for the people working and visiting the museum now, rather than out of a prescribed obligation to future generations (see Graham 2016, Gray 2011).

For example, the desire to install a wooden fire in the entrance hall of the museum is about the visitor experience and 'creating an atmosphere when you walk in' (FGH chair, interview January 2016) but it is also about saving on energy costs and encouraging visitors to spend money in the café which, currently without fire, is uncomfortably cold. These seem like piecemeal comments but in the context of operating a museum on a severely reduced budget without the safety net of the local authority, it is troubling that small changes which would alleviate some of the pressure of the present are blocked by a requirement to satisfy environmental monitoring systems. In these circumstances, Accreditation implicitly positions the paid professional to make this decision, as evidenced in the chair's account of conversations had with the conservation officer and the mentor regarding the proposed installation of the fire. Accreditation ensures that the museum – in this decision at least – functions for the preservation of the museum's rationalities at the expense of relieving some of the pressures of the present. In this instance, it is not the action that was blocked by Accreditation that is problematic per se (the fire would have put objects at risk) but how it encourages the chair to distance himself from the identity of a 'museum person' and the agency to reflect on the priorities of museums that goes with this identity.

Whilst it is key to highlight that the agentive capacity of Accreditation emerges as an effect generated by a complex web of people, practices and things, rather than existing as a pre-determined script somewhere 'behind' the guidance documents and online portal, there does appear to be an argument for viewing Accreditation as having achieved foundational status here. For the local authority officers setting up the SRoI monitoring who want to ensure Ford Green Hall continues its life as a museum (as distinct from a community centre, for example), maintaining Accreditation is assumed as the means via which to achieve this outcome. For the incoming museum manager, despite articulating how Accreditation acts as a substitute for more substantive questioning of the museum's function and purpose, his circumstances mean

he welcomes a straightforward 'how to' guide to museum work. Yet, as he enrols himself into its requirements, we see its effects.

Given the increasing motivation amongst local authorities to transfer the management of discretionary services to organisations led by people such as the Ford Green Hall chair, it is important that we understand how processes viewed as procedural by experienced museum professionals can have unpredictable effects on individuals and groups who come into these positions via different routes. For the interviewee, the locus of expertise remains with the 'professional', named as such by a set of criteria established by Accreditation. Both the ability to 'do' certain aspects of museum work and the legitimacy to make certain decisions regarding how that work should be carried out and with what purpose remains their prerogative.

The chair of Ford Green Hall views the building as a vital resource for the community of Smallthorne, as discussed further in Chapter 7. As he demonstrates by taking on its management, he feels a clear sense of responsibility to ensure the building functions for its audiences, for example by hosting affordable activities which emphasise their productivity in spite of being outside the labour market. What is interesting is that he views the building as part of this set of objectives but not the collection. My suggestion is that through contact with Accreditation, because it introduces a boundary between the professional and the non-professional by enabling one to do the work another cannot, the chair does not view the objects or the museum-aspect of the building as part of his jurisdiction. Therefore, despite the entrance of asset transfer bodies into museum work, the potential for museum practice to be moulded by these bodies is hampered by Accreditation which circulates a conventional conception of museum practice and its priorities, as well as rendering the 'professional' as the legitimate steward of the museum itself.

6.2 The role of professional endorsement in decision-making

As I indicated in the Introduction, members of transfer bodies are under no obligation to maintain a museum function for buildings which they take on via asset transfer, unless the council explicitly includes the continuation of a museum function as one of the terms of the lease (Ford Green Hall). Once a budget decision is taken to remove the museum service from the building, it is the building being transferred rather than the museum. What this means is that transfer bodies have a decision to make as to whether they want to manage the building as a museum or not, whether or not they recognise this.

In this section, working with ethnographic data from the transfer in train in Ilkley, I illustrate how participants in the transfer process failed to recognise their capacity to take the decision to pursue the continuation of a museum function for the Manor House Art Gallery & Museum building until, that is, they received the endorsement of a suitably knowledgeable museum professional for their plans. Although a restrictive form of expertise is not an essential or foundational quality of the museum profession, continuing the chapter's attention to how expertise takes shape in practice, and how it affects practice, I illustrate the sway of professional expertise during meetings of the NMHG over what group members thought was possible for the Manor House Art Gallery & Museum, and over their perceptions of their agency to shape its future.

As part of the data collection in relation to the Manor House Art Gallery & Museum in Ilkley I observed sixteen formal meetings. These meetings were attended by a mix of Ilkley residents and employees of BMDC, but in the main one individual represented the council. At all but one meeting, this individual was the Museums and Galleries Manager. I made extensive fieldnotes in these meetings noting key quotes and comments relating to moments of increased tension, silences and exchanges pertinent to the research aim to examine the relationship between members of transfer bodies and the museum sector, as well as with the idea of 'museum work' itself. The decision was made (in discussion with participants and reiterated at the beginning of every meeting to accommodate for newcomers) for key quotations to be noted down verbatim but that speakers would be identified by affiliation only. As my aim in these fieldnotes was to trace the extent to which something that we might term 'expertise' or 'authority' was brought to bear on the discussion and its influence on the plan of action regarding this building's future this was felt to be an appropriate strategy. This strategy also minimises the potential for the discussion to veer towards a critique on the conduct of individual professionals. This is important as the focus is on statements and boundaries which gain their durability through being associated with an imaginary of the specialist expertise of the 'museum professional' rather than any individual employee.

We have already encountered how the survey technique of the feasibility study introduced a typology of uses for the Manor House Art Gallery & Museum (museum, community, heritage building, example of Roman heritage and other, see Tomorrow Advisory 2015: 4 and 5.2). In this typology the 'museum' is understood to be synonymous to the collection of objects and artefacts housed in the Manor House Art Gallery & Museum. Here, museum is taken to mean the static display of a collection rather than the creative use of that collection as a springboard for engagement with people. The survey turns respondents' attention away from a

consideration of whether engagement with collections might be what makes the community use of this building distinct from the many other community spaces in the neighbourhood. The question of whether the building would continue to serve a museum function, and discussion of how both the collection and the specific set of activities and processes associated with maintaining a collection (acquisition, interpretation, conservation, encouraging audience engagement) was not settled by the survey alone. The critical question of the possible future of the Manor House Art Gallery & Museum continued to pivot around the right to name this building as a museum: whose decision was this? As I have already discussed in the Introduction, for local authority personnel, buildings become museums when they are assigned a museum function. The museum is the service, the objects, the staff, the interpretation and activities around that. It is not the building. Thus, once the museum service has removed itself from the building, the question of whether the building is still a museum or whether it is just another community space, is up for negotiation. This separation between the service and the building is common to all local authorities, making this discussion vital to our understanding of how decisions are made about the size and shape of the cultural infrastructure of towns and cities following public-sector cuts.

With the following three excerpts from the empirics (a field note, transcribed interview and excerpt from meeting observation), I illustrate how museum professionals were considered as the source of authority and expertise on the question of the future of this building as a museum. The term museum professional is used in a functional sense here to mean staff currently or formerly employed in the museum sector.

November 2014: Excerpt of dialogue from NMHG meeting, chair's house, Ilkley

Group member 1: There's a blind spot we haven't addressed. Would the museum retain Accreditation? We need that if we want to maintain the museum function of the building

Museum and Gallery Manager: The infrastructure of the museum service is just as important as the objects. The service as a whole is Accredited rather than individual sites. The collection can be redeployed to any of our sites. You need a technical team and this will be difficult to maintain now the museum service has withdrawn from the building.

Group member 2: Can we still call it a museum though? That's in the name

Museum and Gallery Manager: What is a museum though?

Group member 3: Let's just agree to call it the Manor House so we don't get caught up in this

Museum and Gallery Manager: Yes I agree. I'd encourage you to avoid using the word museum because it can be prohibitive. You need to have ownership of the collection to gain Accreditation.[25]

February 2015: Interview with BMDC's Museum and Gallery Manager

Museum and Gallery Manager: 'I see it as more of a visitor attraction, local heritage, a visitor site. In the past I have worked with organisations who want to set up a museum and I have actively discouraged them from using the word museum.'

Interviewer: Why is that?

Museum and Gallery Manager: 'Because I think a museum, the work of a museum is more, for me, it's more around the collections, acquiring objects, research, interpretation, it's all the backroom stuff'

October 2016: Fieldnotes taken after a meeting with Portfolio Holders at BMDC

We are waiting in the lobby of City Hall, to meet with the Portfolio Holder for Environment, Sport and Culture and the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, Planning and Transport. A group member is giving us a summary of the feedback from the Charity Commission as part of correspondence to register the Manor House Group as a CIO (charitable incorporated organisation), including their comments regarding whether the museum would continue to be Accredited and whether it would be a 'museum' or other community space. Another group member remarks in jest: 'but we're not allowed to call it a museum remember! Do you remember that from the meetings Bethany?'. It feels appropriate to respond truthfully so I decide to interject: 'It seems there's significant will to maintain the building as a museum, especially with the plan to approach HLF. I'm not sure why the word museum is seen as problematic, if you feel it's important to keep the word 'museum' in the title then it's not for the council to

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[25] This is not the case. See Arts Council England 2014c: 4-6.

direct you otherwise.' 'We were instructed otherwise, like with the balance of community and commercial use,' the group member reminds me. I make my comment again, in different terms. It's clear the comments about the word 'museum' have become a source of humour but they have also been taken to heart.

With these excerpts, we see the neutralisation of the 'museum question' as it is gradually accepted that the building will no longer serve a museum function. At this point, the assertion of the museum manager is taken to be based on a solid foundation of knowledge and expertise. There is a clear sense that the question of whether this building could be a museum (or not) was a question for museum professionals. The intentions of the NMHG were not considered enough to warrant claiming the building as a museum and the position of the museum manager was considered sufficiently authoritative that questioning their assertions was considered inappropriate. This avoidance of the term museum was the status quo in meetings which took place after November 2014. Often towards the end of the meeting, the matter of the collection, future exhibitions and audiences was raised by different members but there was never the appetite to take these discussions any further. This, however, did not last.

Months down the line, two honorary curators who offered their time as fully subscribed group members or as advisors to the collective came on the scene. After this, I observed a mode switch: the blind faith in the cursory judgement of BMDC's museum staff captured in the excerpts above was set aside in favour of a new sense of confidence in the legitimacy of the group's ambitions for the building. Being a museum was once again on the table. This switch underlines how the perceived jurisdiction of the museum profession can work upon groups for whom museum work is unfamiliar territory. It is almost irrelevant whether this was the intention of the museum manager because, in this case, the museum profession endured as the site of authority on the possible futures for the Manor House Art Gallery & Museum despite the explicit withdrawal of the museum service from the building. Although the comments of the Museums and Galleries Manager may have been well intentioned or offhand, they stick with the group and contribute to the formation of the assumption that the agency to take the decision as to whether the Manor House Art Gallery & Museum should continue as a museum rests with the professional, on the one hand, and, on the other, Accreditation, which is named in the meetings as synonymous with being a museum. We might suggest that members of the NMHG and MHG are open to being 'instructed' because of their lack of familiarity with the terminology circulating in the meetings and are cautious to undermine the knowledge and training of professionals, even in a circumstance where they are being asked to replace the

professional as managers of the museum. This group deidentify with the status of the 'museum professional', and the agency that goes with it, because they associate that status with an employment position they have not occupied. However, this was not the case for members of The Whitaker Group, who explicitly rejected the value of such a status.

6.3 Setting up competing narratives between 'traditional' and 'new' approaches

This section considers how a narrative which caricatured the 'museum professional' as an anachronistic figure, unsuited to the demands of the present was used by participants to position themselves and their work at the museum as distinctive from pre-existing practices and commitments they associated with 'museums'.

All interviewees came from a public sector background (the bulk of their previous employment was in health and social care) and had no experience of working in a museum before. As we might expect, the interviewees sought to establish how their previous experience and skills were not only relevant but necessary to the continued functioning of the museum in the context of the current funding climate. Amongst other things, they argued for the value of their expertise in health and wellbeing work, an area which appears to be a valuable source of income for the museum sector but also their emotional and experiential knowledge of the area gained from living in proximity to the museum for much of their lives. Above all, however, what the empirics captured was the interviewees' tendency to position their contribution as distinctive and a necessary corrective to the characteristics that they presented as being common to museum professionals, particularly those employed by the local authority. This category of employee was framed as embodying characteristics and behaviours which were out of step with present concerns.

As the following quotations emphasise, this was a core motif which offered the incoming staff an emboldening means of maintaining and arguing for the value of a change in management notable for its replacement of a workforce comprised of professional museum staff with a group of individuals whose experience was in other professional fields. Across these extracts, although it is not named as such, the expertise of the public sector museum professional is named as problematic:

> 'They were more inward looking before, which is typical of museums, more making sure that actually the assets were safe and more 'don't touch that, don't touch this' and preserving of the assets and certainly the museum was very, kind of, you weren't allowed to speak in the museum really so I think we connected in

terms of trying to give the museum back, actually do sing and do chat and do more of a move from, I suppose, an institutional to an engagement model' (Creative Director, interview March 2015)

'What I'm glad I didn't do was ever have a background in museum studies. I think there's a sort of school of thinking. I don't want to put anybody down…My fear would be that being schooled in a certain way, would that have placed me in a certain direction? Possibly. I think the three of us are the type of people where even if that would have been the case, we would still try to do things in a different way' (Operational Director, interview March 2015)

'They'd do what you would do in a health services, a social services kind of job, they'd do things like, 'oh it's 4:00pm on a Friday now, we've got the opportunity to leave early', but they are still getting paid until 5:00pm, we're not going to finish until 10:00pm tonight. It's actually who is driving those energies in terms of making those changes really and some of those were jobs for the boys and they had to start to change, I think' (Creative Director, interview March 2015)

'It felt very much like going to a meeting with people who had been in the job for a long time who were way, way away from us in terms of our thinking and I think we challenged them. We challenged their thinking and not always in a way that they liked' (Creative Director, interview March 2015)

'It came across as one of those places, shall we say, the older generation tend to go to read a newspaper but it wasn't attracting new audiences who are repeat visitors. Nothing was changing and again, I'm not blaming the County Council or the staff, it's just the way council museums tend to be run really' (RBC Head of Health, Housing and Regeneration, interview February 2015).

As a narrative this has political consequences, irrespective of the truth of the comments made. Here, I find Llewellyn (2001) and Tonkiss and Skelcher's (2015) analyses addressing the discursive framing of local government reforms, narrative and storytelling useful for drawing attention to how constructing a vision of the museum's past makes way for the type of future desired. Llewellyn's (ibid: 53) observations focus on how storytelling enables claims of organisational change to be made by circulating 'images of the past [which] establish a sense of progress in the present'. Tonkiss and Skelcher (2015: 867), in a study of how the decision to abolish the Audit Commission in 2015 was positioned as 'common sense' by the coalition government, note how a rationale for a break with the past is established by framing that past

as problematic and anachronistic. However, whilst Tonkiss and Skelcher make an implicit argument that organisational actors are strategic and intentional in how they tell their stories in ways that serve 'political functions'(ibid), it is Llewellyn's recognition of what is at stake when stories are told in 'culturally available' language which is 'parasitic upon…political discourse' (55) that resonates here. Although organisational actors may narrate stories of organisational change imbued with nuance, there is always a danger that these will be reduced into simplistic stories of movement from one 'problematic' state to another unquestionably 'better' one.

In the empirics quoted above, a stereotypical view of the former staff who worked in the museum and the public sector more generally establishes the way the museum was before the management change as incongruous with the realities of the present moment, instilling a framing where the museum's survival is predicated on wholesale change. Of course, this point would be largely tentative were these narratives localised to the moment of the interview. However, the rhetoric of the public sector and the 'professionals' as the problem circulated in press coverage of the transfer (Rossendale Free Press 2013a, 2013b). Beyond the local context, and with the potential to impact on which governance models might be normalised as viable approaches to museum management in the context of austerity, this framing has already found its way into a consultancy report on local authority museums produced for Arts Council England. Here, the authors write in an example of best practice presented under the sub-heading 'local community focus and new insight from new management' (TBR 2015: 21):

> 'the museum service was provided by a third party with a "traditional/conservative approach" to managing the service…the CIC executed an ambitious grown plan, turning the museum into a community and cultural hub'.

This quote implies that the approach of the museum personnel is the impetus for change, in other words, the traditional approach is the problem. Yet, the actual impetus for change is the mismatch between the cost of managing the museum in a way that involves a professional staff team and the current financial climate. In a general sense, this is problematic because these narratives rely on denigrating the perspectives, approaches and commitments of those who managed the museum previously to valorise a new mode of museum work. This sets up a sense of competition between these two approaches to doing museum work, instead of acknowledging that both parties bring valuable and relevant knowledge and experience.

In addition to bolstering governmental discourses where the public sector is the problem, this framing has subtle consequences at the local level. For example, the Managing Director relayed a conversation with the chair of the Friends of the Museum who expressed their sense that 'the museum had lost something of its identity' (interview February 2015). This was in response to the replacement of exhibition spaces with a café and the removal of traditional display apparatus. This claim was rebuffed by framing this sense of loss as typical of a certain type of person for whom 'change is difficult' and who is unaware of the need for change. Of course, there is truth in this: central government cuts mean local authorities need to make savings. Yet, read with a sympathetic eye, the comment above may stem from a desire for the museum to evoke a time where museums without commercial spaces were plausible and in fact, part of their distinctiveness.[26] In a context where there is a clear move towards a reduced role for the local authority in museum provision in favour of involving an eclectic range of newly formed organisations, there is a need to avoid pitting one person's vision of a museum against another. Instead, we need organisations which work in collaborative ways to understand how individual museums are used, valued and perceived by all parties who want to be involved in such a discussion. I return to the importance of drawing upon the institutional histories and previous imaginaries of local authority museums as a corrective to a governmental landscape interested in entrepreneurial and market-orientated approaches to public culture in Chapter 8, where I discuss how not all visions of the museum's role and purpose are treated equally. The conclusion highlights two debates to which this chapter contributes: how expertise is conceptualised within museum studies and the type of contribution members of transfer bodies are able to make to their respective museums.

6.4 Conclusions

What emerges from these analyses is that ideas of the 'expertise' and 'authority' of the museum professional play a role in shaping the perceptions and practices of members of transfer bodies. This shaping role takes various forms such as encouraging deidentification (6.1 and 6.2) or in bolstering claims to novelty (6.3). However, as well as presenting findings which relate to participants' understandings and practices of museum work, the analysis in this chapter has also attempted to approach matters to do with 'expertise' through a different

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[26] This could be read through the lens of radical nostalgia where authors have sought to refuse framings of nostalgia as conservative, instead arguing for the value of nostalgic thinking as pinpointing what it was about the past that was good, and suggesting strategies that would enable us to return to such moments. Silke Arnold- de-Simine (2013: 54-70) offers a useful summary of this framing.

lens, suggesting an alternative way of engaging with expertise in empirical studies of museums.

Whereas several studies use the terminology of 'expertise' and the role of the 'expert', these ideas are rarely conceptualised in a way that leads to a fuller understanding of the organisational practices and circumstances which lend what we later name as 'expertise' a shaping or ordering potential. Questions of the influence of preservation guidelines and conservation standards, which lend professionals the legitimacy to act in ways which others cannot are posed in this literature (Smith 2006), yet the suggestion of a straightforward boundary between professionals and non-professionals in this work has had consequences for subsequent studies relating to the forms of museum practice which aim to display non-professional forms of knowledge or contribution in the museum. Such analyses sometimes implicitly suggest a deterministic role for expertise and authority as factors which constrain and structure relations in allied ways across museums of different types (Lynch 2011a, 2011b; Fouseki 2010; Smith and Fouseki 2011). Expertise, along with 'organisational culture' and 'authority' have become shorthand for explaining why methods of sharing decision-making or working collaboratively often fail to meet expectations (Graham 2017). What is more, when the effects of expertise are evidenced by interview data alone, the nuance of how expertise limits museum practice in situ can be lost.

As an alternative way forward, my approach to the topic of expertise is to avoid using the term as an end point in explanation, rather suggesting that expertise is something that, if we feel it is playing a role, must be empirically described. To paraphrase Latour (2005: 68), the ideas of expertise and authority have taken on the character of 'big container ship[s]' which we know are aggregates of material and non-material elements yet whose contents we are yet to explore. In other words, expertise comes into being rather than existing as a fait accompli structuring museum practice in predictable ways (Law 1992; 2008, citing Foucault 1980). For example, the Accreditation process validates the expertise of the museum professional in the case of Ford Green Hall, as well as contributing to the chair's understanding of the boundaries of his role, because of the specific circumstances in which this process arose. In a different way, the expertise of the museum professional in Ilkley acted to constrain the group's interpretation of their agency to make choices about the future direction of the building, an interpretation which was swiftly turned on its head by the intervention of another 'expert'. Across all cases the influence of 'expertise' takes different forms and the circumstances and components which lend 'expertise' its agentive force are various, highlighting the need for in

situ analyses of relationships between professionals and their other-than-professional counterparts.

Also arising from this analysis is the argument that although the contribution of individuals and groups whose knowledge of the museum is distinct from that held by a museum professional is invited, the contribution expected of these groups is restricted. The way this contribution is restricted or contained to certain tasks differs across the three case-studies. However, taken together these examples of how museum work takes place post-transfer all illustrate the maintenance of a distinction between professional knowledge and other forms of knowledge. Importantly, this distinction does not originate from intentional human action but is bolstered by the infrastructure of the museum sector, as well as fleeting moments where boundaries are established largely out of the nuance of circumstance.

These findings are relevant to the debate in museum studies where several authors have sought to move away from discussing 'professional/amateur' or 'expert/lay' knowledge as though they are in competition with one another in relation to exhibition development strategies and interpretative techniques. The observation that an individual can be situated within multiple subject positions at once (e.g. both professional, amateur, activist, hobbyist, academic) (Mason et al. 2013; Meyer 2008, 2010; Ellis and Waterton 2005) and that our position as an 'expert' or 'lay' knower may be an identity that is 'ours by choice' or 'ours because of the way other people see us' (Watson 2007: 4) bolsters this move. Instead of positioning lay/expert knowledge or the professional/non-professional distinction as ingrained and consistent barriers which constrain and complicate collaborative museum practice, the suggestion here is that a synergistic effect might result from the 'interaction between different individuals and their knowledges and skills' and placing 'different kinds of expertise' alongside one another in museum displays (Mason et al. 2013: 174). However, this synergistic effect was not borne out in the empirics collected for this study where a distinction was maintained in terms of the forms of knowledge which ended up contributing to the debate at key points in its trajectory. There is an affinity between this point and arguments made in relation to the relationship between amateur photographic content and art photography in museum displays (Galani and Moschovi 2013). Despite displaying amateur or vernacular content, its display apparatus is often different to photographic work held in museum collections, which serves to maintain the distinction between the two forms of photographic practice. What is more, and of relevance to our concerns, the contribution of amateurs may be 'collected and curated not for their aesthetic quality but as personal expressions of everyday visual culture' (ibid: 178). A similar dynamic can be detected in museum asset transfer,

particularly in relation to Manor House Museum & Art Gallery and Ford Green Hall. What emerges from this data is that museum asset transfer invites the contribution of external groups to the task of managing museums but the influence of various factors can mean that their contributions to significant matters such as key decisions about whether a building continues as a museum are marginalised. The contribution of groups that are local in one way or another in the design or delivery of public services is held up for being distinct from the contribution of a professional in policy literature (Gammon and Lawson 2008; Blond 2010) and in local government narratives surrounding asset transfer, as the following comment from the Strategic Director of Regeneration at BMDC indicates:

> 'The community-run model is more aware of its customers and their needs. We don't have that level of flexibility in the service that we provide and that can be a really positive thing for communities because they can respond to local need much better' (interview June 2015).

However, participants relating to Ford Green Hall and Manor House Museum & Art Gallery rarely saw themselves as potential museum professionals nor as bringing useful or valuable knowledge or perspectives on how their respective museums could be renewed in line with the needs or interests of groups using the museum, even in cases where they were managing a museum which would have closed were it not for their efforts. Although it is too tentative to say whether this will remain the case, this is almost beside the point. As this chapter found, removing oneself from this identity has various impacts at multiple stages along an asset transfer trajectory. For example, in Ilkley it stymied the confidence of the group to openly discuss and debate what role and purpose would be appropriate for this museum in the contemporary context. In Stoke-on-Trent, it established a boundary between who is and who is not authorised to do specific tasks and who gets to say which priorities are of greater import for the museum. The extent to which individuals have the agency to alter, reconsider or revise the conventions of museum practice is hampered by this rejection of a professional identity. This is important because it suggests that groups, who bring different forms of knowledge, expertise, political and social commitments with them to their work in the museum, interpret their task as one of maintaining a museum rather than feeling able to experiment with new practices of museum work as appropriate for the environments in which these museums are located. However, this does not necessarily mean these groups don't bring such ambitions or beliefs with them, as demonstrated by the next chapter where I consider how the role and purpose of the transferred 'public' museum was understood by participants, and how participants sought to enact these understandings in the context of asset transfer.

Chapter 7
Transferring the Public Museum: Ideals and Practices of Publicness

This chapter turns from the perception and practice of museum work to consider how the 'public' nature of local authority museums was interpreted by members of transfer bodies and local authority personnel. It examines their attachment to the idea of museums and civic spaces that are public, as well as exploring the way beliefs held as to how public bodies should function were applied to instances of organisational practice (or not, as the chapter goes on to demonstrate). As Newman, whose work explores the fortunes of the public sector following various tranches of reform, and the strategies public sector professionals use to resist or mediate institutional change, argues: 'the publicness of public institutions…is something to be struggled over' (2006: 163, 2007; Clarke and Newman 2009: 117). The political moment examined by this thesis is one where the role and nature of public spaces and services appear to be up for question in the UK and further afield. As such, examining people's attachment to the values they read into the public museum and believe it condenses (Newman 2007: 888) enables us to appreciate what is at stake as museum provision is reshaped. Although their comments are set within a discussion of localism, Brownhill and Bradley's (2017:253) observation that 'the statecraft of localism could not be effective unless it responded to, and found recognition in, a stock of desires and capabilities already present at the local level and amassed over many years' is highly relevant for initiatives such as the 'Big Society' and moves to encourage greater involvement of civic and locally-based groups in the design, delivery and management of public services, as this chapter demonstrates.

My focus on the function of the local authority museum, as an emblem of publicness, takes it cue from the empirics where these ideas emerged as a key theme. The potential for the museum to lose its 'publicness' was at the forefront of the minds of individuals involved in negotiations regarding the futures of local authority museums where a decision had been made to withdraw public funding in full or in part. It was a topic participants who were members of transfer bodies wanted to discuss during the interview. These discussions centred around two points of focus: instances where decisions of how to act were influenced by the public nature of the building they were dealing with or, a general preoccupation with safeguarding or retrieving the public museum in question as an arena of activity embodying certain values, qualities or purposes. My focus on public values plural is concerned with how interviewees interpret and then seek to manifest qualities distilled in the imaginary of public cultural institutions (e.g. openness, inclusivity) rather than the term as used in the singular by

cultural policy scholars in attempts to grasp the value generated by public institutions (Moore 1995, O'Brien 2013).

There were no easy answers to the question of what it meant to be a public museum, either conceptually or practically. Terms such as 'public values' and 'publicness' are open to interpretation and the empirical material analysed for this chapter is full of fragile and tentative notions as to what these concepts mean or look like in the context of asset transfer. Rather than attempting to offer any normative definitions of these concepts or a survey of how the role and purpose of the public museum as an institution has been repackaged over time, my purpose is more modest and exploratory. Examining each case-study in turn, I discuss the various ways in which public museums are being remade and repurposed as groups of individuals assume responsibility for their continued operation and existence. Unlike other authors who offer expanded accounts of the attributes or principles which lend public spaces or services their distinctiveness (Kohn 2004; Low and Smith 2006; Madanipour 2003; Varna 2014; Fabian Society 2014), this chapter moves through a plurality of understandings of the role of the public museum and publicly-funded culture as present in the empirics of this study. Central to the analysis presented here is a commitment to acknowledging the ability of council personnel and members of transfer bodies to work within and against the limits imposed by austerity measures to a degree. Within the responses they formulate to deal with the cuts to cultural spending and a broader discourse which de-values the public sector and its subsidy, we may find practitioners and projects which offer outcomes which are a consequence of austerity, yet which simultaneously express values or commitments drawn from alternative framings of the public sector and the state-citizen relationship (see Williams et al. 2014; Barnes and Prior 2009). Various authors have framed these responses to austerity as 'progressive localisms' (Williams et al. 2014; Morse and Munro 2015; Findlay-King et al. 2017, drawing on Featherstone et al. 2012). Acknowledging the powerful examples of values-led professional practices found in these accounts, we might suggest that the term 'progressive' does not help us to distinguish one group's version of other-than-public management from another. Although I concur with the idea that public sector retrenchment is problematic but may also lead to new possibilities, I prefer to avoid recourse to such framings so as to encourage an analysis which is less diagnostic and more exploratory. This preference is apt given that examples of other-than-public forms of museum management are almost entirely absent from research, and thus benefit from an exposition before we attempt to determine what they might mean or represent.

This chapter has five sections. In Section 7.1 I present a brief analysis of how council personnel responded to the question of whether the museum in question would continue to be 'public', and what did this mean exactly? This moment in the interview was often tricky. Officers either avoided reference to normative ideals associated with public services or spaces, preferring to provide evidence for how the space had become 'more public' since the transfer. Alternatively, they reframed the question to avert explicit discussion of the museum's public qualities and whether they were under threat. To the contrary, responses of members of transfer bodies to these questions were animated and rich. In the subsequent three sections, I explore the interviews and observations from each transfer scenario in turn as each set of empirics enables a discussion of different conceptualisations of the public museum, why it was valued and beliefs as to what it should achieve. Throughout the chapter, it is argued that the public nature of these museums is the terrain which transfer groups are motivated to defend, although interviewees from each transfer body framed their commitment to the museum's 'publicness' in different ways. However, there was no simple translation of these commitments or beliefs about the role and purpose of the public museum into practice: attempts to secure the museum's public qualities following transfer, as well as during the decision-making process pertaining to transfer, were a key site of struggle and tension.

Section 7.2 relates to The Whitaker. Here, interviewees articulated a role for the public museum imbued with an image of the museum as symbolic of civic pride and a romanticised image of the Victorian civic ideal condensed in a mythology surrounding the museum's benevolent founder. However, as well as acting as an important motivational glue for people working together for the first time, the mythologised image of the social and political moment when the museum was 'gifted' to the people of Rossendale served a more-than-symbolic role. As I describe, reviving the institutional history of the museum seemed to direct decision-making, as well as hinting at the potential for future-orientated articulations of how a museum based on civic ideals might be re-purposed for now by bringing new voices into museum management.

Section 7.3 focuses on Ford Green Hall in Stoke-on-Trent where we find an example of a museum whose role is articulated via an implicit rejection of a unitary or universal approach to public services where the museum seeks to be open to everyone or to deliver value to the public at large. For the chair of the newly formed independent trust, the museum's role as a public space is part of a network of spaces which address the needs and interests of specific communities. In this discussion, I highlight the interviewees' attachment to a values-led approach to museum management through reference to specific examples from his practice.

This short section goes a long way in focusing attention on substantive questions such as for whom does a museum exist? Philosophical questions such as these have been brought into sharp focus following the budget cuts, and this example shows that we must avoid generalisations of how austerity has influenced the cultural sector as this neglects the different types of museum practice being trialled by people such as the group in Stoke-on-Trent.

In Section 7.4 I move to the Manor House Art Gallery & Museum in Ilkley where there was a tension between how commitments to the public qualities of the museum were narrated to me during the interview, and how these ideas were expressed amongst the transfer group themselves. This lead to a scenario where the requirements of the local authority's asset transfer process and how participants viewed their role encouraged members of the group to contain their thoughts as to how decisions about publicly-owned buildings and resources should be made to the space of the interview whilst seeking to keep the 'public' at arm's length in practice.

Section 7.5 closes the chapter with an argument that groups are drawn into transfer scenarios because of an emotional attachment to the museum as a publicly-owned resource which embodies a series of principles and values, as well as being a symbolic icon of a former social and political moment. However, the extent to which groups can translate these attachments into practice is variable and fraught, testifying to the tension inherent in delegating responsibility for buildings which are widely held to be public, in one way or another, to other-than-public bodies.

7.1 Professional perspectives on publicness

When the question of whether the public status of the museum might be changed by transferring its management from a public body to a group of private individuals was posed to council personnel, interviewees interpreted publicness as allowing access. For this group, the museum's public quality could be evidenced by the fact that the museum was physically accessible to the public, with issues of intellectual accessibility or evidence of the highly restricted nature of 'access' to spaces such as museums undiscernible in the comments. With the responses of the three council officers, arguments for the continued public nature of the museum rely on the idea that the museum must still be public because it is not private, implicitly positioned here as publics' opposite:

> 'As I see it, it's still a public space. They have weddings, the ghost hunters, they have
> this psychic group who meet there every month. They're really good payers. They link

in with the schools a lot and they host Tudor Days. [Staff member] does a lot for volunteers. There's a lot of people using the space…there's been an increase in school visits and under 15 visits since they've been independent so whatever they're doing it's working' (SoTCC Voluntary Sector Policy and Strategy Officer, interview March 2015).

'I don't see the space as delivering public services but I would still describe it as a space for public use' (BMDC Strategic Director of Regeneration and Culture, interview July 2015).

'It's free access to members of the public which is something the council always wanted to maintain…you can just walk in, you don't have to go to the café, you don't have to go to the paid exhibitions, you can just spend as much time in there as you like and just walk out so there's that public element to it

I think the question of whether the space could still be described as a public museum is difficult, I don't know the answer, well no I do know, it's trying to put it into words I suppose. If you run a venue, for want of a better phrase, which is publicly-managed but nobody comes to it, then you've got to ask yourself, well is that public?' (RBC Head of Health, Housing and Regeneration, interview February 2015).

Throughout the interviews, officers equated publicness with access and use. For the first interviewee, the public nature of the building is evidenced by the fact that multiple groups are choosing to use the space. Here, the publicness of the building is conflated with the 'freedom' of groups to spend money to use the space. Within the second comment, the focus is on the ability of a generalised public to use the space if they wish. Here, framing the building as a public space whose public service delivery role has been removed is a means to position access as ability to enter as opposed to a concern with inclusion or making accessible. Although the third interviewee was concerned with how publicness might be articulated, publicness was addressed through the passive language of openness (Newman 2007: 888-890). These defensive arguments overrode questions of whether the changed circumstances within which these groups are managing museums (e.g. without public funding, introducing charging, without the organisational capacity to address matters of inclusion) offer up new conceptions of what it means to be a public museum or new approaches where the museum's publics are addressed differently (i.e. not as a general public but as specific groups). In the accounts of members of transfer bodies, attempts to articulate new conceptions of how the

museum would fulfil its public role were much more visible, as the following sections illustrate.

7.2 The Whitaker: recasting the local authority museum in its civic role

In this section, it is argued that the decision to continue supporting cultural provision by RBC was tied up with a deeper reclaiming of a positive role for the local authority in the area by members of the new management body and the council alike. Local authorities in Stoke-on-Trent and Bradford both withdrew public funding for Ford Green Hall and Manor House Art Gallery & Museum, respectively, whilst RBC have continued to fund the museum, both through a management fee paid to the CIC (The Whitaker Group) and assistance with maintenance costs. This points to the fact that local authorities are adopting a plurality of approaches to museum provision to deal with the financial circumstances of austerity. Reduced budgets for cultural provision are evidence of the impact of austerity on the ability of local authorities to support public museums and other forms of public culture. But, as I observe it, the way individual local authorities respond to these circumstances is reflective of how local governments, the people who work there and those people who involve themselves in the activities of local government conceive of themselves and their role.

In Rossendale, the efforts of council officers and local individuals who formed the CIC crystallised around prioritising a civic role for the museum. Across Section 7.2.1 and 7.2.2, I argue that nostalgic references to the ideals of the museum's founder and the role of the museum as part of local civic culture provided an important resource for the group and the council as they sought to outwardly articulate their ambitions for the museum, both during the interview, in press materials and to each other during the early stages of the relationship between the local authority and the members of the CIC. As well as serving a motivational role, the mythologised story of the founder appeared to shape the way officers made decisions about the future use of the museum building. However, ideas and ideals of civic culture are subject to multiple uses. In Section 7.2.3 I present two ways of interpreting the allusions local authorities and the groups they work with make to the civic through counterposing a critical reading with a sympathetic one. This illustrates the analytical purchase of the idea of the civic as a means of acknowledging the role and purpose local authorities assign to public museum provision, as well as highlighting that contemporary decision-making is shaped by the museum's past in interesting ways.

7.2.1 The motivational value of institutional biography

The institutional biography of The Whitaker played a motivational role for council officers and the individuals who formed the body who took on the management of the museum in 2013, as this comment illustrates:

> 'I think the council have massively reconnected to the building and what it represents, I think in times of austerity it's really difficult for councillors and the council and they're not getting that many pats on the back…I think they saw it as a pat on the back for them…being in the paper so many times, with us thanking them for their support, so there's that element to it, but I also think they have seen, I suppose, a belief in Rossendale, that it's coming up, and that they are part of that, I think that has helped them believe that there's hope and a sense of energy about the area, and the museum is part of that…that hope in the area was central to how the museum was given in the first place, it really goes back to that, it goes back to The Whitaker, to the roots of it, and how it was given and I think that has really helped with that sense of partnership working' (Creative Director, interview March 2015).

The recent past of RBC partly explains the motivational value officers drew from developing a distinctive solution to ensure the future of the museum in response to the cuts. Since the Comprehensive Spending Review of 2010, RBC's budget has been cut by 51%. The Whitaker had not been managed directly by local authority since before 2004, when a 10-year management arrangement was drawn up between RBC and Lancashire County Council (LCC) which transferred the museum to LCC in exchange for an annual fee for the delivery of the service. The licencing of the building and collection in 2004 came at a difficult time for RBC as it was part of the council's response to a report from the Audit Commission which categorised the Council as poor in several areas including the provision of cultural services, highlighting low public satisfaction in their quality. The reputation of the council was poor locally and it seemed that constructing a new rationale for the future of the museum in Rossendale, through recalling and re-appropriating a romanticised narrative of the ambitions of long-dead founders, provided an important sense of purpose for officers and had an emboldening effect on members of the CIC and officers alike. This is important, as I have already mentioned, because in a political moment where a positive role for the local authority has been denigrated in the political discourse of the coalition government (and previous Conservative governments), the efforts of organisational actors and members of the public to align their ambitions with different temporalities is an important arena where the value and

virtue of the local authority, and the spaces and resources they act as guardians of, can be reclaimed.

7.2.2 The shaping role of institutional biography

As well as providing a point of orientation during the formation of their relationship, the way the museum's past was understood by council officers also appeared to shape the options they felt were available to them as they set about modelling future use scenarios for the space. My reading of institutional biography as shaping the routes deemed available to councils as they formulate their responses to austerity takes it cue from authors such as Navaro-Yashin, Beckert and Orr, who writing in contexts from economics to migration, all point out that fictions about the past and future form an important part of the cognitive resources drawn upon by individuals as they decide which courses of action are available to them (Navaro-Yashin 2009; Beckert 2013). Orr's reading of the influence of departed leaders on organisational practices in the present (2014) seems particularly apt for the sphere of the local authority museum where museum directors often recall the origin stories of their museum explaining their importance for now.

Describing their vision for the museum, officers and members of the CIC noted their attachment to the narratives of benevolence and provision of resources for collective benefit they read into the ambitions of the museum's founder. The gift of the building and collection to the council over a hundred years ago was symbolic of a social moment where Rossendale was triumphant (known as 'The Golden Valley' during the Industrial Revolution), as well as a political moment when the currency of local government was strong. In the interview transcripts, members of The Whitaker Group and some council officers displayed a strong attachment to strengthening the currency of the local authority, viewing the museum as a potent exemplar of the ideals they wanted to revive. Albeit to differing degrees, interviewees were committed to carving out a role for local government as a public institution taking responsibility for the wellbeing of place and the people who live there through direct action or by investments in projects such as museums which were expressive of local identity, instilled sentiments of civic pride and concern for where one lives and inculcated belief and attachment to ideals and ideas of pride, mutuality and connectedness amongst the population.[27] To explore this perspective in full, I begin with the framing of RBC's decision to continue funding the provision of a museum service by the Council Leader.

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[27] The Victorian moment – when several museums were opened themselves up as public institutions – is by no means universally celebrated. For a scholarly critique of this moment see Debord (1967) or Harvey (1989).

The Leader provides the institutional 'go-ahead' for the actions of council officers, thus playing an important role in establishing the goals officers are working towards as they seek to establish asset transfer arrangements with external groups. In the interview, the Leader was keen to highlight that although the museum service was being delivered by an external group, an explicit decision had been taken to continue funding the museum:

> 'government has very clearly got its mind around statutory and non-statutory, what they will pay for and what they won't [and even though] the council is being absolutely strangled in front of people's eyes and nobody knows [it was the] consideration that this is the only arts activity that we support as a council that underpinned the decision to continue to support the delivery of a museum service (interview July 2015, my additions).

This is partly suggestive of how the decision-making actors in the council act on beliefs about the role of their local authority that they construct, supporting claims about the agency of individuals to formulate distinctive justifications and practices in response to changes emanating from central government (Bevir and Rhodes 2010: 73; Gardner and Lowndes 2016: 141). However, it is worth questioning whether this agency to take decisions might be partly influenced by the beliefs of figures from the past whose ideas and values are given continued presence through the built infrastructure which they bequeathed to the local authority. As I observe it, for councillors with a political interest in maintaining the trust of the electorate, the museum is a particularly challenging problem to solve in the puzzle of austerity. On the one hand, its architectural form is problematic. Unlike community development, or youth work, this museum refuses to be sold off or transformed into a residential home or sold for development without outward change to the material and social ecology of a local area. In other words, people would notice.

What is more, the museum itself is imbued with the ambitions of figures long past which occupy an important role in the public imagination. As I observed it, these 'inheritances of the past' found their way into the 'mind's eye' of decision-makers, effectively imbuing the present with the spectre of the past (Orr 2014: 1041, 1057). In this way, the description the council officer gave of 'finding out all the options' (RBC Head of Health, Housing and Regeneration, February 2015) for the building before presenting these to the councillors is a pertinent example of how contemporary decisions regarding the recalibration of museum management necessitate a confrontation between the museum's past and its future.

This officer, who admitted to knowing 'nothing about running museums', was the key mediator between the council and any external groups who made their intention to submit a proposal to operate the building known. Describing the boundaries of his endeavours, this individual spoke of 'being open to anything' but that this flexibility was qualified by the 'several covenants attached to the building itself in terms of what it can be used for' and for this reason the officer rejected proposals which did not 'fit with what we wanted which was to keep the museum going' (RBC Head of Health, Housing and Regeneration, interview February 2015). Given that the covenants were mentioned as framing the possible futures considered for this building, it is interesting to note that neither the interviewee nor the legal officers of RBC were able (or willing) to locate these documents. In addition, although this has not been tested in the courts, restrictive covenants, despite carrying more enforcement weight than positive covenants, can still be modified by the Lands Tribunal in certain circumstances.[28] Despite this, the belief that the building could only be used as a museum, was taken seriously such that it was listed as a key requirement of the council in the document which was written by the officer and circulated to solicit expressions of interest from organisations with an interest in operating the museum. The specific phrasing: 'The Museum itself is restricted to be used for the purposes of the Public Libraries Act 1892 i.e. museums, libraries and art galleries [sic]' contains numerous factual errors (not least that this Act was repealed in 1964), yet the notion that the building had an inscribed use which was unalterable by the concerns of the present took hold with the group who formed into The Whitaker Group, who now manage the site.[29] Following on from this discussion of institutional biography as motivational and limiting, I now discuss how narratives which re-imagine the civic museum as expressive of a strong local government with the currency and capacity to valorise local identity, take autonomous action in order to promote economic growth which benefits the people living within its administrative boundaries offers a different lens through which to read local authority decisions, particularly those citing the regenerative benefits of a thriving museum as a reason for maintaining public investment in the service.

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[28] A restrictive covenant is preventative. A positive covenant, however, is productive. In other words, a positive covenant specifies a course of action whereas a restrictive covenant prevents a specific course of action. This distinction is subtle yet important in the eyes of the law because a positive covenant does not run with the land, meaning the promise cannot be enforced against subsequent owners or occupiers without complicated new structures. A restrictive covenant, however, stays with the land, but can still be modified by the Lands Tribunal in special circumstances. Special thanks to the participant who took it upon themselves to research this distinction.

[29] An analysis of other council documentation, particularly minutes from meetings, mention these covenants as demanding that a course of action is pursued. However, as these meetings predated my research, it is too tentative to say whether they had an impact on higher level decision making.

7.2.3 Articulating the civic

Referring to the civic calls to mind the Victorian era when many local authority museums were founded. These origin stories occupy an important place in the public imagination and often inform the narratives of museum directors (cf. Hunt 2004). It is not my intention to offer a prescriptive definition of the civic here, as my use of the term is as an interpretive device rather than as a topic for detailed discussion. However, briefly expanding on the boundaries established by Philo and colleagues (2015) writing in an editorial to a special issue on 'Civic Geographies' is useful to explain how I understand this complex and contested term. As Philo argues, important to the civic is a celebration of spaces, projects or groups which instil a feeling that we are 'connected to or associated with something larger' than ourselves. Crucially, the civic tends to be about place and locality – it emphasises the distinctiveness of place identities and the eccentricities of place. The importance of public museums, their collections and institutional histories should be plain here. A civically-minded local authority, or indeed museum, would prioritise investments which facilitate 'connectedness' as well as those which instil 'sentiments of concern, pride and even enthusiasm' (2015: 358-360) for others and for place. The civic tradition vociferously proclaimed a role for local government as one of civic leadership which involved the provision of adequate infrastructure for growing industrialisation and the pursuit of the 'well-being of a place and the people who live there by whatever means are necessary and available' to address the problems brought by industry (Stewart 2000: 27-29). In return, and this is what can be read as paternalism, populations are anticipated to respond to the responsibility taken by the local state by adopting a stance of collective responsibility for themselves and the collective life of where they live. Critical accounts of the civic identify the use of images of civic pride by local governments as outward-facing branding exercises which conceal inequalities, difference or the multiplicity of place (e.g. Harvey 1989). Whilst useful, these perspectives can obscure the positive impact of local government activities which celebrate local identity, encourage people's involvement in associational activity and facilitate discussion about local identity and what it means to identify with place. The empirics emerging from this study suggest that for this group, coming into museum management is a means to quietly reassert the value of civic pride, as well as those public spaces which facilitate civic activity and function as expressions of the ideal of a civic culture itself.

RBC officers did not refer to ideas of civic pride or the civic in their explanations of why the council had decided to maintain a degree of support for the museum. Officers spoke of regeneration while members of The Whitaker Group spoke of civic pride, local identity and

the collective spirit and solidarity between civic groups working in the area. For officers, the museum was viewed as central to 'building up Rossendale's economy' as well as 'a place to visit which promotes the cultural offer in Rossendale' (RBC Head of Health, Housing and Regeneration, interview February 2015). From this, it appears safe to say that improving the attractiveness of Rossendale as a place to visit was undoubtedly part of the rationale for RBC's continued investment in the building. The documentation pertaining to the decision to continue funding museum provision in Rossendale is peppered with references to the regenerative potential of the museum.

Within cultural geography and museum studies, there is a strong tradition of analysing local authority's regeneration work through a critical lens. For geographers, the claim is that these strategies aim to attract inward investment at all costs, through selling romantic or false images of cities, towns and regions (in some cases circulating ways of understanding place which are invented for marketing purposes) to furnish regeneration projects which operate at a level above the residents of an area, generating benefits for people or businesses beyond the area itself (Harvey 1989; McGuigan 1996, 2016). For scholars of the museum, regeneration is associated with top-down museum instrumentalisation and its associated policies over the previous two decades which many have critiqued as benefiting the few not the many, and detracting from the 'true' benefits of museums (Gray 2014; Message 2009: esp. 258, 263). These critiques have been useful for drawing our attention to how the role and purpose of museums and local government activity has been reframed over time, but, as I indicated previously, they miss the other logics on which investment in museums takes place, as well as the ability of regeneration strategies involving museums to benefit communities in myriad ways. The blending of a language of regeneration with one of the civic by members of The Whitaker Group provides a potent example of the multiple framings available to groups seeking to articulate how they view the role and purpose of the public museum. The currency of the idea of civic culture and civic pride for this group, as I observe it, demonstrates how the efforts of groups taking on museum management can be understood as a quiet 'politics of [civic] retrieval' (Philo et al. 2015: 363), a point I return to in the final chapter (9.5). Indeed, although there are many criticisms levelled at asset transfer throughout this thesis, this is an example of how bringing new voices into the management of public museums can involve a reassertion of roles and purposes which the current political moment seeks to devalue through discourse and cease through public sector retrenchment.

For the members of The Whitaker Group, the regeneration of Rossendale was *both* about attracting tourists and business investment to the area *and* celebrating the distinctiveness of

place, as well as instilling strong feelings of civic pride, attachment and joy about the culture of the area amongst Rossendale residents.[30] This quote from the Group's Creative Director speaks to a concern with local identity and the experience of living in a place and what it means to connect with where you are from, or live:

> 'It's that civic pride isn't it…that raises who you are as a community. The community historically is very strong who all work together, you know, from small hamlets, and the history of how people would, make sure their neighbours were fed, we very much connected with that importance of where you are. A museum is a massive part of a community…it's where you see people and the joy of meeting others there…people bring their families here and they do that because they are proud of it (interview March 2015).

For the Managing Director, the museum's role in regenerating Rossendale was about branding the area, but it was also about providing a place for people to confront the nature of local identity and their place, and the place of others, within that, as well as maintaining public spaces where people can just spend time:

> 'You've got to know those systems. You've got to know Community Strategy, and how that links up with the Regeneration Strategy, we came here ourselves and looked around and saw the potential…I considered the wider regeneration, I knew this was a place waiting to happen. I knew Ramsbottom which is close, they've really come up on the kind of regional mapping, lots of small industry, lots of things going on, and I think we are the poor relation. Not in terms of size but in terms of what's going on here…for me it's about how the museum brings you into a place…but it's also about people's identity, people have lost a bit of identity, you've got these lunatic fringes, UKIP and BNP, it's not about people, it's about sectarianism, and for want of a better phrase, the white working class, it's not a great phrase nowadays, but there's something in there, are disenfranchised very badly…and I think that's in my mind, who would identify with Rossendale Museum as being their museum? There's a real thick rich core of people around here, and they don't come enough and we want to get them to use the space…it's important how people perceive the public realm…I think the message we try to get over here is 'yes, we do want people to spend because we

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[30] It should be noted that these job titles (Operational Director, Creative Director, Managing Director) should not be read as evidence of the commerciality of this group. As the Managing Director noted: 'it isn't a question of particularly hierarchy here…it just made sense to have a strategic-type feel, as much for the outside world as anything else' (February 2015).

need the money to keep things going' but there's nothing we love more than for it to be what it should be really, just a place to go where it's relaxed, that's a social thing, giving people a place to go' (interview February 2015).

For the Operational Director, instilling a sense of pride and attachment to the social history of an area was a crucial role for the museum:

'I suppose I looked at what is unique about the building, and I suppose you connect that to what is unique about the valley…perhaps 'up North' we do things a little bit different, there's a sense of humour that might be different to most, I suppose there are social stories of objects. I came in thinking 'why on earth is there a brick collection?' but one of the first things I read in the comments book was 'fantastic brick collection!', I couldn't take it seriously at first but then you start to understand it, the back stories, that humour behind it…it's everybody's history and it's always been here, so that's what we're passionate about' (interview March 2015).

There are rich quotations with their own nuances that I do not expand upon here. However, all three demonstrate attachment to the benevolence they read into the actions of the museum's founder, as well as his concern with celebrating and improving Rossendale, an ambition which was understood to be just as much about improving the public realm as it was about improving the quality of life of the people who live in Rossendale, the experiences available to people on their doorsteps and how it feels to be from there. Discernible across this set of empirics was the priority this group placed on the people living in Rossendale, their quality of life, and the virtue of community-led civic-minded activity.

As the Group's Creative Director noted: 'I think we all connected to the story of how the museum was given in the first place, and we kept going back to that, the story of Richard Whitaker' (interview March 2015). The figure of the founder also loomed large in the various press interviews the Group conducted after they assumed operational responsibility for the museum. In this quote, the Operational Director emphasises the importance of the values held by the founder, citing them as a source of inspiration:

'his intention was to open up the house and the grounds to the ordinary working folk of the valley. He landscaped the gardens and turned them into a park, and converted the house into a museum. He wanted the children of the valley to breathe fresh air and learn something about the world around them. So Mr Whitaker is massively important to us. We want people to know what a kind, generous, forward-thinking man he was' (Northern Soul: November 2013).

At face value, this story typifies what is known as a brand persona, a narrative which creates the impression of an emotional connection between the business and the customer, inculcating trust and loyalty (see Herskovitz and Crystal 2010). In this context, however, these acts of remembrance serve as a reminder of a way of understanding why the museum came into being in the first place. As well as bolstering the objectives of the new management to maintain civic pride in the local area through avoiding the loss of permanent exhibits and collections which point towards the former economic and social success of the town, these references to the museum's past provide the group with an important resource through which to reassert the role and purpose of the museum they now manage for the present.

As I see it, drawing attention to the priority given to the civic role of the museum in Rossendale is crucial. Recalling the civic tradition of local government offers a useful means to temporarily disrupt contemporary framings which emanated from the previous coalition government. Here, reviving the ambitions of previous Conservative governments, speeches and writings from David Cameron and colleagues circulated a powerful framing of local government intervention or autonomy as inherently bad (or as something to be 'experimented with' in areas such as Manchester) whilst also positioning community and civic activity as locked in a zero-sum game with local government, the implication being that the power of local government must be reduced in order for the agency of associational groups to increase (see Cameron 2009; DCLG 2010, cf. Shucksmith and Talbot 2015). In a contemporary politics where the autonomy and positive role (both practically and discursively) of local government and forms of publicly-subsided culture have been consistently undermined by claiming that community-based activity and grassroots-led change is dampened by the very existence of local government ('bureaucracies') and, by implication, public institutions, the language of the civic offers a powerful reference point through which institutional and community-based actors can re-claim their sense of purpose. Whilst this discussion has centred on perceptions of the public museum, read through the lens of institutional biography and the civic, the next two sections focus on the efforts of members of transfer groups to translate their beliefs about the role and purpose of public spaces (Stoke-on-Trent) and public bodies (Ilkley) into practice.

7.3 Ford Green Hall: the community museum

I want to argue here for a more nuanced reading of the various ways in which a museum can orient itself towards the public. In the context of public sector cuts, it has been argued that funding bodies and policymakers have prioritised economic and business-orientated roles for

the museum and heritage sector with ideas of public service provision orientated towards the public or the user being replaced by consumer logics (Lagerqvist 2015, 2016). Whilst these arguments are relevant to one of this project's aims, namely to understand how decisions about spending on museum provision are made by decision-makers located within local authorities, they fail to acknowledge the multiple uses to which museum buildings and collections are put by local actors. Museum professionals retain a degree of agency to 'negotiate the effects of austerity in their local areas' (Morse and Munro 2015: 4). One of the ways they do this is through reworking their practice in innovative ways to temper the effects of austerity on the individuals and groups they work with (see 2.1.3). We see this in the efforts of the chair of Ford Green Hall.

In the interview transcripts of the individual who assumed responsibility for Ford Green Hall in Stoke-on-Trent, it is clear that effects of austerity on the museum sector have encouraged a 'turn towards economic values and business logics' (Lagerqvist 2016: 67) in terms of how decisions were made by the council regarding which museums to continue funding and which would be cut loose. However, the transcripts are also evidence of the way small-scale organisations entering contractual relationships with local authorities to protect museum provision in their area, such as Ford Green Hall Trust, can be arenas in which new approaches to managing publicly-owned resources take form. In this section, I offer a series of examples of how this individual approached his work as manager of the museum. In part, I offer these examples as part of an ethical commitment to emphasising the dedication of a single individual to the survival of this small museum. However, beyond that, thinking about the role of public spaces more generally, these examples of how one individual set out to mould the work of the museum to fulfil the needs and interests of specific groups provide an important cue for subsequent chapters to reflect on the different ways in which museums can fulfil their public role, as well as prompting debate on the ethicality of removing funding for museums which look towards local users whilst maintaining funding for museums which look outwards towards external visitors.

7.3.1 The role of the community museum

The chair's understanding of the role of the museum, in terms of the way he felt the museum should orientate itself towards visitors, was marked by a concern with targeting a specific geographic community, of users and organisations:

> 'The council's responsibility is for the whole of Stoke-on-Trent, we are really aiming the museum for this small piece here'

'It's classified as a community museum and the way we understand this is different from the council, we mean, we'll know when it's become a community museum when we're getting people saying "that's not a council museum, that's our museum" and they feel part of it'

'The way I think about the ownership of this space, it belongs to them, the people of Smallthorne, as much as it is ours, that's serious…we're not attracting a massive national audience, we're not going to get busloads of people parking up there and coming in there but we can get a lot of local use out of it'.[31]

These quotes are revealing of the chair's stance on how this museum, as he terms it 'a community museum' must work within a different image of the public than a 'council museum'. When the interviewee calls attention to the council's area of responsibility as the 'whole of Stoke-on-Trent', this is a reference to the administrative boundaries of the area across which the council is required to deliver certain services. In addition to addressing the needs and interests of the visitors from beyond the area, the council museums are, by implication, understood to aim towards the 'large piece' of Stoke-on-Trent whereas Ford Green Hall is orientated towards Smallthorne and the people who live in 'this piece here'. This suggestion of an opposition between how the council conceive of the boundaries of their responsibilities and how the chair conceives of his is interesting because it can be read as a subtle attempt to define the role and purpose of the museum in spatially bounded terms. Here, community is used to make a statement about who the museum exists for and in whose interests it will be made to work through the purposive action of the Trust. It is still used as a positive description of what the museum will do, which does conceal the exclusions which may occur as a consequence of such an approach. However, in a context where the categorisation of this museum as 'community' by the council was influential in making its transfer appear legitimate, it is important to analyse how this categorisation was interpreted by the museum's new management, and how they sought to translate the museum's 'community' moniker into practice.

Delineating the role of the museum in this way, as aiming towards a specific place and geographical community, indicates that transferring responsibility for publicly-owned museums to groups who are motivated to undertake such responsibilities because of an emotional or ethical attachment to the fortunes of a specific place and the people living there

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[31] Unless stated otherwise, all quotes in this section are taken from an interview with the chair of FGH which took place in April 2015.

introduces a new set of ideas for thinking about the way this category of museum should function, and who should benefit. Local authority museums, when managed by local councils, perceive of their public role on a broad and abstracted scale, encapsulated by terms such as 'public interest', 'public benefit' and 'public museum' (see 2.2). Conversely, in the quotes above, we find a much more purposive and specific articulation of the museum's public role where abstract images of a generalised public are replaced by a focus on the way a museum, particularly when it becomes the responsibility of an other-than-public organisation, might re-orientate itself towards spatially bounded communities. This is different from the social inclusion work that has long been undertaken by museums, both in response to DCMS policy and as part of the moral/ethical commitments of staff (see Morse 2014) as this is a framing based on geographic communities rather than those who are underserved or under represented by the museum. Within a financial and political context where an increasing role is being played by groups such as Ford Green Hall Trust in the management of museums, it is important to realise that these groups do not merely accept responsibility for the operation of the museum, they also bring with them ideas and notions as to how a public museum should carry out its role. Whereas other authors have summarised the way museums perceive of their public role in overarching terms, such as Gray who writes 'all museums [have] a general, public, accountability to the people that the museum exists for – whether this be the general public at large, local communities, or simply those who visit particular institutions' (2011: 54), my discussion highlights that ways actors involved with museum asset transfers, may not conceive of the public role of the museum they are responsible for in such general terms. This matters because how organisational actors perceive their purpose and responsibility makes a difference to how they carry out their role, as I indicate in the next section.

My aim in presenting this example, which was selected as one out of many in the transcript, is to illustrate at the micro-level how the management of Ford Green Hall was characterised by a concern that this museum was operated with concern for the means, needs, interests and lives of people to whom the museum belongs, in the chair's view. This example highlights the multiple ways in which the museum as a public institution is understood and practiced. Here, as in the quotations above, the museum's public role is fulfilled through an orientation towards specific communities of need and location. Directing benefit towards specific groups, and making this the focus of the organisation's work, disrupts museum orthodoxies in its sidestepping of concern for attempting to operate museums on behalf of everyone (Bennett 1995, see 2.2.1).

7.3.2 Tempering difficult choices through adaptability

Despite introducing admission charges given the strain the Trust was under to generate income the chair spoke of his commitment to doing the utmost to ensure that the museum and events hosted there were accessible to anyone who wanted to attend:

> 'We use social media a great deal, for publicity but even more importantly for me it allows feedback so if people write or message saying they'd love to come but they can't afford it, that tells me we've gauged our prices wrong'

> 'We keep it as cheap as possible and we are open to people saying 'look I can't afford that, I could afford this' and we will meet that...wherever possible we will meet those requests'

> 'It's a poor area. It's not your usual place to have a museum, especially a heritage house...we're thinking of different approaches…wherever possible it's about ensuring that people can come, making sure they know that they can do things here, when we have activities and it's £1 for adults, 50p for children, with no time limit on how long you can stay, that helps'

The charging practices of the chair cannot be claimed as guaranteeing that anyone who would 'love to come but can't afford it' will be granted access to the museum regardless of their ability to pay. As the three-year tapering grant to the group from the council ceased in 2016, Ford Green Hall trust relies on income from visitors and other users of the building (such as a paranormal group and weddings) to 'survive financially'. Free entry may not be an option, yet this commitment to adaptability based on the means of people and groups who demonstrate an interest in the museum to pay, is indicative of the specific set of values held by the chair, made manifest in actions such as those described above. Here, the chair acknowledges that the museum must generate income to survive financially, yet through prioritising survival (a word used frequently in the interview), rather than aiming to massively increase income generated (an aim which would require an orientation towards one-off tourist 'busloads' rather than frequent use by local people), the chair pursues an approach towards managing the museum which he describes as 'running [it] in a nice way'. Despite the challenges faced by the Trust as it seeks to ensure the museum can 'survive financially' in a difficult financial context, there is a clear commitment to operating the museum as a sphere of activity which is distinctive in the way it transacts with users through adopting ethical working practices such as those described here. For the interviewee, this commitment to embodying publicness extended

outwards from the museum to relationships with other small-scale organisations working in the area, such as the work the chair does with the Scouts which is about 'making sure things aren't all one way, it's not just about us taking all the time. It's knowing our place too, giving back to this community in the same way that they help us'.

This brief example of adaptability, and the set of values which I have argued it stems from, is an example of the importance people such as this interviewee place on maintaining public spaces which embody 'publicness' in the way they interact with users in the flux of everyday practice. In the following section, I maintain a focus on how the museum's public role was articulated by the chair but move on to consider the way the museum was felt to be just one of many sites that should provide a service and space orientated towards the needs and interests of specific groups or individuals, encouraging them to try unfamiliar activities and creating spaces for the pursuit of self-led projects.

7.3.3 Retaining spaces of community resource

Large museum services can deliver several strands of activity at the same time. Small-scale embryonic organisations, which are reliant on volunteers, do not have the same capacity. So, whilst a museum service may deliver programmes which focus on community development or mental health support, this is unlikely to be the spirit in which the entire service operates. More accurately, these strands of work tend to exist on the peripheries of larger museum services (see Morse 2014). However, in a context where large staff teams working across multiple sites are replaced by small groups of staff (both paid and unpaid) with responsibility for single museums, the function of these museums is being revised along lines where functions such as community development may now be placed at the heart of the new organisation's work. Therefore, empirical examples of how individuals providing the strategic direction to these organisations put the museum to work (its space, personnel and collections) are revealing of the different ways a museum's public function may be pursued, as well as indicating the nuanced way the roles played by museum assets managed by other-than-public bodies is changing following austerity. Presenting this data raises fundamental questions about how public subsidy is being directed by local authorities, and to what ends, an argument I pick up in subsequent chapters.

For the chair of the newly formed independent trust, the museum's role as a public space is part of a network of spaces addressing the needs and interests of specific communities. The museum is no different to the other spaces which the council have recently transferred to voluntary groups (mainly community centres and libraries), all of which the chair is

personally involved with. As the chair put it: 'between us, we try to meet all demands', indicating that the museum is just one space serving a public, or more specifically a community, function in the area that he feels must be maintained.

Over the course of the interview, the chair gave several descriptions of projects and the spirit in which they were conducted which indicated an organisational goal of making the museum work for the needs of individuals and groups in the area, with an emphasis on lending the museum's resources (its space, personnel and collections) to people in the interests of encouraging them to recognise their own capacities to shape their lives. In addition to these substantive goals, the chair spoke of how the museum would offer individuals support in completing tasks over which they had little control, such as mandatory tasks associated with receiving benefits:

> 'It's about creating a comfort zone for people...I am putting in bids for classes and it's things like mental health, because a lot of those people who come to the classes on a Monday and Thursday wouldn't do anything else that week, they would just stay at home and watch the box, coming here and learning has got to be better than that'

> 'I'm promoting it as a place to do things...for learning but also about using the computer, to fill in forms and that sort of thing'

> 'With the volunteers, I want to encourage them to do more admin type work, allowing them to take on more responsibility and that's about training for me. We can get people properly trained up, send them on courses, so they have those skills in their own right, they can do that here and that benefits their CV. I want a mix of people, not just people who already have all the skills, we should be going for people who are enthusiastic as well. They might say, I'd love to do that but I don't know how, well let's find them a process where we can make it happen.'

> 'When I talk about skills, whether it's embroidery or the equipment (computers)…it's about getting people trained in those skills, so people can start making things themselves. If they want to, they can then set up their own little business and sell it from here, or take it a step further and sell elsewhere. It doesn't matter, it's just getting them to see those possibilities'

> 'We work with groups like the Scouts they come and do a litter pick for us and I've been over to help them, helped them to put together a bid for a small pot of money to get some new tables and chairs, they were chuffed to bits with that and so were we. It

works, it's nice, that enthusiasm. It's making sure things aren't all one way, it's not just about us taking all the time. It's knowing our place too, giving back to this community in the same way that they help us'.

In a context where organisations like Ford Green Hall Trust are the difference between the availability of community space in an area reducing from several to none, these unheroic accounts of the museum's purpose are important. They reflect beliefs about the role required of museums located in places such as Smallthorne, an area whose demographic has been heavily impacted by changes to welfare since 2010. As the chair noted:

> 'What I am doing, it's not part of the Big Society or anything like that, it's survival that's all it is. And it's survival that those people out there who are having to survive on a day-to-day living with poorly paid jobs, that's survival there and this is survival in the same way, that's all it is I am afraid'.

Within museum studies, multiple grand narratives circulate advocating how museums are fulfilling their public role or how they might do so in the future (Sandell 1998; Barrett 2011; Museums Association 2013). These narratives are valuable if we continue to ask the question, following Levitas (2012: 336): under which social and economic condition would these ideas cease to be read as quixotic? However, there is a tendency for these positions to be narrated in a celebratory tone. My discussion in this section has taken a deliberately unheroic approach, which veers towards banal descriptions of the type of museum work taking place in transferred museums. However, I offer these descriptions to demonstrate that there is a subtle public ethos to this work, albeit one which replaces universalistic conceptions of the public with an approach which aims to mould the museum in the interests of communities that are both spatially and socially delineated. What this section shows is that asset transfer bodies bring with them different interpretations of what it means to be a public museum. Unlike the professional accounts presented in Section 7.1 at the beginning of the chapter, to be a public museum does not mean to be open to an undifferentiated public. This is an important observation as it demonstrates that moves towards other-than-public forms of management have the potential to challenge our understandings of what it means to be a museum held 'in trust' for the public. I return to these observations in the Conclusion.

In the next section, I turn to the case of the Manor House Art Gallery & Museum where we find a group whose endeavours to make decisions in a way they feel is becoming of a building owned by a public body for the benefit of the public came into conflict with the professional mode in which they approached the task. Unlike the empirics relating to Ford Green Hall,

these empirics capture a group in the process of choosing the future direction of the building. From the two case-studies where a new management model was already in place at the time of the research we gain a sense of the extent to which the public was involved in negotiations leading up to the transfer of the museum to another form of management. The case in Ilkley, which the research followed in train, affords *in process* understandings of how a group aimed to heed to the public nature of the building in the way they made decisions about its future.

7.4 Manor House Art Gallery & Museum: the problem of the public

This section is about how members of a group involved in museum transfer believed that they were accountable to a public beyond themselves. In acknowledgement of the museum's publicly-owned status several group members spoke of their desire to involve the public in decisions about the future of a public space and to adopt an exploratory approach to investigating which publics the museum might be moulded for. In this discussion, I demonstrate how lynchpin members of the group used the space of the interview and informal conversations after meetings to articulate what they felt would be a normatively 'right' way to make decisions. In practice, the group found themselves immobilised as they followed the decision-making procedures of a study led by external consultants (see also 5.2). Similarly, in formal meetings of the group and with council officials, the group took it upon themselves to avoid confrontation by engaging in conduct management, avoiding discussion of difficult yet important matters which accompany the very idea of asset transfer. Of particular note here was the group's approach to soliciting the opinions of the 'public' and the approach they took, following the lead of officers from the council, to the assessment of whether their plans represented future use scenarios for the museum which delivered 'community benefits'. I illustrate how this approach emerged through analysing two aspects of the complex negotiations between the group and the council, observing a preference amongst the group for a procedural approach more akin to that of a professional than a person who has stepped forward to a task beyond their usual frame of reference out of a potent desire to save a local resource from closure.

The empirical material certainly provides evidence of participants adopting different modes of address in different circumstances but my intention in this discussion is not to provide a classic case of the way individuals adapt their behaviour in accordance with social norms which define 'appropriate' or 'advantageous' behaviour (Goffman 1969). However, what is important is which modes members of transfer bodies adopt, when and why, and with what effects. Delegating responsibility for the management of a publicly-owned building or

inviting non-governmental actors to deliberate on the options for its future has the potential to lead to instances of expansive thinking regarding the use to which public spaces are put. Likewise, one of the prominent rationales employed in arguments where the case is made for involving stakeholders from beyond the public sector in decision-making about public spaces or in the management of them is that these people contribute values, experiences or knowledge which are in some way different from that which already exists within local authorities. Therefore, this analysis of how people engage with this task and reason their responsibilities in relation to it is an important contribution of the thesis and an indication of an avenue for future research.

7.4.1 Keeping the 'public' at arm's length

As noted in Chapter 4, assembling the Ilkley group did not take place via an open call but involved being invited to a closed meeting which was subsequently referred to as a 'public meeting' (MHG Secretary, pers. comm, 11 January 2016), the participants of which then self-selected to form the NMHG. Because of this, several members were concerned about their 'representativeness' and appeared to be surprised when BMDC did not pursue a broad-reaching public engagement process in order to further involve the public in modelling future use scenarios for the museum. While this case of asset transfer included an opening for an expanded number of individuals and groups to engage with the council in their decision-making, the self-selecting nature of the group and the relatively passive approach of the council to encouraging a broad base of contributions indicates that involvement in asset transfer only involves a diversity of people if they are already inclined to engage.

Officers did not shy away from these circumstances during the interview, speaking of the need for 'locally-based decision making' and 'communities who can respond to local need' yet making explicit their inability to 'work with each individual group' (Strategic Manager, interview July 2015), noting that officers are 'hard pushed to even give them advice because we are contracting so much' (Museums and Galleries Manager, interview February 2014). Yet, outside the space of the interview, officers were rarely upfront about their role expectations for the group, nor that the opportunity for bringing in new actors or challenging voices into the deliberation process was theirs for the taking. The council were not going to pursue these routes themselves as their priority was to 'achieve the outsource' (Strategic Manager, interview July 2015) rather than facilitate diverse deliberative spaces. Still, as this was not made plain, the group continued to distance themselves from a representative role: they believed that further public involvement was a goal that someone, but not necessarily them, should be pursuing and would eventually pursue.

Public involvement can take various forms. For this group of participants, it meant making the deliberation process open to the broader population of Ilkley by creating opportunities for dialogue with groups and publics beyond the group's regular meetings which were private. As one of the group members commented: 'there have been a few awkward conversations with friends and colleagues who have asked if they can come along to meetings and I've avoided saying yes or no as I'm unsure what the status of the group is' (MHG member, interview January 2015). At several points in the interview and during meetings, the group sought to highlight that their membership was not representative of the variation in opinion amongst the Ilkley population regarding say, the value people placed on the continued existence of the museum.

During the period between 2013-15, the group acknowledged that their role was as a 'mechanism' through which the council could 'engage with Ilkley', a role they knew had been assigned to them for the simple reason that they 'were the only group who came forward in any real sense'. Knowing this, members of the group voiced concern that they were not 'representative of the community at all…' citing the way they were recruited as problematic given that they 'were just a group of people who were, if you like, invited to come round the table' (MHG Secretary, interview March 2015). This is interesting because at this stage, the group know they are the only 'mechanism' through which the council is 'engaging with Ilkley' yet they do not recognise that they *are* the very public whose involvement they seek to elicit. To put it differently, when the group, both during the interview and in meetings I observed, reject their 'representativeness' they are doing so based on their view that they do not *factually* represent the public: that their representativeness could be better. Yet, in positioning themselves around the table and engaging in a period of deliberation with the council and other local organisations lasting over two years, the group are viewed by decision-makers within the council and to a certain extent by the public at large as representatives of the Ilkley community. This view of the group as representing the interests of Ilkley was evidenced by comments from the councillor whose portfolio included museums who, when asked about the role of the group and how they were viewed within the council, said: 'they were a bit of a weathervane for me, having them on the ground, having local people involved in that way…was really helpful in making sure I was connected to the mood locally' (BMDC Portfolio Holder for Education, Skills and Culture, interview June 2015). Press materials released by the council included the phrase 'community representatives' (Stray FM 2014), further illustrating that for the council this group are the 'public': their involvement is evidence of the council engaging with the public in the decision about the

future of the museum. The difference between how the council viewed the role of the group and how several members of the group understood their role is illustrated by comparing the comments above with this assertion from a group member in response to a question about the role of the group: 'I nearly rang [x] myself and got them involved but then I thought, actually that's stepping over the mark...it sort of sounds grandiose but you have to let the people decide' (MHG member, interview January 2015).

At this stage in the process (late 2014), the future of the Manor House Art Gallery & Museum was uncertain. The council had decided to remove their museum service from the building but whether it would continue to serve a museum function had been delegated to the NMHG However, it did not appear that the NMHG understood this, preferring to delegate the decision again, to a public beyond themselves. Importantly, this deferral did not translate into practical action.

The lack of inclination from several group members to take on tasks themselves (i.e. members preferred to attend meetings but take little action outside them) was a factor here as they subtly delegated the responsibility for facilitating a wider discussion to an actor (the council or consultants appointed to deliver the feasibility study) beyond the immediate group, absolving themselves of responsibility. However, the primary reason why a broader base of Ilkley residents did not end up participating in negotiations can be attributed to the feasibility study, and how it was completed.

The feasibility study appeared to encourage the group to adopt a style of behaviour which I would summarise as professional, impersonal and consensual. Although each individual member acted in their own way, during the process of engaging with the feasibility study, the atmosphere within group meetings changed, becoming more procedural and less accepting of challenge or interventions which distracted from the task at hand which was to complete the study in a timely manner. By this stage in the process, the group have pushed for the funding of the feasibility study and for it to be managed by them. Ensuring it is completed is a task they are wedded to. In addition to delivering a written report, the study tested the financial viability of a range of ideas which had been proposed as offering potential future uses for the site. A successful study would identify 'potential custodians for the site' to ensure 'community-use of the building will be maintained' (NMHG chair, interview March 2015). For a period of 4 months (the timeframe for completion), the group pursued contacts and relationships which would fulfil this goal. It was not in the interests of the study to engage in expansive thinking or events which would have introduced a plurality of points of view into deliberations. As the (then) chair of the group noted: 'there was an absence of creative

innovation and imaginative thinking around what could happen to it' (interview January 2015), primarily because the study became a funnel through which all efforts and information had to be channelled. It became a frame into which the group's work had to fit.

To illustrate this point, I turn to fieldnotes taken during meeting observation. Present at this meeting were: the consultants (co-appointed by BMDC and the group to conduct the feasibility study, see Chapter 5.2), the council officer leading the negotiations between the council and the group (the Museums and Galleries Manager) and the members of the group. All quotes are verbatim yet anonymous as observation of meetings was premised on this:

> A number of the Manor House Group are talking about communications between the people in the room and the wider community. The thrust of the conversation is a concern that the dialogue between the council and the Group 'doesn't become a closed book' because at the moment everything is 'going on behind closed doors'

> After these comments, made by members of the Group, an elected representative who is also a member of the group offers to host and organise a public meeting. This suggestion provokes momentum in the room: the further involvement of the public was seen as an important ambition by most, although it should be noted that the purpose of the meeting veered from *informing others* to *involving others* and from *involving everyone* to *involving specific groups*. Either way, this ambition was not shared by the consultants, who had been exchanging knowing glances and raised eyebrows with one other as enthusiasm for bringing the 'public' in mounted in the room. One of the consultants responded by asking, cautiously, 'do we want to broaden the debate at this stage? We've already spoken to a representative group of people'. The other consultant is more explicit, proclaiming 'the public stage of this process has passed'. The meeting finishes up a couple of minutes later and the plans for a public meeting do not materialise. Instead, a conclusion was reached for a 'communications plan to be drawn up' and to 'talk to the council first' in order to 'agree a release [of information, through a press release] with them'

> After today's meeting ends, and the consultants and council representatives have said their goodbyes, the way members of the group act and converse changes. It's almost as if they remove one hat and put on another. They become passionate about their desire to host public events. They question the council's processes. They fervently debate the consultants' consultation methods and talk about alternatives. This is

becoming a pattern, the sedate meeting followed by the passionate debrief (field notes, December 2014).

This is one of several micro-moments where a collective decision was made to 'go along with things' to ensure the timely completion of the study. During my longitudinal observation of the group, it was evident that they were gradually formulating their identity, and certain rules and norms regarding the type of contribution or intervention that would be received as legitimate and useful were taking shape. As a preference for avoiding tension or disagreement regarding how the negotiations were proceeding (i.e. what information was being used, who was contributing, what limits were being put on discussions) had taken hold, no public meetings took place. The next section explores a further ramification of the professional way the group approached their relationship with council officials so as to further emphasise the importance of understanding how other-than-public groups engage with their roles and responsibilities in scenarios where they are making decisions about public spaces.

7.4.2 Maintaining consensus

As I indicated in the introduction to this section, although my meeting observation found a preference for consensus in order that tasks were completed in a timely manner and meetings were free of explicit confrontations or heated debate, a quotation such as this one requires our attention for reasons beyond its illustration of a group of people controlling their behaviour to conform to the rules of engagement:

> 'I think it became about skilfully using our knowledge of how systems work to get the best possible outcome. Some of that is being alongside people and getting alongside them, recognising they have got a job of work to do as well. The times we've had, potential fall outs with Bradford [a list of examples is given] well, at the end of the day, they could just say, tough that's the way it works, beyond saying we're just not doing this anymore, our power was limited. Perhaps if we'd been more of an irritant to Bradford things would have been different but I don't know' (MHG Secretary, interview March 2015).

From Lynch (2011a; 2011b) we know that when people participate in processes led by organisations, institutional requirements often shape the process. From scholars who draw on Foucault's governmentality thesis, we know that even 'active participation' requires that participants are active in certain ways, within certain limits and in pursuit of certain ends (Cruikshank 1999). However, what studies of how participants act within processes of

deliberation or participation tend to neglect is the impact of this for both the language through which the topic being deliberated is discussed and the texture of debate, and with what consequences for the eventual outcome.

To make this point, I return to my ethnographic notes. These empirics are from 2016, whereas those above are from between 2014-16. Following the completion of the feasibility study, which did identify an organisation who expressed an interest in running the building as a heritage centre but who pulled out after deciding the project was too much of a financial risk, the NMHG had a final meeting in April 2015 to 'close' the work of the 'steering group' (MHG Secretary, interview March 2015). In late 2016, the NMHG reassembled as the Manor House Group (MHG) with a mix of new and old members. As no organisations with a plan for the building had materialised, the group decided to pursue a transfer of the building themselves. Here, we find them in a meeting with council officials to discuss the ideas the group have had as to how the building can be used in the future. The meeting's focus is how to balance the need for the building to generate income (no grant from the council will be assigned) with the council's requirements for public asset owning bodies to deliver social, economic and environmental benefits. 'Community benefit' is the council officers short-hand term for this:

> A handful of members of the MHG and I are in the council offices for a meeting with the (new) assistant director for sport and culture and the (same) museum and galleries manager. The council officers occupy one side of the table and the group another. I sit at a diagonal at the corner of the table, wanting to signal that I'm observing. The atmosphere is courteous. The group members have made an effort; they're dressed differently today. There's no agenda but in the middle of the table sits an artist's impression of the Manor House Art Gallery & Museum in the near future. The architect (a member of the group) produced this and the group find it acts as a visual representation of their mission statement: the drawing shows a flurry of people – young and old, families and solo visitors – occupying the courtyard where the museum is located. The drawing is not on the table out of chance, this was planned as a statement of their commitment to being open to 'all the people of Ilkley', a phrase often used by this group.

> The assistant director opens the meeting by doing the usual things: thank you for coming, looking forward to progressing this project, indicates that the meeting will be an hour. He then makes a statement which takes everyone by surprise: 'we've been in listening mode up until now, now we're in challenge mode'. He explains this mode

switch comes from the portfolio holders who are nervous about the detail of the group's proposals. He goes on to explain that the focus from now on will be on 'challenging how the community benefit stacks up against the commercial use of the space'. Fair enough, I think, for this is one of the crucial points of balance facing buildings that are widely held to belong to the 'public' and operate 'on behalf of the public' who are under increased pressure to generate increasing revenue from 'customers' given the cuts. Everyone seemed comfortable with this although it was not a distinction that had been discussed thus far. However, his next suggestion was 'to think seriously about the floor space, what floor space is taken up by commercial use and what floor space is community use'. This comment is met with silence. No one quite knows what to say. He elaborates by talking percentages, noting that 'some creative thinking is needed here', advising the group that 'the café can count as social benefit, so that helps us with those percentages you see'. The rest of the meeting proceeds through a series of exchanges 'is x community benefit' 'does y not ultimately benefit the community' and so forth. The meeting continues to flow like this with the assistant director closing the meeting by saying, 'I'm not quite seeing it yet guys, my narrative never changes, if it can't pay for itself then I won't release the asset, this building has to wash its face but we need to maintain a public building that people can visit and view'. Plans are made for next steps and the meeting ends (fieldnotes December 2016).

On the one hand, this episode captures the challenge facing officers as they seek to balance the accountability they feel they owe to the 'public' with the imperative for buildings to attract customers who will spend the necessary money to balance the books in the absence of public subsidy. The percentages are merely a means of driving home the point to the group: this building must be as equally and inclusively open to those people who cannot pay as to those who can.

However, the empirics also capture interactions between the local authority and the group where substantive issues are being discussed that members of the transfer group have no capacity to influence nor reflect upon. For example, the issue of what it would look like for a publicly-owned building, being managed by an other-than-public group, for the 'benefit' of the public, is surely deserving of a more expansive discussion than one based on percentages.

Being a publicly-owned building gifted to the 'community', as well as being legally owned by a local authority whose legitimacy to govern is based on taking decisions in ways which involve the public and are in the public interest, group members believed the process

surrounding this building's future should involve more of the public than it did. However, in Section 7.4.1 we saw how the group was drawn into organisational processes and procedures which shaped their behaviour. These behaviours, as this section has shown, led the group to avoid engaging in meaningful discussion about substantive issues which asset transfer accentuates, such as whether it is reasonable to expect public spaces to fulfil a public role when public subsidy has been removed.

At the time of writing, this building is empty, the collection it housed is in storage and the events it played host to have ceased. A group who speak of a desire to 'bring the building back into full use for the benefit of every member of the local community' (MHG Mission Statement, November 2016 working version) have expressed an interest in managing this space on behalf of the council. However, as the empirics presented throughout this section demonstrate, this group do not know how to honour the public status of the building, and are not encouraged to do so by the officials they encounter. Rather than being a criticism of those individuals, this is a pertinent indication of the limits within which asset transfer processes take place, and what it is possible for these processes to achieve given this context.

In this chapter I have shown that members of transfer bodies are attached to the idea of the public museum, an understanding which takes various forms, as well as materialises to different degrees. I conclude by highlighting the chapter's core findings.

7.5 Conclusions

This chapter has explored the meanings participants attached to the very idea of publicness and the public museum, demonstrating how maintaining public qualities becomes one of the main dilemmas facing asset transfer bodies. As signalled in the opening remarks, the chapter illustrates that the comment 'the publicness of public institutions…is something to be struggled over' (2006: 163) applies to members of transfer bodies and academics alike. However, loyalties to the idea of publicness do not necessarily translate into practical action. Likewise, a commitment to being 'public' can have limiting effects. I return to these arguments in the subsequent chapter as both points are important for understanding the nuances of museum asset transfer.

The chapter has also made an implicit argument for the utility of an ANT-inspired approach to theorising organisational change. Although, as elsewhere in the thesis, the distinctive vocabulary associated with this body of work is invisible in the text, the suggestion that action-orientated 'how' questions precede meaning-oriented 'why' questions has been helpful

in directing the inquiry towards how beliefs about a building's public nature influenced decision-making and action.

As the chapter shows, the process by which members of transfer bodies comprehend their situation and evaluate possible courses of action is influenced by a wide-ranging collection of actors, when understood as things which make a difference to which courses of action open up or are seen as possible (see 3.1.2). As indicated by Gray (2011, see Chapter 2), this is an aspect of museums about which we know very little. In this vein, this chapter has found that for the council officials at RBC it was, amongst other factors, the institutional biography of the museum that played a shaping role in how decisions about its future were made (7.2). In Ilkley, I demonstrated the way organisational routines and procedures of local authorities can influence how members of transfer bodies understand their role, as well as discouraging them to pursue courses of action which have the potential to bring forth new articulations of what it means to be a public space in a context where public subsidy has been removed, yet the public nature of the building resides (7.4). The research methodology has allowed exploration of how factors which tend to be subsumed under terms like 'organisational culture' or 'context' influence how decisions are made about museum futures.

From its examination of the tricky idea of 'publicness' it is clear that sustaining a mode of operation which is in some way 'public' is a dilemma inherent to the public sector generally but one which is aggravated by asset transfer. This is because transfer involves a double move of removing public subsidy whilst replacing the involvement of employees who are either experienced in public sector work or identify with the values characterising it (or both) with groups who bring with them different ethical commitments and work experience, all the while expecting such groups to adopt working practices which are 'public'. This pressure comes from the local authority itself and its methods (the need to evidence social benefit), as well as a seemingly shared belief amongst groups of this type of the need to honour a building's public nature. In the subsequent discussion chapter of this thesis, I reflect on the notion of accountability, which is directly linked to the public nature of museums and publicly-owned buildings, alongside other debates and insights arising from the thesis thus far.

Chapter 8
Museum Asset Transfers: Matters of Accountability and Contention

This chapter expands on the preceding four analytical chapters through the prism of two themes emerging from the empirics: accountabilities and debates. Building upon the discussion of 'publicness' in the previous chapter, Section 8.1 diagnoses the issue of accountability as a key tension intrinsic to the transfer of public buildings to other-than-public bodies. Section 8.2 demonstrates that transferring public museums to other-than-public bodies brings to the fore several critical issues regarding the public subsidy of culture. When a local authority responds to a set of circumstances such as the unprecedented budget cuts which frame this project, these decisions are informed by norms and ideas such as: what success means in the context of local authority museums, what a museum is at the local authority level and what publicly-funded museums are felt to be for. Section 8.2 discusses what the findings tell us about how these contentious topics are understood within the local authorities featured in this project.

8.1 Matters of Accountability

Gray captures why accountability is a definitive issue for public museums:

> 'There are multiple forms of accountability that can be identified in museums: accountability for the efficiency and effective working of each part of the museum workforce; accountability to the law on which museum functioning depends (Brown, 2014); accountability to those who hold the purse-strings – from boards of governors and/or trustees, to national and local governments and their elected representatives – and accountability to the communities and interests for whom the museum exists in the first place' (2015: 114, see also Gray 2011).

In museum studies, a small number of studies outline the multiple forms of accountability that museums live by (Carnegie and Wolnizer 1996; Gray 2011, 2015) or explore how such accountabilities are made sense of by practitioners as they go about their day-to-day practice (Hetherington 2003; Morse 2014: 93-103). Yet, as a relatively new context, how accountability figures in asset transfer is yet to be acknowledged. It could be argued that museums managed via asset transfer arrangements are partially removed from the accountability dynamics associated with (purely) public museums. This is because, as in the cases of Ford Green Hall and Manor House Museum & Art Gallery, the operation of these spaces is no longer supported via public money. Theoretically, those managing these spaces

may become less open to the scrutiny of others as a consequence of this shift in support. However, museum asset transfers involve a temporary change in management of a building and a collection to an other-than-public body, yet both the building and collection remain in public ownership, a state of affairs which complicates the question of accountability in this new context.

Nevertheless, the empirics suggest that transfer bodies saw themselves as accountable to a population beyond themselves for their decisions and results. In a generic sense, transfer bodies could be said to have taken fthe accountability dynamics associated with public museums. Yet, interviewees interpreted the matter of to whom accountability was owed differently and therefore had different ideas about how to attend to said commitments. I examine the different emphases present in empirical material relating to accountability in Section 8.1.1 to demonstrate that museum asset transfer is a distinct site where different enunciations of this important concept arise, indicating that transfer bodies bring with them different understandings of the museum's role, purpose and its relationship to the public.

Section 8.1.2 observes how public sector practitioners manage the relationship between the public nature of transferred buildings and the other-than-public organisations to whom their management is being transferred. Specifically, it shows that routine bureaucratic techniques are used as a way of assessing and managing the decisions and results achieved by transfer bodies. However, instead of reading these approaches as suspicious attempts to govern and control, I suggest they are demonstrative of a commitment to one of the thornier questions raised by asset transfer: what does it mean for public buildings to be managed by other-than-public bodies? Reflecting on how the local authorities who feature in this project respond to such questions is an important first step towards understanding what the move to other-than-public forms of management might mean for the status of public museum buildings. Although it is not clear what the long-term consequences of this shift might be, it is important to ask these questions given that the practice of museum asset transfer is a growing trend in the sector (MA 2017: 10), as well as because existing studies on asset transfer focus on generic topics such as organisational learning (Findlay-King et al. 2017) rather than topics such as accountability which have specific importance in public sector contexts.

8.1.1 Asset Transfer Bodies: reappraising accountabilities

Members of transfer bodies identified strongly with the idea that they were answerable to a public beyond themselves, speaking of a desire to enact this responsibility to the public in

terms of how they made decisions about the strategic direction of the organisation, or how they were communicated, as the following quotations illustrate:

'The ownership is, we're captain of a ship but very much the direction of it has a big part to play with the people of the valley. What we don't want to do is crash it into the rocks so where you are faced with decisions that you have to make, it's about transparency, this is something we'd like to do but that might take us a little while to get there' (Operational Director, The Whitaker Group, interview March 2015)

'I'm recruiting increased membership so people can be a member of Ford Green Hall. We've got a charitable constitution which will allow members, so the board becomes more accountable to the membership, that's a slow process because it's not clear how that could work, but I think it's in the long-term benefit, people feel it is theirs, that kind of ownership…it creates mechanisms that allow a community to have a better ownership and an opportunity to pick the direction of travel of the museum' (FGH chair, interview January 2016)

A number of the Manor Group are talking about communications between the people in the room and the wider community. The thrust of the conversation is a concern that the dialogue between the council and the MHG 'doesn't become a closed book' because at the moment everything is 'going on behind closed doors' (fieldnotes, meeting of the NMHG, Ilkley December 2014)

'It sort of sounds grandiose but you have to let the people decide' (MHG member, interview January 2015).

These comments express the commitment of participants from each case-study to a state of being accountable. The extracts above all suggest that transfer bodies seek to make themselves, as Hetherington writes in his definition of accountability, 'open to scrutiny, questioning and audit by others' (2003: 107). Partly, the comments are symptomatic of the embryonic nature of the transfer bodies who, at the time of interview, had all recently taken on the management of museums and who had all done so as a reactive stance against proposed closure rather than as a part of a planned or proactive attempt to change museum provision in their areas. Discernible in each extract is how the practical pressures associated with asset transfer take priority over the desire of members of transfer bodies to develop and decide upon their plans for the museums in question via processes which attend to the accountability they felt was owed to the populations with a stake in the museum, a topic I come back to in the conclusion (9.5). However, the comments also point towards the different

emphases available within this very notion of 'the populations with a stake in the museum' and accountability more generally, as well as the degree of change required in order that the museums' organisational practices bring expressed commitments to being accountable into effect.

In the first extract, accountability is appraised as being owed to the 'people of the valley'. This is indicative of a form of accountability where the relationship with the population proximate to the museum is emphasised and although the boundaries of the notion of the 'people of the valley' is not specified, the implication here is that the stakeholders of the museum are the local population of the area in which the museum is located. However, how this commitment informs organisational practices of the museum is unclear as the use of the word 'transparency' indicates a specific way of demonstrating accountability via making decision-making processes visible which may or may not be accompanied by organisational mechanisms which seek to make these processes and the knowledge they are based on (see Chapter 4 and 5.2 for why this matters) penetrable by stakeholders beyond the museum. The second extract expresses an orientation towards owing accountability to the community, as well as a desire to introduce a membership model to whom the actions of the governing body would be answerable, an orientation discussed fully in the previous chapter (7.3). As I noted in Chapter 2, these orientations towards spatially bounded populations is a distinctive quality of local authority museums which has more-than-symbolic consequences when it alters which publics museum personnel seek to engage with through their work. For this thesis, we can note that these transfer bodies (see also 7.2) appraise their relationship as being with the local population or community, rather than other groups who may have a stake in the museum. This is important because it indicates the specific meaning concepts such as the 'public museum' and 'local authority museum' have in the context of asset transfer.

At this stage, it is too tentative to say whether or not these identifications of accountability form part of renewed organisational practices. However, these findings do complicate Magalhães and Trigo's (2016: 25) suggestion that the 'interests and aspirations of those with a direct stake in the public space, and who are organised enough to make that stake count' are privileged by asset transfer. Arguably, these findings do not counter this suggestion as it is clearly the case that museum management arrangements under asset transfer are self-selecting and thus privilege the involvement of 'those who are organised'. However, one may also argue that the orientation, and indeed anxiety, of these groups to fulfil the accountabilities they felt they owed to the public, whether figured as 'the people of the valley', 'members' or 'the community', indicate an expressed desire of 'those who are organised' to work on behalf

of others rather than in their own interests. Through these expressions of their commitment to maintaining or renewing the means by which these museums make themselves accountable, it is clear that these transfer bodies see accountability as something essential that they, through the organisational practices of their museums, must work towards and it is interesting to note that asset transfer bodies seek to make themselves and their commitments visible via such vocabularies.

However, the longitudinal observation of the group working in relation to Manor House Art Gallery & Museum demonstrates that the moment when a commitment to 'being accountable' is decided upon and written into an organisational document or expressed during an interview encounter may be evidence of an act of closure or evasion, just as much as it might be held up as indicative of a commitment to more 'accountable' means of working. Comparing the commitment to accountability visible in the third and fourth extracts above, with a moment from the fieldnotes during which the final text of a mission statement was agreed upon, is illustrative of this point:

> Today's meeting was uneventful, largely. We discussed potential funders and the maintenance the building might need and other procedural matters. The group are pushing ahead with their registration with the Charity Commission, a process which requires they write a mission statement. A working version was circulated which included the line 'we aim to bring the main building back into full use for the benefit of every member of the local community and visitors'. After some discussion, the group decide to omit the phrase 'every member' and replace it with 'community'. The feeling is that it gives them greater flexibility or, as one group member put it, 'it doesn't tie us down as much' (fieldnotes May 2016).

In this extract, the production of the mission statement and the writing in of a commitment to working in the interests of the 'local community and visitors' is a moment where the group orients themselves towards being answerable to the groups they name as their stakeholders. But, as the ethnographic observation evidences, it is also a moment where more specific commitments and accountabilities are evaded via their omission in the text. This decision, one might argue, is partly explained by the fact that it is unrealistic for the museum to be used by 'every member of the local community and visitors'. However, and this is a point which arises from the ethnographic observation of the group, the minor edit also serves to conclude a lively discussion on the subject of what it would mean for the group to embrace the commitment to working towards being used by, and open to scrutiny, questioning and contribution by such a broad set of interests as 'every member of the local community and

visitors' would represent. Clearly, from these empirics, there is a point to be made about the ambiguity of the language of accountability, leading to the conclusion that research which explores organisational practices arising out of commitments to making museums more 'open' and 'accountable' rather than organisational expressions of such commitments may be a more productive means to understanding whether asset transfer changes accountability dynamics in practice. But, more importantly for the focus on asset transfer, this discussion indicates a strong commitment amongst the three transfer bodies to developing working practices aligned with what appears to be a deeply felt commitment to being accountable to publics beyond themselves. An important dimension in these empirics is that these commitments appeared to be significant motivating ideals, prompting reflection and to a lesser extent given the timeframe at which these empirics were generated, action amongst participants, thus indicating the desire of transfer bodies to continue to operate museums in a way which is sympathetic to their public character. In the context of asset transfer however, as the next section illustrates, technocratic versions of these commitments are assigned to transfer bodies by local authorities, as well as being part of the ethics or values participants bring with them to this work.

8.1.2 Asset Owning Bodies: legislative and ethical accountabilities

Transfer bodies do not purchase museum buildings from local authorities outright. Rather, the local authority remains the legal owner and landlord of the building, with transfer bodies leasing the premises for terms of varying lengths. As such, this is a discussion about accountability relations between transfer bodies and local authorities that is also attentive to the way public sector practitioners are accountable to legislative requirements, as well as to ethical ideas about the way public assets should function and the benefits they should deliver.

As I observed in the case of Ford Green Hall, public sector practitioners involved in asset transfer may apply monitoring practices to transfer bodies to ensure transfer bodies deliver certain outcomes and targets. These deliverables are part of the terms of the lease and can result in termination of the lease if unmet.[32] At the time of writing, no formal arrangement has been made for Manor House Art Gallery & Museum and my observations indicate that the transfer body would be granted a lease with similar agreed targets or outcomes attached. In both cases, the use of monitoring practices arises out of a legislative need for transfer bodies to evidence that the service they are delivering delivers economic, social or environmental

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[32] Internal document

benefits in order to justify the subsidised rent and rates they receive from the local authority that would not be available to a commercial for-profit operator (see 2.1.4).

Arising out of this, as a slight aside, it is important to point out that given the continued involvement of the local authority, via these forms of monitoring and the representation of the authority on the boards of transfer bodies, as observed in the case of The Whitaker, I would argue that museum asset transfers are distinct from independent museums.[33] It is important to recognise this because, as the previous discussions on accountability and publicness both emphasise, museum asset transfers result in a change of management personnel and support infrastructure but they appear to result in the enrolment of new managers who are committed to maintaining the public quality of the museum, and to continue to operate it in a way which is sympathetic to the values they associate with museums (both buildings and collections) owned by the local authority as public assets.

To return to the use of monitoring mechanisms in the formalisation of arrangements between transfer bodies and local authorities, I want to argue that the use of these techniques flows directly out of their status as public assets and the accountability public sector practitioners feel towards the ethical codes and values associated with the public sector generally. This line of analysis is distinct from the majority of literature on the use of audit and monitoring practices in the context of contractual relationships between voluntary organisations and local authorities where a language of control and imposition dominates (Keevers et al. 2012; Keevers and Abuodaha 2012; Harlock 2012; Milbourne 2013; Lowe and Wilson 2015). Although the question of what it means to be asked to deliver public benefits whilst simultaneously being cut loose from public infrastructures of support (both financial and otherwise) remains open, considering that one of the objectives of this study was to understand how public sector practitioners were influenced by the public nature of these buildings in their approach to asset transfer, it is important to acknowledge the multiple rationales informing the use of such monitoring techniques, as well as the specifics of their content.

In both cases where monitoring was in use or planned to be used, phrases such as 'the benefit should come back to the public' (BMDC Strategic Director of Regeneration and Culture, interview July 2015) or 'whatever they do, it's got to be for the benefit of the community' (SoTCC Voluntary Sector Policy and Strategy Officer, interview March 2015) often cropped

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[33] A small number of independent museums lease buildings from local authorities. These arrangements pre-date asset transfer legislation so are not discussed in this thesis.

up as justification of use. Bureaucracy functions here to ensure publicly-owned buildings and organisations receiving support from public bodies (through rate relief and peppercorn rents) function according to norms associated with the public sector and are thus partly reflective of the public responsibilities of council personnel (see du Gay 2000, 2007).

Nevertheless, the specific way local authorities attempted to assure transfer bodies operated 'for the benefit of' the public was rudimentary. For reasons of confidentiality I am unable to present the content of these monitoring regimes in the thesis. However, expanding on the observations made in previous chapters relating to monitoring in Stoke-on-Trent (5.1 and 6.1) and how it looks set to work in Ilkley (7.4), one might argue that discussion of what it means for an other-than-public transfer body to be accountable to the public nature of a building was an aspect of discussions between local authorities and transfer bodies that appeared to be neglected. Whilst these are difficult issues, given the scale of the responsibilities being transferred, and the extent with which transfer bodies appear to identify with the values associated with the public nature of these museum buildings, opportunities for discussion of what terms such as 'public benefit' and 'public accountability' denote could enable these embryonic forms of museum management to engage in organisational practices which express more fully their commitments to ways of being accountable, in its various guises. At present, local authorities appear to rely on monitoring to communicate the values and qualities they wish to see expressed in the practices of transfer bodies, an approach which downplays the significance of these qualities for both parties, as well as minimises opportunities for new articulations of these terms to arise out of discussions of these concepts.

The means via which public sector practitioners observe the accountability they owe to legislative frameworks and professional ethics matters because monitoring regimes may mediate organisational activity in ways which go beyond the intention of their author (Hull 2012: 134; Brereton and Temple 1999; Keevers et al. 2012, see also 2.1.1, 3.1). Whilst it is too tentative for this thesis to say whether these techniques affect the priorities pursued by asset transfer bodies, academic analyses of the influence of auditing practices associated with the private sector, a presence in public administration since the 1980s, note how the requirements of performance management override a concern with 'procedural integrity' (Pratchett and Wingfield 1994: 34, cited in Brereton and Temple 1999: 460). In other words, provided that objectives are fulfilled, the relationships cultivated and other linked impacts are secondary. This is important because it places a large amount of discretion in the hands of asset transfer bodies with regard to how they go about their work. So, although Ford Green Hall represents a case of asset transfer whereby an individual who brings an explicit ethical

orientation to his work which is befitting of a public asset (see 7.3), the scrutiny of 'public benefits' via technocratic accountability mechanisms leaves significant questions such as how decisions are made and who is involved (see Graham 2016) open to interpretation.

These two sections have highlighted the multiple forms of accountability associated with museum asset transfer, noting how accountability relations are managed between local authorities and transfer bodies, as well as how commitments to accountabilities may be read as moments of commitment and closure. In the next part of the chapter, I change focus to consider three matters of contention often in the background of discussions on subsidised forms of culture which are accentuated by asset transfer.

8.2 Matters of contention

The aim of this section is to consider some of the organisational thinking associated with museum provision in the local authority environment. Drawing on the compositional thinking associated with ANT, where the focus is on opening up organisations, technologies and explanatory terms to observe the specific interactions, relationships and actors which they comprise, this research reminds us of the entrenched modes of thought and premises informing museum provision at this level. Whereas the previous four chapters analysed empirical material relating to the granular detail of asset transfer in relation to the specified research objectives, this section discusses key issues which arose out of the empirics, specifically those which informed how decisions were made about museum provision in the current financial context.

Researching the process of asset transfer has meant the research came into contact with local authority departments and their associated thinking and routines which inform museum provision and how decisions about it are made in a context of reduced public subsidy. As a result, this discussion enriches our understanding of local authority museum provision by contributing empirical material relating to stakeholders who are often invisible in museum studies which tends to foreground the perceptions and experiences of museum staff and audiences, namely members of asset transfer bodies with little to no knowledge of museums (aside from the experiential knowledge of living in proximity to one or being a visitor) and council officials who make decisions about museums but are not museum professionals.

This section explores three questions in turn:

- At the local authority level, what is understood by the term 'museum' and does this view fit in with public perceptions?

- How is a success currently conceived of within these local authority environments and with what consequences for local museum provision?
- In the contemporary climate of a contracting public sector budget for museums, are we witnessing a prioritisation of one type of museum provision over another?

Although this discussion is rooted in the empirical findings, the questions raised here are transferrable to other settings.

8.2.1 What is a museum?

The scale of local authority museum provision is undergoing significant change. Recent data from the MA illustrates 64 museum closures in the UK since 2010 and 'an ongoing trend among local authority museums to transfer operations outside council control' (MA 2017: 10). As such, the observations of this research add detail to what is currently a limited picture of the reasoning informing how decisions are made at the level of local authority museums. Its observations of how local authority asset management teams view museums are of benefit here, demonstrating that between different departments there are a variety of responses to the question which titles this section: what is a museum? As Chapter 4 discussed, departments beyond the museum service are responsible for decision-making about museums. Therefore, how an asset manager or a strategic director would answer this seemingly basic question provides useful insight into how museums are understood by decision makers. While any attempt to generalise between the local authorities who feature in this study and those elsewhere should be approached with caution, frameworks for asset management are issued by central government (i.e. DCLG 2008) so it is reasonable to suggest that these observations on asset management thinking about museums may be present in other local authorities as well as those who feature here.

At the level of local authority asset management, buildings are temporarily home to the museum service but are not considered museums as fact. There is a separation between the museum service and the building as the service is the collection and activities facilitating access to it whereas the building is a structure housing said activity. In other words, buildings become museums when a museum role is assigned to them by a local authority. However, because buildings are owned and managed by asset management, not the museums service, it is the departmental priorities of asset managers that dominate decisions about museum futures (see Chapter 4-5). Although the final decision will often involve individuals responsible for the political function of the local authority because stories about museum provision are widely

reported and gain traction with voters, the options they choose from are provided by asset management officers, demonstrating the influence of departmental reasoning on decisions about museums. Drawing attention to this is important as prioritising museum services, as an output that is moveable and not entwined with the built environment, neglects to acknowledge where the full range of values generated by museums emanate from.

Asset managers focus on capitalising on the potential value of the building. This may be via sale on the open market or as commercial space for rental, both options which generate income which can then be redistributed to other areas for which the council is responsible. This raises the question of whether closing museum buildings in order to sell can be held up as a socially motivated move towards the funding of more extensive public services in areas of deprivation. In making such decisions, officers prioritise delivering a quality museum service which means that if said service can be delivered to a reasonable standard from fewer buildings, surplus buildings are no longer thought of as museums but as assets to be capitalised upon.

However, it could also be argued that for some, the benefits of museums emanate from their built form rather than the activities and collections they house (see Macleod 2013; Jones and Macleod 2016). Indeed, the 'physical presence' of museums may produce effects such as 'national and civic identity and pride' (Macdonald 2003: 11), an effect arising from interactions between an 'assemblage of people, material and practices' in which the building may, for some, play a constitutive role (Jones and Macleod 2016: 208). Seen in this light, the reasoning informing the separation of museum service from museum building may misrecognise where value is located in museums and what it is about museums that people appreciate.

The data from this study suggests is that for local authority personal, the service and its success was the priority. Yet members of transfer bodies were concerned with perpetuating a museum for their area which housed objects originating from there and played host to visits that have become a rite of passage for people born in certain geographies (see Chapter 7). To think of museums as a portable activity is to disregard how the physical presence of the museum and its built infrastructure is intertwined in the benefits and effects produced by the museum, especially for proximate populations. The question of the meanings and values people attach to the experience of visiting museums has been the subject of several studies whilst the question of the value people attach to their existence is explored less often (cf.

Usherwood et al. 2005a, 2005b; Britain Thinks 2013; Bandelli and Konijn 2015). These issues are accentuated when a museum is threated with closure, and the motivations of asset transfer groups give us an insight into what it is about these local authority museums that is valued.

What is more, this reasoning hints at a potential future where the provision of public museum space and the scale of public museum infrastructure is vastly reduced. This quotation from the director of the Science Museum Group in response to an article criticising the Group's proposal to close one of its museum branches should government cuts go ahead is a pertinent example of this logic:

> 'The reason for cutting one museum outright is that I would rather have three world-class museums than four mediocre museums' (Blatchford, cited in Financial Times 2013).

The assumption here is that the benefits generated by world-class museums, as well as who benefits, are being prioritised over and above those generated by mediocre museums. This seeming prioritisation of service excellence over service spread is a cause for concern given that previous research demonstrates the importance of distance to venue in determining engagement with culture (Brook 2016). What is more, the judgement as to what we might mean by 'mediocre' or 'world-class' in this context is the proviso of organisational actors, practices and techniques, as we saw in relation to the language of 'underperformance' and 'failing' museums in Chapter 4. Tracing the specific reasoning undergirding organisational modes of thinking about museums, particularly on rudimentary questions like 'what is a museum', contributes to and draws out the practical implications of the logics governing decision making about museum provision at the local authority level. Within local authorities, given the influence of asset management thinking and practices, the notion that a building might have 'museum' vested into its fabric as an innate quality is not credible. Of course, buildings are assigned roles by people whether this is their makers or owners and use is subject to change. However, given the extended periods that certain buildings have spent as museums, many have become important features in the social and cultural fabric of places such that their role as museums is perceived as a fait accompli. What this means is that the proposition that removing a buildings' museum service delivery function, a decision taken by the council, is the same as bringing about a switch in the buildings' identity, from 'museum' to 'asset' or 'site' holds sway for asset managers who perceive museums as portable services. However, this proposition does appear to neglect other ways of envisaging what it means to

be a museum, and whether buildings have a role which extends beyond being an inconsequential container where museum-work takes place. What emerges from these findings is the highly particular understandings of museums present at local authority level, indicating that this is a productive environment for research because it produces findings which pertain to local authorities which are inapplicable to other museum types. For example, whilst national museums undergo iterative expansion, the idea that a national museum's activities are portable would be considered untenable. Furthermore, the ramifications of this mode of thinking for the scale and scope of local authority museum provision should the current financial circumstances remain unchanged or worsen raise significant question about the accessibility of cultural experience, and the purpose museums may fulfil in the future. The next two sections continue this line of thought by considering the rationales for cultural provision, and how its role and purpose was understood in the case-studies.

8.2.2 Re-thinking the criteria for success

Chapter 4 discussed the evidence and attendant valuation frameworks on which decisions about how to deliver cuts to museum provision were based. To expand this analysis, and to draw further the empirics, I highlight the precedence given to the continuous improvement of museum services at the expense of individual museum sites. These individual sites are removed from local authority museum portfolios as they do not present clear opportunities to succeed in the terms required at the present time. Questions of how success is conceived of are paramount when the ability of a museum to succeed according to certain criteria influence whether they continue to receive public subsidy and other support. Furthermore, when decisions about public subsidy proceed along these lines, there are consequences for the scale of local public cultural ecologies and the accessibility of the kind of cultural experience available in public museums. As the current government appear to be committed to austerity policies despite changing social attitudes to public spending (NatCen BSA 2017: no pagination), validating claims that the contemporary scenario represents a 'new normal' for public sector spending, it is necessary to acknowledge how these decisions are made and with what consequences for the future of museum provision at the local authority level.

Both BMDC and SoTCC, local authorities which have responsibility for several museum sites, appeared to prioritise the further improvement of museum provision at preferred sites over and above the continued provision of museum spaces at current levels across all sites. Thus creating the conditions where individual site closures can be justified on the proviso that the service itself was improving. This comment captures this rationale succinctly:

'We'd set out very early on in 2011-12 that as the budgets were moving forward with reductions in staff and resources we were going to have to go from 7 museums and galleries to 4 and concentrate on a core offer from 4 sites…it's instinct really, I didn't feel that this site [the Manor House Art Gallery & Museum] was ready to go forward for a major capital investment…' (BMDC Museums and Galleries Manager, interview February 2014)

This prioritisation is enabled by the separation of museums into 'services' and 'delivery sites', a distinction I noted in Chapter 4 (4.4) and elaborate in the next section. The significant suggestion here is that it is instinctive to prioritise the improvement, via investment, in a smaller number of museums at the expense of the survival of the full number of museum buildings owned by the authority and previously accessible by the public. As discussed in Chapter 4 (4.3), within the context of the local authorities who feature in this study, improvement meant an ability to house commercial activity and market-based activities where money is exchanged.

The result of prioritising this form of success for museum is that local authority museum portfolios are divided into those museums sites which have the capacity to success/improve along commercial lines and those which do not. Linked to this, one could argue that there are museums which are predisposed to qualify for continued public support and those which are vulnerable to being cut. Although transfer bodies may achieve positive outcomes for museums (albeit remaining unclear who the beneficiaries of these changes are beyond the local authorities who achieve their budget savings), the sustainability of other-than-public forms of museum management is uncertain because continual public subsidy has been removed, indicating that museums managed under transfer are more likely to close than those managed in-house. Likewise, although this study explored local authorities where an attempt to find other operators for the discarded museums has been made, several local authorities do not explore the transfer option. All this points towards an environment where the standards for success predispose museums of certain types as vulnerable to transfer or closure, with associated consequences for museum provision.

It is possible to counter this argument by reference to the financial circumstances facing local authorities. One could say that we cannot criticise local authorities for closing individual sites where it is a last resort in circumstances where interviewees had done all they can with a 'salami slicing approach' (BMDC Museums and Galleries Manager, interview February 2014). Yet, the interview data, as evidenced in the quote above, did suggest that investment was taking place, albeit funded through external grants (HLF capital grants cannot be spent on

direct running costs, though other project-based grants can) in Stoke-on-Trent and Bradford. As such, improvement is secured for the 'core' museum service at the expense of 'non-core' museum spaces. Whilst improvements of this nature may enable local authorities to generate additional income, they may not be in keeping with what local populations desire of or need from their museums. Likewise, although it is worth highlighting that local authorities are political organisations whose elected representatives are likely to take decisions and support initiatives which bolster a positive self-image of the council, this partial explanation of why sustaining an image of thriving museum provision is important does not attend to its consequences for museum provision.

Significantly, adopting an approach based on continuous improvement, despite the challenging financial settlement facing local authorities, where improvement is understood as increasing visitor numbers, generating income and furthering opportunities for market-based exchanges to take place in the museum appears to be leading local authorities towards an approach where museum provision post-austerity is divided between survivors and casualties of the cuts. In other words, where the future of individual museums is predicated on whether their continued operation is good business sense, it is inevitable that smaller museums of the sort featuring in this study will close, or be proposed for 'alternative' forms of management. Where the goal is income-generation, sites in city centres, affluent communities or popular tourist destinations will continue to receive public subsidy as they provide a better return-on-investment, whereas smaller venues out-of-town will not.

Whilst a temporary lowering of ambitions could be proposed as a means to avoiding the long-term loss of museums, as budgets for museum provision seem unlikely to return to pre-2010 levels, it is challenging to model alternative scenarios which would maintain museum provision across all sites. However, should local authority budget reductions continue to necessitate cuts to museums, the consequences of coping with the cuts through approaches which divide museum services into survivors and casualties must be acknowledged. For example, if we posit that proximity of a museum is a determinant factor for whether certain socio-economic groups visit museums or not, then focusing on fewer-but-better museums could be problematic for those concerned with equality of cultural access. As contemporary choices about public museums have permanent consequences for museum provision, which will be particularly pronounced in areas without DCMS-sponsored museums, the priorities and forms of success pursued by different local authorities in relation to their museums matter, as following on from this are different configurations of who museums exist for.

The next section maintains a related focus, moving from considering the rationales informing decisions about the scale of museum provision to those influencing which types of museum are prioritised.

8.2.3 What is publicly-funded culture for?

In previous work on cultural value, as in how we measure the effects of cultural experience, several authors have shown how the 'seeming transparency of numeric data as a means of assessing performance' and value (O'Brien 2013: 71) is called up to repackage political decisions as technical ones. Decisions with an ideological basis are claimed to be based on 'objective' measures and 'rational' calculation frameworks (see also Hesmondhalgh et al. 2015; O'Brien 2013). This characteristic was heavily present in the data discussed in Chapter 4 where we saw how decisions about which museums to continue funding which drew on political or normative ideas were presented (externally, but also within the councils) as straightforward. In Chapter 4, I made a point of describing the information and logics on which these decisions were made. Here I instead explore the normative bases to these decisions to show how decisions about how to allocate cultural spending at the local level are indicative of value judgements as to what type of public culture ought to be supported. In making this argument, I do not wish to suggest that these normative judgements arose out of the contemporary austerity moment. From what we already know about the history of the assumptions about cultural provision, instrumentalist rationales have been present since the Victorian period (Mason 2004). However, the decisions necessitated by spending cuts, I would argue, are expressive of the rationales for public cultural provision which hold most sway with decision-makers. To make this argument I undertake a comparative analysis of how the role and purpose of museum provision was understood in two case-studies (The Whitaker and Ford Green Hall). In this analysis, I show how local authorities draw on different logics and ideas to frame their decisions about how to allocate cultural spending. I argue that decisions about museum closure reveal distinct responses to the question, what is publicly-funded culture for? This analysis offers, through its discussion of the assumptions undergirding contemporaneous decisions about cultural spending, a contribution to our understanding of how top-level discourses around cultural provision and why it merits public subsidy, a topic which is frequently the subject of academic analysis (Garnham 2005; Mason 2004), play out on the ground.

A straightforward response to the question of 'what is local authority cultural provision for?' was discernible in Stoke-on-Trent with the case of Ford Green Hall because this was a case

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where resources were allocated away from one museum to enable the continued support of another. To briefly repeat the findings reported in Chapter 4, the purpose of investment in cultural provision here was very much couched in a language of tourism with museum provision called upon as part of an effort to positioning the city centre as a destination for visitors to the area.[34] Museums such as Ford Green Hall which did not 'fit' into this framing were viewed as lacking in potential because decision-makers could not see how they would yield economic benefits or attract tourists. Sites which were an obvious fit with council-wide objectives to stimulate growth for the region via tourist spending and attracting investment of private capital relating to tourism and the creative industries were prioritised over and above those spaces facilitating social activity for groups which tended to be formed of individuals from poorer backgrounds. Although it need not be the case that success in the manner of commercial activity supplants other outcomes, the rationales I encountered in Stoke-on-Trent appeared to suggest the prioritisation of one over the other, which is significant given that this museum service appeared to comprise museums of distinctive types and functionalities. While these observations are specific to this case, it is potentially transferrable to other local authority museum services.

We should not be surprised that the governing bodies who fund museums desire that they function in a way which meets certain pre-set objectives. In an area, such as Stoke-on-Trent, using public investment in museums or tourism strategies to attract private investment cannot be criticised or claimed as straightforwardly problematic. As Cameron and Coaffee (2005) remark in relation to culture-led regeneration in Gateshead, local authorities operating in areas burdened with rapid de-industrialisation are unable to invest in infrastructure or social architecture themselves because of central government policies which restrain the local state are, as such, 'obliged to court the private sector' (ibid: 45) to improve employment opportunities or housing provision for their populations. These observations are directly relevant to the circumstances officers at SoTCC operate within which make it difficult to claim the prioritisation of museum sites which fit a regeneration narrative attractive to private investors and commercial capital as 'the wrong approach'. However, if spending on culture by local authorities is to become solely about gains which can be reduced to financial metrics then there needs to be an alternative way of supporting the efforts of organisations operating museums which do not deliver such benefits. Otherwise, inequality in access to museums of a certain type will prevail. In a context where museums of a certain type are considered

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[34] For accuracy, Stoke-on-Trent is formed of six towns meaning it does not have a city centre in the conventional sense. Hanley is where the shops and bus station are, as well as being where the Potteries Museum and Art Gallery is located. It is where people would be going if they said 'town'.

appropriate for transfer, the danger is for only those areas which are home to people who can meet the time, resource and capacity demands of managing ex local authority museums to have access to public spaces of this type. This ties in with well-rehearsed objections to the idea of delegating responsibility for decisions or service delivery to actors beyond the state on the grounds of equity issues and the uneven capacities of individuals to undertake the activities necessary to accomplish asset transfer (see Stoker 2006).

The rationale for maintaining a degree of cultural spending in Rossendale was markedly different from what I have just described of Stoke-on-Trent. Some matters of context are important here for RBC is a lower-tier local authority with less responsibilities than a unitary authority such as SoTCC and significantly less pressure on its resources. However, for our purposes, what is most relevant is the difference in how the purpose of the museum service was understood by local authority decision-makers. In Rossendale, this was constructed within a narrative where cultural provision's civic purposes came to the fore. Claiming a civic role for the museum, as I articulated fully in Chapter 7 (7.2), utilises the museum in the interests of propagating ideas of distinctive local place-based identities, whilst drawing on these narratives to promote feelings of communal belonging, unity and shared purpose (Philo et al. 2015; Collins 2016). In Chapter 7, I showed how this provided a strong foundation on which the local authority reclaimed their role as supporters of the municipal museum. Although members of the transfer body were more likely to be upfront and explicit about this sense of purpose, a commitment to cultural provision as a key responsibility and aspiration of local government was discernible in the narratives of key decision makers, albeit in subtler ways. Whilst council officials cited regeneration as one of their objectives for the museum, this was accompanied by a desire to maintain what was left of the area's civic architecture because of the impact of the museum on the lives of people living in the area, indicating that commitments to the continued allocation of resources to cultural provision can be more nuanced and locally-specific than phrases such as 'cultural regeneration' or 'culture as a tool for tourism' would suggest.

The interview transcripts from key decision makers in Rossendale contained evidence that, in this case, the continued subsidy of museum provision was partly based on the hope that the museum would contribute to the regeneration of the area through increases to business investment. However, this was by no means the only rationale for the decision to allocate a portion of the council's limited budget to ensure the continued provision of a museum for the town. Equally perceptible in the transcripts was the belief that it was the responsibility of the local authority to support cultural provision on the grounds of accessibility, with continued

support justified by reference to the comparative lack of cultural activity available in the area. In the interview, the leader of the Council, explained the importance of the museum for people living in the area: 'it's somewhere lovely to come isn't it, to spend time…there isn't a lot [here] to begin with you know and sometimes I think that…I think it's an important thing for us [the Council] to do for the residents of the Borough' (interview July 2015). Here, the closure of the museum is considered in terms of its impact on the leisure routines of residents, and the council's role is described as the body who is responsible for ensuring that cultural experiences of the sort facilitated by the museum continue to count as part of those routines. These are not timid ways to think about the role of the museum but are potent in a contemporary context where austerity policies hamper the ability of local authorities of certain scales and in particular geographies to frame their museum provision in this way.

Philo et al. (2015: 363) put forward the notion of a 'politics of retrieval' to describe projects and activities which 'foster knowledge [of a previous political or social moment] in the face of ignorance, offering intuitions of other/better worlds in the face of neglect/dismissal'. In current political discourse, much effort is being made to draw a line under a past where large-scale public subsidy of services such as museums, libraries, community centres and public parks was the norm and a virtue. Maintaining commitment to spending on cultural provision, which is discretionary in England, and publicly linking this decision to the late nineteenth century, a moment where local government was emboldened by taking responsibility for shaping the environment in the interests of its population (see Hill 2005: 20-36), is important because it goes against a narrative of natural or necessary contraction of local government largesse. Hence, whilst these framings of public museum provision using language where the council provides such spaces and experiences for the residents of an area as part of their obligation as the 'authority' can be claimed as politically expedient 'historical referencing' (Mason 2004: 54) or as paternalism (the negative framing of which serves political interests) in my view these rationales and statements of purpose should also be held up as an example of the relevance of these ideas for contemporary officials. In a moment where ideas of museum provision as a social good are challenged by central government framings, and public sector retrenchment, acknowledging the relevance of such ideas is important if we are to understand the basis on which decisions about cultural spending are made in situ. What this comparative discussion highlights it the importance of paying attention to how the purpose of museums is narrated by decision-makers. However, this is not to suggest that councils who adopt a different framing or rationales be denigrated: the contemporary context and the relationship between central-local government make it difficult for local authorities to make

their ambitions manifest. The next section by way of closing the chapter briefly summarises this section's key observations.

8.3 Summary

This chapter has expanded upon the contributions of the previous analytical chapters through two key themes: matters of accountability and contention. Different interpretations and practices of accountabilities were investigated in the first part (8.1) and a number of foundational debates were reflected upon in the second part (8.2).

In Section 8.1, I picked up on the idea of accountabilities as it was a key theme arising from the empirics, and appears to be one of asset transfers central ambiguities. The relations of accountability associated with asset transfer are interesting because asset transfer bodies are accountable to the same exogenous demands as local authorities, although asset transfer bodies are also accountable to an additional demand, the contract between them and the council. To add to this complexity, local authorities – both as legal owners of these buildings and the collections that they may continue to house and as their perceived guardians – retain the ultimate accountability for the activities and outputs of transfer bodies, a task for which they are accountable to the public. The focus of my discussion in Chapter 7 (esp. 7.4) was to show that participants continue to identify with the idea of owing accountability to the public, yet it appears that asset transfer bodies do not know how to bring that commitment into effect in the context of an asset transfer while local authorities rely on contractual mechanisms and monitoring procedures as evidence that they are enacting their accountability to the public. It appears that one of the key factors that people find themselves engaging in and processing as they make sense of asset transfer is how public accountability can be secured in this novel context, indicating that accountability, how it is felt and practiced by organisational actors, and how it is understood by external stakeholders is an area for future inquiry. The core issue here was not whether asset transfer bodies are accountable or not, but how they engage with these accountabilities.

Thinking through core debates, accentuated by the cases of asset transfer and the reworking of resource allocation that are the subject of this study, was the focus of Section 8.2. In this section, I discussed questions regarding: the criteria by which a museum's performance or value is assessed, the definition of museums within local authorities and the rationales for public cultural provision. Although each section made a number of discrete arguments, the core argument arising from this discussion was that local authority decision-making about cultural provision reflects normative judgements and common-sense framings extant within

local authorities which this research into the stark choices being made about cultural spending foregrounds. It is not my intention to rehearse these findings or observations, yet I would like to make a final point regarding what we should make of these findings. Arising from the analysis presented in this section, we can conclude that local authorities favour certain roles for their museums (8.2.3) and desire they achieve certain outcomes (8.2.2, see also Chapter 4), as well as aiming for their continued improvement despite the severe budget cuts local authorities are shouldering.

Whilst I stand by these findings, I wish to suggest that they are read with an empathetic eye on the circumstances within which local authority personnel are operating. Favouring museums which fit within city branding strategies such as in Stoke-on-Trent is easy to critique, especially when presented alongside the empirics in Rossendale where a narrative of civic revival is hopeful and attractive. It is useful to foreground the multiple rationales available to councils as they seek to justify spending on culture, as it testifies to the variable environments in which museum provision exists. However, in doing so, we must recall that each of these local authorities is facing an unprecedented set of circumstances and constraints which curb their ability to think through the logics on which their decisions are made, a state of affairs which is accelerated by the dominance of extra-museum personnel in these decisions. The austerity programme advanced since 2010 has curbed the ability of local authorities to pursue objectives and priorities as they would have prior to these cuts. Thus, although it is important to acknowledge orthodoxies as they emerge, it is equally necessary to remain attentive to the circumstances which give rise to such developments.

In the final chapter of this thesis, I consider the contribution made by this research, and the thesis, to the literature concerning local authority museums, and public sector reform following the cuts, as well as to our knowledge of how decisions about resources are being made in this context. In the Conclusion, I reflect on the implications of the research for local authority personnel and members of transfer bodies pursuing this approach to museum management, as well as reporting on the practical outcomes of the research. The thesis then closes by pointing towards several avenues for further enquiry, whilst reflecting on the research as a whole.

Chapter 9
Conclusion

This chapter outlines the conclusions of the research, and the aspects of the study which represent an original contribution. I summarise the key findings in relation to the aims and objectives (9.1) and indicate how they contribute to the literature. As the research has employed a specific set of theoretical tools which guided the methods and analytical approach, the conclusion suggests that this approach, which aims to explore the organisational detail of museum practice, is useful for encouraging more grounded and attentive ways of investigating the museum (9.3). In addition to reflecting on the limitations of the study (9.4), and suggesting avenues for future enquiry (9.5), the conclusion also demonstrates how research findings have been used to inform two practical outcomes of the study (9.2.), evidencing its contribution to theory and practice.

9.1 Key findings: the research aims and objectives

The research project set out to answer the following question:

How and on what terms do other-than-public management arrangements for ex-local authority museums function, and how do members of transfer bodies and local government practitioners engage with their roles and responsibilities in relation to this task?

The research has five aims and a series of linked objectives, all of which are answered across the thesis.

Aim one: to analyse how and why particular museums were chosen for transfer and the local contexts in which these decisions occurred using ANT **(see Chapter 4 and 8).**

> Objective one: to identify who is involved in these decisions within local authorities.

> Objective two: to discuss the decision-making process within local authorities and the type of evidence/knowledge on which these decisions are based.

Elected representatives, senior council personnel and departments such as asset management, barring the museum service, make decisions about which museum asset transfers will be pursued. This indicates the importance of focusing on these actors in research that aims towards a fuller understanding of how decisions are made in relation to local authority cultural provision. Actors external to local authorities have limited agency to challenge these decisions, especially because certain forms of knowledge are considered legitimate

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(performance measurement, future cost analyses) whilst others are not (petitions, personal accounts of value).

Local authority organisational protocols give rise to an infrastructure of documentation. Documentation is constitutive of the contexts out of which decisions emerge. These documents are gatherings of ideas, information and judgements about possible courses of action around which organisational actors build their subsequent moves. By paying attention to the type of content they introduce into decision making environments, this research has highlighted how these documents figure in the working practices of professionals, indicating the utility of methodological approaches such as one informed by ANT which allow for the role of documents in human cognition and action to be foregrounded.

It was common for numerical data, specifically statistical ways of assessing the success or performance of a museum relative to others, to form the bases on which decisions were made about the museums featuring in this study. Academic debates on the logics informing decision making at the level of central government (Belfiore 2004; O'Brien 2013) illustrate how economic modes of assessment (e.g. cost-benefit analysis and contingent valuation) are used to 'present ideological decisions as merely technical exercises' (O'Brien 2013: 69). At the level of the local authorities who feature here, however, modes of assessment and the information they generate appear to be drawn upon as a matter of routine. Likewise, said decisions are also rooted in engrained assumptions about museums which can be loosely summarised as 'ideological' in character. However, an expanded understanding of local authority decision making rationales is afforded by replacing such shorthand with a more detailed and situated approach. The organisational assumptions informing said decisions are engrained yet made visible by the extremity of the financial circumstances which induce museum transfers. These assumptions are organisational rather than normative in character because it is not necessarily the case that they arise from the conscious embedding of human motivations into organisational practice. Instead, organisational practices contain assumptions which circulate and are reinforced through use. For example, the distinction between the museum as a service or space, discussed in Chapter 8 (Section 8.2.1).

Additionally, the empirics suggest that local authorities frame their spending on culture as investment rather than subsidy, resulting in decisions about investment which are based on the potential for return rather than need. Given the extremity of budget reductions, such an outcome is a matter of necessity as local authorities seek to reduce spending on all aspects of museum provision and increase the income generated. This represents a retreat from a core principle informing the public subsidy of museums: to support activities which would be

underprovided by the market otherwise. Two of the case studies are examples of continued support being assigned to museums which can generate a return on the authority's investment. Museums of certain types are predisposed to such objectives, indicating how the sway of mundane factors such as a museum's location and size in the designation of future public funding is altered by austerity. However, this is not always the case as ideas about museum provision and how it should function vary considerably from one local authority to the next.

Aim two: to detail the terms of these new management arrangements and the negotiation processes leading up to their implementation using ANT **(see Chapter 5 and 3: esp 3.1).**

> Objective one: to analyse the role of policy tools and legislative measures within the Localism Act 2011 and cognate initiatives encouraging the transfer of managerial responsibilities to organisations outside the public sector in the case-studies.

> Objective two: to explore the different types of management arrangement implemented and the influence transfer groups had on this.

Each case-study provided a different example of how museum asset transfer functions. Local authorities exercise discretion in how they formalise these arrangements. The finer points are significant because they affect the scale of responsibility transferred to transfer groups. Transfer groups were rarely able to shape the terms of the transfer and local authorities often impose contracts and monitoring procedures which were designed with larger professionalised voluntary sector organisations in mind.

Transfer bodies did not draw upon the legislative measures contained within The Localism Act 2011. Instead, museum asset transfer takes place within the legislative framework of CAT introduced by the Labour government (1997-2010). CATs are initiated by local authorities as an alternative to selling ex-service delivery buildings on the open market. The initiatives contained within The Localism Act (e.g. Community Right to Bid, Community Right to Challenge) provide a legislative framework which local interest groups could make use of in relation to museum buildings threatened with closure but groups are unlikely to do so due to limited awareness of these options among groups with an interest in the museum (i.e. Friends Of, campaign groups). What is more, to take advantage of the provisions of The Localism Act groups would have to have access to substantial financial resources. For example, should a museum building be listed as an asset of community value following nomination by a local group, said group is then granted a moratorium period to develop plans and raise funds to bid for the building. Not only would this figure be substantial, but groups do not have first refusal either. The use of these provisions, particularly the nomination of assets, has more potential as

a lobbying tool as groups may nominate assets to pre-empt a sale or as a reaction against a proposed sale. The nomination informs the local authority that any proposals relating to the building may be an object of contention.

The observation that CAT takes place in a layered policy environment has broader relevance for how we assess the policy context for museums, challenging conventional approaches which infer a bounded container or pre-established macrolevel of factors influencing museums. Amongst other factors, because the legislation and policies of previous governments remain in place when they are no longer in power (unless legislation is revoked or amended), initiatives of new administrations are layered on top of those of previous administrations. As such, understanding the 'policy context' pertaining to museums, especially at local authority level, requires a careful analytical approach which guards against premature contextualisation (and overcontextualisation) through its focus on the distinctiveness and discretionary nature by which policy contexts are assembled in individual cases.

Aim three: to examine the relationship between members of transfer bodies and the museum sector, as well as with the idea of 'museum work' itself **(see Chapter 6).**

> Objective one: to examine relationships between paid museum staff and members of transfer bodies.

> Objective two: to address how newly formed groups with minimal-to-no previous contact with professional museum work identify with their roles as museum workers.

> Objective three: to reflect on the potential of involving groups external to the museum sector in museum work to bring forth different ways of thinking about museum practice.

The financial and organisational context surrounding CAT limits relationships between local authority staff and members of transfer bodies. While officials recognised that groups would benefit from support, their priority was to achieve the transfer rather than to establish a collaborative way of working.

Sector-specific routines such as ACE's Accreditation Scheme circulate ideas about the priorities of museums as well as granting licence to certain people as qualified to make certain statements and influence decisions. In this study, this licencing was granted to suitably qualified professional staff. The requirements of being an Accredited Museum influence the content of interactions between local authority museum professionals and transfer bodies, as

well as produce distance between them. Such protocols have greater influence on groups who are inexperienced in museum work and have limited knowledge of its development.

An organisational practice such as this is one of the factors which lend 'experts' and 'expertise' the capacity to influence practice. Approaching these terms via ANT means that they must be empirically described and held up as effects of networks comprising social and non-social things. This is distinctive from previous work where the terms are used to explain practice and sometimes assumed, a priori, to influence practice in uniform ways.

Museum asset transfer is an opening for new entrants into museum work. New entrants may bring with them new ideas about how their respective museums can operate differently given the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of the areas where they are based. This is reinforced as transfer bodies appear to bring strong connections to and knowledge of places and populations. For example, transfer bodies may establish different type of relationships with audiences and other associational groups or trial unconventional collecting, charging or decision-making practices. To a degree, their lack of capacity to do so is partly an outcome of the financial circumstances they face. However, members of transfer bodies displayed a tendency towards disassociating from the identity of being a museum professional, believing this identity to be a necessary pre-cursor to making museological decisions. This disassociation had various roots but was bolstered by factors such as organisational protocols and local circumstance. This had impacts at various stages along the three trajectories of asset transfer explored in the research as members of transfer bodies deferred to professionals and their ways of knowing and/or defining museums. Where alternative means of managing museums is achieved, it is mainly in the form of maintaining the operation of museums rather than reconfiguring museum practices or priorities.

Aim four: to explore how members of transfer bodies and local authority personnel engage with their new roles and responsibilities **(see Chapter 7 and 8, esp. 8.1)**

> Objective one: to analyse how members of transfer bodies and local authority personnel make sense of their task.

> Objective two: to analyse links between commitments to the 'publicness' of museums and the effects of these loyalties on practice.

There is a lack of clarity to the local authority position on the roles and responsibilities expected of asset transfer groups. Groups struggle to determine the scope of the task or the type of contribution asked of them, raising questions such as: are they representatives of the

populations proximate to the museum or are they individuals with a personal interest? Is it their responsibility to seek the contribution of wider constituencies or will the local authority retain that role?

Local authority museums are considered as the responsibility of the local state, a political institution whose legitimacy comes from its ability to act in the public interest, meaning those operating local authority museums are accountable to the political actors in local authorities and the constituencies they represent. As museum asset transfer involves the transfer of public buildings and collections to other-than-public bodies, said bodies must wrestle with these conceptual tensions.

The move towards museum provision based on potential rather than need represents a diversion away from the principle of ensuring access through replacing a volatile market mechanism with the universality of state provision. As discussed in the Introduction, there is a distinction between the democratic rhetoric of the public museum, emphasising universal and equitable access, and the ardent promotion of non-state managed museums as reactive and adaptable to suit the specific preferences of different communities (variously defined). In rhetorical terms, then, there is a fundamental difference between a museum which remains the responsibility of the local authority and one which is devolved beyond this boundary, mainly due to the contrasting set of expectations associated with each. The findings presented in previous chapters, particularly with relation to the inability of local authorities to address the uneven capacities of individuals to undertake the tasks necessary for asset transfer demonstrate the potential of asset to transfer to exacerbate uneven distribution of museum provision.[35] Austerity has altered the ability of local authorities to perform the role of a guarantor of equity of access, at least in the conventional sense.[36] Awareness of the different principles informing the public image of local authority museums vis-à-vis museums whose relationship to the state is otherwise highlights the potential consequences of transfer. However, moving away from rhetoric, principle or policy statements, as this study has sought to do, is important to my aim of studying these foundational principles, and the extent to which they are being diminished or modified by contemporary conditions, proximately. As I argue in Chapters 7-8, principles and values-laden intentions often claimed as distinct to the public sector are also shared by members of transfer bodies, and were frequently cited as a

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[35] I make this point to highlight how the pursuit of asset transfer as a means to secure museum provision represents a diminished role for local government in attempting to level out access to culture. It is not my intention to affirm the reality of a Golden Age of perfectly equitable museum provision which austerity has destroyed.

[36] Equity of access can be secured via other means than bricks and mortar of course, yet the extent to which local authorities are pursuing such strategies was not investigated as part of this study.

core motivation informing their asset transfer activities. Although the alignment with principles of democratic access to culture claimed by interviewees can be unsettled by the further question of whether they would make similar efforts to maintain a museum for a community with which they would not identify, my suggestion would be that empirical work of the sort conducted for this study is instructive insofar as it builds a nuanced picture of the way transfer bodies interpret their actions as attempts to replicate a type of public museum provision akin to that which they feel a local authority ought to provide. The definition and realisation of ideas associated with publicness and state provision is a complex matter, as what these terms signify are analytically vague and their claims to distinctiveness contested, yet taking empirical material as the point of departure in an exploration of what these notions mean and how they are made manifest is a productive means to add further nuance to the speculative claim that what transfer bodies seek to provide is inherently different from the public sector.

Transfer bodies demonstrated a strong attachment to the 'publicness' of the museum in question, often citing maintaining this as a key motivation. Unlike council officials, who preferred to frame the building's 'publicness' in terms of accessibility, members of transfer bodies articulated a plurality of responses to the question of how the museum in question (as distinct from museums in general) could fulfil its public role. Across the cases, members of transfer bodies recognised that their operation of the museum could be viewed as demonstrating the viability of an approach to public space management with which they fundamentally disagreed but were doing out of a feeling of necessity.

Ideas about 'publicness' were not mere narrative but played out in the way members of transfer bodies approached their task. The same can be said of accountability for as Gray (2015) highlights, those responsible for museums must manage multiple relations of accountability (see also Morse 2014: 93-102). For transfer groups, however, feeling accountable to 'the public' and expressing fidelity to the idea of the public museum was sometimes an obstacle to activity which would have resulted in expanded public engagement during negotiations leading up to the transfer and in the work of museum governance following it. In some cases, feeling accountable to the public and an awareness of the museum's public nature was a negative experience given a lack of guidance as to how to fulfil those obligations.

A key issue for future debate is how museums can hold onto their 'publicness' while the context they operate within changes resulting in some cases in the withdrawal of public subsidy and direct public management (see Murray 2013; Newman 2007). Difficult issues

arise from museum asset transfer as groups attempt to balance their affinity to the building's 'publicness' all the while finding ways to generate sufficient revenue to replace public subsidy. The absence of open discussion of what it means for a museum to be public yet managed without public subsidy and by an other-than-public body in negotiations between council officials and transfer bodies observed in the case of the Manor House Art Gallery & Museum was a limitation (see 7.4) as groups dealt with their uncertainty by avoiding the issue.

Aim five: to assess what practical outcomes would be of benefit to members of transfer bodies.

> Objective one: to assess the extent to which members of transfer bodies access the resources available to them pertaining to asset transfer.

> Objective two: to work with relevant sector bodies to facilitate the production of further resources as appropriate.

Two relevant practical outcomes were identified as part of the research, the details of which are summarised in the next section.

9.2 Practical outcomes

One of the findings of this research is that council officers are persevering in supporting groups to the best of their abilities, yet as the circumstances they are working in dictate the level and type of support they can offer. Together with members of transfer bodies, particularly the Manor House Group whom I have followed for the duration of their transfer work, I identified that museum asset transfer would benefit from tailored support from national organisations. This would alleviate some of the pressure on council officers who cannot provide the level of support they would like whilst also establishing a clear map and set of pointers for groups considering museum asset transfer. A national network could be helpful in the future should this approach to museum management become more mainstream. Following conversations with colleagues at Arts Council England and the Association of Independent Museums, it was agreed that an online guide would be of benefit.

My research identified that for groups considering asset transfer the lack of specific documentation addressing the nuance of asset transfer in relation to ex-local authority museums was a problem. Although toolkits are available (Historic England 2015), participants did not identify with their content, often expressing frustration that online search

engines were not returning anything relevant to their circumstances. The guide will directly address these issues as although it will be written by the author, the scope of the document and the resources it will feature will be developed in collaboration with groups who participated in this study and others who have contacted the author in the duration to directly address this issue. The online guide will be published by the Association of Independent Museums in December 2017 and is funded by Arts Council England. Details of the guide are provided in the project proposal provided in Appendix F.

The guide aims to function as a roadmap whilst also translating several research findings into practical recommendations for future action. For example, Chapter 5 showed that museum asset transfer can be formalised using a variety of techniques, contractual and otherwise. Building on the argument that formal documentation and the circumstances surrounding its implementation affects asset transfer groups at practical (e.g. the extent of their financial responsibility) and personal (e.g. the type of relationship formed with officers) levels, the guide will establish a clear set of options to assist groups in making the case for proceeding with transfer arrangements where an even distribution of financial responsibilities is more likely. Similarly, Chapter 6 argued that encounters with organisational protocols can influence members of transfer bodies at a subjective level, affecting the extent to which participants saw themselves as capable of doing museum work. Likewise, when museum work is viewed as a profession requiring specialist knowledge and training, the extent to which groups feel confident to express and act upon their museological ambitions can be influenced by fleeting comments by experienced professionals. To address this, the guide will include clear guidance on basic matters such as the definition of museums because, as I showed in Chapter 6, it can be unclear who gets to make decisions in such matters. In this way, the guide demonstrates the benefit of exploring and describing situated processes of asset transfer in their detail as such an approach generates findings which can then be returned to the organisational context as precise recommendations or outcomes which directly address the empirical context.

It was with practical ways forward in mind that my involvement in the Museums Association's working group on 'Museums Facing Closure: Ethical and Legal Reflections' arose.[37] Together with colleagues from various sector bodies, this document takes stock of the financial circumstances facing governing bodies of museums and aims to provide information and reflections on the difficult problem of considering closure. As above, the contribution I made to this work arose directly from my research findings. Throughout the thesis, I have

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[37] This article gives an overview of the project: https://www.museumsassociation.org/news/07102016-working-group-museum-closure. Publication of the guide is planned for late 2017.

demonstrated that achieving museum asset transfer can position transfer groups in precarious circumstances. Whilst local authority staff may be under pressure to achieve the transfer (i.e. to transfer financial responsibility for the building outwith the council), this pressure is matched by the subsequent challenge transfer bodies face to 'keep [their] head above water' (FGH chair, interview January 2016) prior to transfer. By investigating museum asset transfer, this research provides an understanding of the composition of these groups. It illustrates that museum asset transfer can involve newly formed groups without resources, experience or organisational cushioning. Although it is too tentative for this research to say whether all instances of museum asset transfer involve groups of this type, several similarly embryonic groups have contacted me during this project indicating that asset transfer is tending to involve local interest groups who formalise for the transfer rather than pre-established organisations who take on the museum/building alongside other venues for which they have responsibility. This finding is relevant for local authority officers, particularly those working in asset management who may be used to dealing with professionalised organisations, because it emphasises that achieving the transfer is not synonymous with a successful transfer. For a transfer to succeed, groups must find ways to sustain their activities without public subsidy whilst establishing themselves as a governing body. The document makes plain the responsibilities that asset transfer involves and encourages staff considering transfer to take a long-term view.

Instead of presenting recommendations for local authority officers to give greater financial support when their circumstances do not allow for it, a critique of the structural barriers to enabling a broad demographic to engage with associational activity such as asset transfer (MacLeavy 2011) or a straightforward commentary on why asset transfer is challenging in the current political and economic circumstances (Findlay-King et al. 2017), the research has taken practical steps to contribute to projects or undertake activities which can provide future members of transfer bodies and local authority employees with a fuller set of resources to draw upon and use as they navigate the new terrain of museum management where transfer is involved.

These are the practical interventions made by the research. The next section summarises the implications of the study for the discipline of museum studies, highlighting the benefits of the methodology, as well as the need for further work where the definition and realisation of the museum's 'publicness' by individuals whose involvement with museums has changed as a consequence of austerity is investigated empirically.

9.3 Implications for research

Chapter 2 reviewed published material on local authority museums under two headings: organisational and institutional perspectives. This section sets out the potential of an approach which views the museum as both an organisation and an institution for the discipline of museum studies. Reference is made to the way these framings were used to inform the methodological and analytical approach of this thesis, as my argument focuses on the contribution of this study to expanding upon previous work and suggestions for method.

In using these vocabularies of organisation and institution I am echoing a considerable body of work within organisation studies and institutional theory (Scott 2008). This material and the analytical frameworks it provides have been omitted from this study in favour of a methodology informed by actor-network-theory which does much to inform the analysis, without providing a ready-made language or set of framings. The flexibility of this approach was felt to be apt considering that asset transfer, and its peoples and processes, were unexamined at the beginning of the study. As such, the characteristic openness of this approach was crucial in allowing insights and themes to emerge from the empirics. However, one of the implications of using this method has been to show that several of the questions raised by institutional theory and organisation studies (see Scott 2008: ix-x) are highly relevant to understanding why museums function in the way that they do, and the factors (social, material, ideational, cultural, rules, routines) influencing this. As such, future empirical work on museums which utilises the methods arising from actor-network-theory, could draw on the analytical framings, typologies and vocabularies of institutional theory and organisation studies to further inform the analysis. As this observation arose out of the study, the following discussion maintains its focus on what the framings of treating the museum as organisation and institution used in this study offer to the discipline, a framing I introduced in relation to existing literatures in Chapter 2.

It is often claimed that museums are unique, and they are in several ways – consider their commitment to preservation for posterity or their ambitions to be for everyone. Yet, museums are also organisations where people work. The interaction between visitors and the museum, and the social aspects of that visit is a fundamental branch of museum studies (e.g. Galani 2005), yet this detailed knowledge of what the visitor does in the museum is not complemented by an understanding of what the museum professional does during their day-to-day working lives. In contrast to other scholars whose ethnographic work with museum professionals deepens our understanding of the nuance and emotional quality of their work

(Geoghegan and Hess 2015; Munro 2013, 2014; Morse 2014), by organisational lens I mean to shift the focus away from the matter that we naturally associate with museums such as objects, storerooms, displays or relational practices like outreach or community engagement. This shift entails a move towards the mundane aspects of museum work.

In this work, staff come across processes and routines which are shown in this study to shape relationships, structure actions and circulate implicit logics, making them inherently political. This ambition to attend to the non-social aspects of museum work was informed by an engagement with the writings associated with actor-network-theory, particularly how these literatures sought to render visible the role of non-social things in the production of social ordering. Matters of context are crucial here, as is the use of the word shape or mediated in place of determined or any other term which implies that the ability to regulate is an intrinsic quality of an organisational practice. As I argue throughout this study, agency is a result of how people and things are arranged, and the contexts and settings in which they encounter one another. The importance of context means that analytical work must pay attention to how the routines associated with museum work and the people doing it interact, as well as to the way these interactions modify beliefs and indeed their actions. This approach enabled the research to generate new insights on the influence of organisational practices on members of transfer bodies, presented in Chapter 6.

Whilst these findings are distinct to the individual cases, the methodology used to generate them could be applied to other instances of museum practice. This method has the potential to produce new insights about individual case studies, responding to questions such as: what factors grant certain individuals granted license to make decisions about museums and who is excluded from this? In such instances, what are the consequences of this on behaviour and for how individual museums function? However, the method also illustrates how and through which materials macro-actors (factors often positioned as stable forces which act on the scene of museum practice in predictable ways) such as 'expertise', 'authority' and 'professional knowledge' come to place people in particular relationships to each other and to museums. In exploring their effects on museum practice and people, this approach complicates previous research which sometimes implies that these macro-actors are problematic in the same way and with the same effects across contexts, a suggestion that this thesis argues against, suggesting in its place a more nuanced, locally attentive approach to exploring the relationships between one museum's organisational features and the people who encounter them.

In their work, members of transfer bodies and council officers were influenced by the public nature of the museum. As I have discussed elsewhere, this is why I introduced the term 'other-than-public' as a way of describing the status of transfer bodies. These groups occupy a compromised and challenging position: their actions enable the local authority to decouple the museum from its position as part of a public infrastructure and, as these museums remain open and may, to a general visitor, appear unchanged, changes to how they are funded remain invisible. Public subsidy has been removed in most cases where museums are transferred beyond the council, yet this study has illustrated that maintaining the public character of these spaces is important for members of transfer bodies, for their emerging professional identity, and as a core ethical orientation in their practice. These dynamics arise because museums are part of an apparatus of public institutions, and their legitimacy as recipients of public money is tied to a discourse of publicness, a discourse where terms such as public interest, public benefit, common good and public involvement occupy a central role. Exploring how people define these crucial but contested terms, the obligations they believe they have taken on by participating in their operation, alongside how they are brought to bear in concrete moments of practice and decision-making informed the analysis in Chapters 7 and 8, and is suggested as an area where further research is necessary in 9.5. Bennett's work on the 'specific institutional properties' of museums (1995: 90-92) is developed by Graham (2012; 2017) whose empirical work provides important examples of how these institutional properties are experienced as dilemmas by professionals and groups. This is the type of work that focusing on museums as institutions could generate, and is particularly needed to understand how people and professionals whose involvement with public institutions has changed as a result of austerity adjudicate between the obligations, ethics and values they read into these spaces and the practical challenges they are confronted with as they seek to maintain the publicness of spaces which no longer receive public support. It is not only members of transfer bodies who must manage the need to generate income or make the museum available as a space for exchange with both the mission of the organisation and their personal and political commitments: organisational reform to the museum sector as a whole means that the institutional role of museums is changing in ways which are not yet fully understood.

The local authority museum, I would argue, represents a particularly fascinating and nuanced window onto public sector reform and recent moves to devolve responsibility for public services and spaces to groups outside the public sector. This is because, as public institutions *par excellence*, they condense the values we associate with the public sector such as accessibility, representativeness, inclusivity, a purposive orientation away from 'the market'

(see Newman 2007). Not only this, they are also places where historical agendas must be reconciled with contemporary circumstances. In their architectural form and due to the place they occupy in the public imaginary, local authority museums are outwardly expressive of a different social and political moment in a way that less visible, relational services such as youth work are not. As I hoped to illustrate in my discussion of the reclaiming of a civic role for local government, a role which it expresses through provision of resources like museums in Chapter 7, decisions about museum provision are spaces where the past, present and the future are negotiated and importantly, where the commitments of the past can be reclaimed or rejected. Hence, as participants in this research project suggested during interviews, and during the many meetings observed, how the *museum's* publicness can be secured and made manifest in a context where public subsidy may have been wholly or partly withdrawn is a critical question for members of transfer bodies and researchers alike. However, although there is certainly a role for purely theoretical work which expands on how museums in general might demonstrate what are currently a set of nebulous terms (publicness, public values, public ethics), this research suggests that cases of specific museums (hence the italics above) are valuable examples of how the museum's role and what it offers is worked through by practitioners engaged in real-life practice. In the contemporary moment of public sector retrenchment, local authority museums are a productive focus for enquiry into how concepts, values and ethics associated with public culture and the public sector more generally are being re-worked. This is because they offer variegated examples of response. Responses which this research argues emerge from the diverse institutional histories of local authority museums, as well as the many and various types of local authorities who own them, both in terms of their political persuasion and their resource capacity following the cuts. Whilst this thesis has much to offer to current knowledge of how local authority museums are changing as a consequence of austerity and makes multiple suggestions as to how our understanding of museums might be expanded, it is limited in ways that I now make explicit.

9.4 Limitations to the research

There are several voices and methods which do not feature in this study, omissions which I justified in Chapter 2. For example, a decision was made in relation to the participatory ethnography that group members who left during the process would not be interviewed, for reasons of time but equally because of a concern with maintaining good relationships with extant group members which may have been damaged by courting members who left on fraught terms. In this section, I focus on the limitations of the research actually conducted rather than what the research could have been.

This study has sought to present an account of how moves to other-than-public forms of management were experienced and interpreted by members of transfer bodies, and to a lesser extent local authority personnel. It is written from a position of concern about these moves, and thus aims to ask new questions and understand the significance of other-than-public forms of management for the groups involved, and for the public museum in general. As I justified in Chapter 3, the research design began with members of transfer bodies rather than local authority personnel and, as such, tells a story of museum asset transfer which is inflected with the perspectives of this group. This is both a strength and a weakness because it highlights the complexity of museum asset transfer as a proposition by emphasising how members of transfer bodies engage with the task, yet arguably quietens the fraught contexts local authority staff face as they struggle to cope with the cuts. Adopting this point of focus was necessary, for the reasons just summarised, and every attempt was made to situate the actions of local authority staff within a broader context. However, and this is particularly relevant to the participatory ethnography of the transfer group in Ilkley, the research has followed asset transfer groups as they navigate their relationship to the museum and the local authority. Both for reasons of research design, and matters of access, the study did not follow local authority personnel as they went about their day-to-day work. Rather, it takes an interest in local authority staff for their involvement in the museum only which potentially has the effect of abstracting their work from the wider context within which it sits.

In general, access (to interviews, documents, meetings) was an issue that I managed. For example, when elected members stated they would prefer to be interviewed after the transfer had been agreed it was possible to make the case for the value of collecting data on the process of transfer itself. However, it was not possible to gain access to several meetings relating to the proposed transfer of Manor House Art Gallery & Museum. For example, oftentimes when the council executive would meet to discuss the issue the meeting was public but was closed when the matter of the museum was being considered. As such, my findings relating to how decisions were made are based on descriptions of these meetings after the event narrated during interviews and analysis of document packs prepared for attendees at these meetings. What this means is that the research findings regarding how decisions are made and the information these decisions are based on emphasises practical information and in-built value judgements, likely omitting considerations arising from the status of the local authority as a political body. Although it is important to acknowledge this limitation, it should be noted that elected representatives from both sides of the political spectrum did not appear to have opinions about museum asset transfer which could be simply explained by their

political affiliation. In general, interviews from the left and the right expressed a commitment to the idea of the public museum and recognised that museum asset transfer was a problematic last resort.

One could argue that the variety observed in the case-studies is a limitation. For example, BMDC and SoTCC are higher-tier local authorities with responsibility for a portfolio of museums whereas RBC, being lower-tier, has responsibility for one. However, this juxtaposition in scale and circumstance aids comparison in the analysis and is generative of important findings such as the variety of assumptions undergirding local authority decision-making about culture. For example, the influence of asset management decision-making practices and the priorities informing the work of these practitioners in BMDC and SoTCC was accentuated by the data from RBC which provided a point of difference. Moreover, the purpose of this study was to explore a contemporary phenomenon about which little is known (see 2.1.4). Part of the rationale for the exploratory approach was that publicly available information about museum asset transfer was limited. Hence, part of the research endeavour has been to contribute a fuller understanding of the variety of approaches taken by local authorities to museum management in a context of public sector retrenchment. The research has demonstrated that practice in each of the case-studies is different; the variety of case-studies supports the argument that different modes of doing museum work and ways of being a museum arise from the interactions between individuals, groups, organisational routines, narrative strategies, organisational ghosts (Orr 2014, see 7.2) and so on. Hence, the variety in case-study selection is both a finding of the research and an aide to productive comparison.

9.5 Avenues for future research

As I have argued throughout this thesis, the management of public buildings which may house public collections by other-than-public bodies is a relatively new approach to museum management. As such, there are several avenues for further study because there is little academic work which focuses on the particularity of these changes at present. I have already noted how future studies of the museum could be expanded by further consideration of its organisational and institutional form in Section 9.3, noting the potential for combining a methodology informed by actor-network-theory such as the one developed in this study with the analytical frameworks and research questions posed by organisational studies and institutional theory. In this section I propose four ideas for future projects relating to asset transfer.

First, during the research period (2013-17) an increasing number of local authorities appear to be looking to transfer the responsibility for their museums, and indeed other types of public asset (e.g. parks and libraries), to other-than-public organisations. We do not yet have a clear understanding of the scale of these developments, indicating that a project which aimed to map the scale of asset transfer within the museum sector would be valuable. There are specific reasons for this which go beyond collating information on how many museums have been transferred. For example, this study indicates that a certain type of museum tends to be considered for transfer. It would be important for a mapping project to take into account the type of museums being transferred, and their attributes but equally to question the assumptions on which museums of a certain type are considered transferrable. To consider one such assumption, why is it that museums which house collections of a local nature are being transferred whereas public art galleries remain under direct management? Is there an assumption that only certain types of public cultural resources are appropriate for management by other-than-public groups without professional training and if so, why? Equally, as recent figures from the Museums Association show, one in five regional museums has closed or plans to close since 2010 (2015), indicating that some local authorities do not pursue asset transfer at all, opting for permanent closure instead. Furthermore, as I indicated in the Introduction, there are examples of transfer bodies who have had their proposals rejected. Both of these are areas about which little is currently known, indicating the potential for future work which addresses both instances of unsuccessful asset transfer and cases where transfer was not felt to be an option.

Second, the analysis presented in Chapter 7 provided evidence that members of transfer bodies were motivated by an explicit and strong attachment to the idea of the public museum, an attachment expressed through their desire to maintain the building and its collection for the public, and informing the introduction of the term 'other-than-public'. Chapter 7 argued that what participants meant by publicness varied and took its cue from various factors ranging from mythologised visions of the museum's institutional biography to a broader belief in the distinctiveness of public assets to an ethical commitment to public spaces which orient themselves towards those in need. However, arising from this exploration of publicness' meaning is the question of its manifestation: what practical actions do members of 'other-than-public' bodies take to honour the museum's public character? To what extent are members of asset transfer bodies able to shape the organisations for which they are now responsible? Are examples of museums emerging which challenge ideas about what museums offer or do organisational standards and procedures plus the financial circumstances of

austerity result in the maintenance of the status quo? In Chapter 7 and 8, I argued that instances of museum asset transfer are moments where the museum's public character and to whom (people) or what (ideas or frameworks) accountability is felt to be owed are reappraised. Arising out of this discussion, I argued that attention to the vocabularies through which transfer bodies express their commitments to ideas associated with the public museum be complemented by research which attends to the expression of these commitments via organisational practices. In future work, I would like to undertake ethnographic work to build a picture of the relationship between organisational values and practices, focusing on how ideas of public accountability and public-sector ethics are being reshaped by asset transfer and the current financial climate. In particular, concrete empirical situations where people are required to adjudicate between the income-generation that receiving little or no public money has necessitated and their commitment to the publicness of the space could be a first step to illustrating how, if at all, and in what way, the nature of museums and the roles they fulfil, changes in instances of asset transfer.

A third area of interest would follow burgeoning transfer groups as they form into a group. The group dynamics of the deliberative group (later the transfer group) in Ilkley were fascinating, yet my observations of the group focused on drawing out points of interest which pertained to the aims and objectives and other 'museological' themes. The group in Ilkley was unlike those in Rossendale or Stoke-on-Trent in that they were a group of people who did not know each other before self-forming to find a solution to keep the museum open. In the instance that asset transfer becomes increasingly popular to manage public museum buildings, the dynamics of these groups represents a fruitful area for future enquiry. For example, how do different actors constitute themselves? Why was it that certain voices and assertions prompted extended periods of silence whilst others had their points noted? What are the conditions for membership and non-membership? Is there significance in the moments at which group members excused themselves from the task, preferring to observe from the side-lines?

A final area of interest arises from the omission of the perspective of the public in this thesis, as well as museum professionals not directly involved with the transfer. Given that transferring public resources to other-than-public bodies who may be operating without public subsidy represents a significant change to the status quo, how these changes are perceived by people with an existing connection to the museum seems an important line of future enquiry. Building on the analysis in Chapter 7 the idea of the civic could lend structure to an enquiry of this nature for members of the transfer body and local authority both appeared to identify

with this idea. The salience of the 'civic' label is also evidenced by the recent establishment of the English Civic Museums Network in 2013, indicating that this way of describing the museums' role has currency with museum professionals. The question here is why this is the case, as well as how the civic is interpreted by different stakeholders. Research which focuses on how these ideas are being re-purposed within a context of austerity would have relevance for pressing contemporary debates regarding how ideas of the public museum and its obligations, priorities and accountabilities are changing as a consequence of austerity.

9.6 Closing remarks

The purpose of this study has been to examine museum asset transfer. While this has been described as an 'ongoing trend' (MA 2017: 10) in the professional press, efforts to investigate museum asset transfer from an academic perspective have been limited. This thesis contributes original empirical material capturing the nuance of asset transfer of three case-study museums, and reflects on the experiences and actions of people involved in these projects as expressed in interviews and observed during ethnography. The methodology for this thesis has drawn on writings associated with actor-network-theory in order to stimulate a detailed examination of what the process of museum asset transfer involves. In doing so, it has set out the organisational processes and decisions this approach to evading museum closure involves. I argue these decisions reveal implicit judgements about museum provision held within local authorities, these are discussed in the latter parts of the thesis. A range of issues were shown to complicate the approach local authorities take to asset transfer and how the responsibilities taken on by members of transfer groups are received. Whereas other studies tend to attribute the complexity of asset transfer to financial circumstances or technical unfamiliarity (see 2.1.4), this study suggests these dynamics are linked to the public status of the buildings, and how to maintain this post-transfer, as well as to how members of transfer bodies relate to the museum profession, both to the notion of what it is to be a museum professional and in a more practical sense, to the professionals they engage with in the course of adapting to their new roles.

The analytic of viewing the museum as organisation and as institution emphasised these dynamics. Allowing for this dual examination enabled the study to use asset transfer as an opportunity to offer new perspectives on museum work and its contemporary reformulation. The dual analytic foregrounded the organisational processes involved in transfer and museum work, highlighting how they affect practice. Yet, whilst the thesis argued for the value of presenting museums as ordinary workplaces saturated by routine and protocol, it

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simultaneously demonstrated the importance of their institutional form. That is to say, museums are said to embody ideals. But, as this study has shown, there is a relationship between the ideals attributed to museums (in the abstract and concrete) and the behaviours people involved in transfer, both public sector professionals and members of transfer bodies, felt obligated to display, and then again between felt obligations and manifestations. On this point, efforts to remain faithful to the public status of these museums, understood and attended to variously, were ever-present in the empirics, showing that publicness is a matter of concern for asset transfer groups, and the local authorities implementing transfer. Whether museums operated under transfer arrangements function according to different principles than those conventionally associated with public service is a question for further study.

The analysis of the organisational practices asset transfer involves and its ideational complexity were enabled by the methodology. This provided the research with a theoretical scaffold and angle of vision wherein both the detail of organisational processes, actions and accompanying rationales were highlighted. By demonstrating how approaches from other fields and theoretical traditions can be productively adapted to empirical research on museums, the contribution of the thesis is both methodological and analytical.

At one level, the virtuous efforts of asset transfer groups to assume responsibility for museums that may have closed otherwise obscure the profound changes to local authority capacity resulting from austerity. As discussed, museum asset transfer takes place in conditions and involves terms which are problematic. The contemporary circumstances investigated by this project capture a potent moment of change in public museum provision as previously understood, demonstrating the potential for austerity to alter existing cultural infrastructures, particularly in those areas unevenly impacted by the cuts.

The financial conditions impelling local authorities to consider little known approaches to museum management are difficult to justify, and the potential for an 'other-than-public' approach to museum provision may generate an uneven geography of museums whereby only those areas with the range of capacities necessary for transfer hold onto museum services comprising a range of museum types. Yet, this does not negate the resolute commitment of individuals involved in transfer and the public sector professionals who find ways to support their endeavours. Asset transfer is not only one of many emerging approaches to museum management suited to the political and financial demands of the present, but as a complex amalgamation of constraint, desire and allegiance to the cause of a variously defined public museum, it may also constitute a new category of cultural institution in the 'other-than-public' museum.

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Appendix A: Sample interview schedule for local authority personnel and elected representatives

Manor House Art Gallery & Museum. Qualitative data interview

Council officers

Preamble to be read by researcher

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for my project. The purpose of this conversation is to collect information about your involvement in the discussions surrounding the transfer of the Manor House Art Gallery & Museum your viewpoint on the context to these changes, the role that central government policy and council-led policy has played in the transfer and your reaction to the process itself.

You may decide that you do not want to answer some questions, which is not a problem. All the information that you provide will be strictly confidential and you have the option of remaining anonymous.

INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS

Could you give me a summary of your role in relation to the Manor House Art Gallery & Museum?

What do you think it is about that particular Museum that made it a service that the Council would consider being managed by someone else?

Do you think there is any significance in it being a local history museum? As opposed to one of your other sites?

SECTION ONE

Assessing the current state of play, the influence of the policy context, what part does this play?

- What would you say was the main reason for the Council exploring the community management?
- Was it the intention to maintain the space as a museum?
- What does the Council mean when it talks about 'community management'? Could you paint a picture of how you initially saw this progressing when it was first suggested?

PROMPT

Can you give me an example of that?
Could you walk me through that process?
How did you make 'x' decision? What information did you draw on?

SECTION TWO

How is the role of community groups conceived? Contracting out? Different voices in MGH? Boundaries?

- I want to explore how the Council views the relationship with the Manor House group? What role do you see them playing? What was their remit?
- Do you think the involvement of the NMHG has had an impact on the outcome?
- Were there any limitations to the level of influence that you were able to give to the group? Can you give me an example?
- Could you talk me through the decision not to allow the NMHG to be involved in the decision on the appointment of the contract for the Feasibility Study?
- I wasn't able to attend but I know there were a couple of public meetings at the beginning of this process but they were 'by invitation only'. What was the rationale behind this decision?

Prompts

Can you talk me through that?
Why was that important to you?

SECTION THREE

Balance of responsibility/Limits to this type of transfer

- How will you monitor the 'community-function' of the new occupiers?
- Could you describe how you envisage the relationship between the new occupier and the Council?
- If there had been impetus to keep the space as a museum, would the Council have been able to offer service support to a new group?
- When it was first decided to explore alternative management options for the space, did you have a specific function in mind?
- What do you think the decision will ultimately come down to?
- In your view, what is good about the new arrangement?
- On the other hand, what limitations does the new arrangement bring?

Prompts
Why do you think that is?

SECTION FOUR

Public space

- I want to focus now on how you view the space itself, many people would say that a public service like a Museum has a special public character and way of approaching its work. Would you agree with that?
- Do you think it would still be appropriate to describe Ford Green Hall as a public service?

- Some would say 'privatising a public space' – do you think that's a fair summary?

Prompts

By public space, I mean more than a space that is open to 'the public', I mean that in the work that you do as an organisation, you are thinking about a broader 'public', not just your immediate audiences

SECTION FIVE

Professional status of museum professionals and new groups/will the new groups be part of the museum sector

- Would you say that Museums are different from other services that the Council currently provide? What makes them different?
- Do you have a particular ethos that guides your work?
- Do changes such as these challenge that? Are you finding yourself having to learn new skills?
- Do you think this type of work will influence how you think about visitors/citizens relating to the other four sites you manage?

Prompts

Can you give me an example?

The Whitaker, Rossendale. Qualitative data interview

Directors, Whitaker Group

Preamble to be read by researcher

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for my project. The purpose of this conversation is to collect information about your involvement in the transfer of the Rossendale Museum and Art Gallery to the Whitaker Group, your viewpoint on the context to these changes, the role that central government policy and council-led policy has played in the transfer and your reaction to the process itself.

You may decide that you do not want to answer some questions, which is not a problem. All the information that you provide will be strictly confidential and you have the option of remaining anonymous.

INTRODUCTION

Going back to the beginning, could you talk me through how you decided to put together a proposal to manage the Whitaker?

For the purposes of the interview, what did you do before this? Are you able to draw on your previous work experience in this role?

What motivates you? [to keep going, this is a huge undertaking] What are you getting out of this project on a personal level?

Do you see this as a career move?

SECTION ONE

Assessing the current state of play, the influence of the policy context, what part does this play?

- When I first came across the Whitaker, it was listed on the Rossendale website as a potential site for 'Community Asset Transfer' – did you see this?
- Do you see your role in managing the Whitaker as an example of this 'transfer'?
- Have you accessed support from Locality or the Asset Transfer Unit at all?
- The support for the management of community assets it based on an idea that 'community' groups are better placed to manage assets like a museum in a way that's more responsive to local need. Would you say that's a fair statement?

Prompts
CAT is transfer of ownership of buildings to communities for less than market value, but can also be transfer of management on a lease.

Could you talk me through that process?

SECTION TWO

How is the role of community groups conceived? Contracting out? Different voices in MGH? Boundaries?

- How would you describe your relationship with the Borough Council?
- What would you say are the benefits of a group like yourselves running the museum? To the Council? To visitors? To audiences?
- What are your objectives as an organisation? Do you have a vision for what the value system of the Museum should be?
- Could you tell me a bit more about the role volunteers play at the Whitaker?

Prompts

What do you mean by that?

SECTION THREE

Balance of responsibility/Limits to this type of transfer

- When you came forward, did you feel it was your responsibility as a 'citizen' to step up to manage the Museum in place of the Council?
- How do you feel about this as an approach to delivering public services more generally, do you feel Councils should be looking to community groups to do their work for them?
- I want to talk about decision-making at the Whitaker. How does that work here? Who is involved in strategic decision-making {not day-to-day}?
- Do you feel that your work is scrutinised by the Council, both officers and members?
- Are you doing further work to involve other community members/groups in the management of the museum, or involving them in decisions about the future of the museum?

Prompts

- Can you give me an example?
- It sounds like you are saying… would you say that's a fair summary?
- Could you walk me through the process?
- What was in your mind at the time? Why did you decide to take 'x' route?

SECTION FOUR

Public space

- I want to focus now on how you view the space itself, many people would say that a public service like a Museum has a special public character and way of approaching its work. Would you agree with that?
- Do you think it would still be appropriate to describe the Whitaker as a public service?
- Are you comfortable with charging for your events programme and temporary exhibitions? Do you think this could exclude?
- When you're planning an exhibition, what are your priorities?

Prompts

By public space, I mean more than a space that is open to 'the public', I mean that in the work that you do as an organisation, you are thinking about a broader 'public', not just your immediate audiences?

SECTION FIVE

Professional status of museum professionals and new groups/will the new groups be part of the museum sector

- Before the Whitaker, did you have a picture of what skills or expertise you would need to manage a museum?
- Has this changed now that this is what you do on a daily basis?
- What relationship do you have with the 'museum sector'? Why did you feel it was important to have a mentor? Do you feel supported to build up your knowledge in this area?

Appendix C: Sample research consent form

Informed Consent Form

I, the undersigned, confirm that (please tick box as appropriate):

1.	I have read and understood the information about the project, as provided in the Information Sheet dated 3 February 2017.	☐
2.	I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project and my participation.	☐
3.	I voluntarily agree to participate in the project.	☐
4.	I understand I can withdraw at any time without giving reasons and that I will not be penalised for withdrawing nor will I be questioned on why I have withdrawn.	☐
5.	The procedures regarding confidentiality have been clearly explained (e.g. use of names, pseudonyms, anonymisation of data, etc.) to me.	☐
6.	If applicable, separate terms of consent for interviews, audio, video or other forms of data collection have been explained and provided to me.	☐
7.	The use of the data in research, publications, sharing and archiving has been explained to me.	☐
8.	I understand that other researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the data and if they agree to the terms I have specified in this form.	☐
9.	Select only **one** of the following: • I would like my name used and understand what I have said or written as part of this study will be used in reports, publications and other research outputs so that anything I have contributed to this project can be recognised. • I do not want my name used in this project.	☐ ☐
10.	I, along with the Researcher, agree to sign and date this informed consent form.	☐

Participant:

_____   _____   _____
Name of Participant   Signature   Date

Researcher:

_____   _____   _____
Name of Researcher   Signature   Date

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Thank you for reading this.

1. Study title (working):

The transfer of local authority museums to external organisations: an examination of process, professional identities and the 'public interest'

2. Research details:

This research will analyse different methods of the management and operation of museums by community-based and voluntary organisations. These are museums that were previously run by the local authority. Analysis will focus on how and why organisations come forward to manage these museums and the type of relationship they have with the community and the local authority. It will pay particular attention to the process of transferring responsibility for the museum from the local authority to the community-based or voluntary organisation. The study will assess the extent to which these processes are related to coalition government's policy of 'localism'. The study will also look at how key decisions are made in the context of the new management structures, the notion of professional identity in the museum sector and the role of the museum as a 'public' service.

From a review of the literature on similar transfer processes from different sectors, it was found that much of the current available work focuses on the outcome of the transfer, as opposed to how the transfer actually takes place. For this reason, I have designed my research study to highlight the process as well as the product. This is why it is important for me to be able to collect data and observations from meetings, interim reports and other process-focused documentation. I am interested in the multiple perspectives and opinions that people bring to the table when they engage with museum-based projects so instances where people may have a difference of opinion are extremely valuable for my research project.

One of the outcomes of the research will be guidance documents for other local authorities and community-based organisations who are engaging with similar processes so that key lessons learnt can be shared broadly. I have established a good working relationship with Arts Council England's policy research team in order to facilitate the dissemination of these guidance documents.

3. What is the purpose of the study?

The study aims to identify new ways that museums can be managed and operated and in doing so hopes to show how museums can continue to be relevant to their communities.

4. How have participants been chosen?

Participants were chosen for their involvement in the process of transferring the management and operation of a museum from the local authority to another organisation. Participants will include members of staff from the museum and from the local authority, alongside other members of the community who have a relationship with the museum in some way. The other participating organisations are: Rossendale Museum and Art Gallery and Ford Green Hall (Stoke).

5. Do I have to take part?

Your participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time, without needing to give a reason.

6. What will happen to participants?

Interviewees will be asked to participant in an interview that will be audio recorded. Interviewees may also be asked to be audio recorded during observation of meetings by the researcher. Participants may be requested to participate in further follow-up interviews or focus groups at a later stage. Participants are not obliged to take part in these follow-up interviews or focus groups.

7. Will my taking part in this study be kept anonymous?

On the consent form you will indicate whether or not you wish to have your name used in relation to any comments you make in the interviews. If you choose to be named your interview quotes or comments from meetings will be followed by brackets that will include your name and the date you were interviewed/observed. This will help to place your comments in the context of the research and your organisation and identify your contributions. If you do not wish to be named, this will be replaced by the word 'anonymous'.

8. What will happen to the results of the research study?

Data will be stored as digital audio files on USBs and as typed transcripts on USBs and in printed form. They will be kept securely and will not be accessible to the public. A copy of the interviews, focus groups and transcripts will be handed in with the PhD dissertation to a panel of examiners, for the assessment of the PhD. You will receive a copy of your interview along with a transcript for your personal records (if requested). You will also have the option of clarifying or correcting your transcripts before your comments are used in the final dissertation. You can do this in person or over the telephone/e-mail. Only selected quotes will be used in public documents – referenced either with your name or as 'anonymous' as requested.

The research findings will be presented as a PhD dissertation that will be assessed to judge the candidate's success or failure to gain their PhD. The research findings may also be presented in different forms such as, but not limited to, documents, lectures, presentations, conference papers and publications relating to the PhD research. The research findings may be presented in paper and digital form. The final thesis will be available online as an e-thesis as is the norm for work of this kind.

9. Who is organising and funding the research?

The study is a three year PhD project that is funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council in the UK. Bethany Rex is a research student from the International Centre for Cultural and Heritage Studies at Newcastle University.

Appendix E: List of Interviews

Interviewee	Affiliation	Date, Location
Manor House Art Gallery & Museum		
Museums and Galleries Manager	BMDC	11 February 2015, Manor House Art Gallery & Museum
Strategic Director of Regeneration and Culture	BMDC	30 June 2015, Jacob's Well, BMDC
Assistant Director Sport and Culture	BMDC	6 February 2017 City Hall, BMDC
Portfolio Holder for Education, Skills and Culture	BMDC	29 June 2015 Leaders Office, BMDC
Secretary	NMHG	24 March 2015 22 June 2015 Interviewees home, Ilkley (x 2 interviews)
Chair	NMHG	15 January 2015 20 March 2015 Interviewees home, Ilkley (x 2 interviews)
Chair/Group Member	Friends of the Manor House/NMHG	22 April 2015 Interviewees home, Ilkley
Chair/Group Member	Ilkley Parish Council	17 August 2015 Ilkley Town Hall
Representative	All Saints' Church	18 August 2015 The Sanctuary, Ilkley
Consultant	Tomorrow Advisory	25 February 2015 Tomorrow Advisory Offices, Harrogate
Consultant	Tomorrow Advisory	25 February 2015 Tomorrow Advisory Offices, Harrogate
Ford Green Hall		
Chair of FGH	FGH Trust	15 April 2015 Ford Green Hall 25 January 2016 Telephone interview
Strategy and Policy Officer for the Voluntary and Community Sector	SoTCC	5 March 2015 Civic Centre, Stoke-on-Trent
Strategic Manager, Property Management	SoTCC	5 March 2015 Civic Centre, Stoke-on-Trent
Strategic Manager, Museums	SoTCC	5 March 2015 Civic Centre, Stoke-on-Trent

The Whitaker		
Managing Director	The Whitaker CIC	15 April 2015 The Whitaker
Creative Director	The Whitaker CIC	31 March 2015 The Whitaker
Operational Director	The Whitaker CIC	31 March 2015 The Whitaker
Head of Health, Housing and Regeneration	RBC	4 February 2015 Futures Park, Bacup
Museums Collections Manager	LCC	10 December 2014 Museum of Lancashire, Preston
Conservation Manager	LCC	10 December 2014 Museum of Lancashire, Preston
Council Leader	RBC	20 July 2015 The Whitaker

Proposal to assist community groups taking over museums through community asset transfers

Creation of a new AIM Success Guide - Successfully Taking Over Your Local Museum: A guide to community asset transfer of museums

Rationale

The move towards other-than-public delivery models for local authority museums looks set to continue. At present, there are a number of toolkits and guidance documents available directed towards groups who wish to pursue an asset transfer (e.g., Locality, English Heritage). However, research conducted by Bethany Rex (PhD researcher, Newcastle University) into the process of asset transfer from the perspective of community groups has identified that these resources are not favoured by these groups because they are not specifically tailored to the task of taking over a museum previously managed and still owned by a local authority.

Rex's experience of working with these volunteer groups is that they are usually not connected to the wider museum community and do not feel part of it. They don't easily find the resources that are available and often have not been introduced to the museum development team in their area.

Because current resources do not speak to the specific needs of these groups, they are often entering negotiations with local authorities with little prior knowledge of either how the process of asset transfer works or whether their plans for the museum are viable.

Goals

The goals of this piece of work:

1. To provide a comprehensive and accessible online resource for largely voluntary groups wishing to assume responsibility for a museum owned and previously managed by the local authority, either by using the asset transfer process or by entering another form of management agreement with the council in question

2. To introduce each of the nine Museum Development regions to the guide and ensure that MDOs and asset transfer bodies are in contact with one another – to

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overcome barriers these groups experience in feeling part of the museum community

<u>1. Resource</u>

Building on the research conducted by Bethany Rex into museum asset transfer, which included an extensive review of resources available to groups and the extent to which they were used by groups during asset transfer negotiations, this resource would take the form of a new AIM Success Guide – a step-by-step guide to the asset transfer process.

The resource will be part of the respected AIM Success Guide series and would be hosted on the AIM website. This would also create opportunities to signpost the groups to other existing resources on the AIM website which would help them (e.g. Successful Business Planning, Successfully Creating a New Museum, Successful Collections Care).

As well as plain English policy summaries and written content relating to the museum status of these buildings, the resource would signpost readers to pre-existing resources where appropriate. The intention of this resource is to produce and make available a document which is explicitly directed towards museum asset transfers, not to duplicate what is already there. In response to a problem identified in the PhD research which informs this piece of work, the aim is for groups searching online for 'museum asset transfer' to be presented with a document that speaks directly to their needs and concerns.

To ensure the resource is comprehensive and accessible to groups with little experience of asset transfer or museums, a small-scale working group would be established by the resource author (Bethany Rex). Importantly for this, the author has the contacts that will enable her to quickly and easily assemble this group. The group would meet once in-person to share comments on a pre-circulated draft, all other correspondence would be via email.

<u>2. Introducing the resource to MDOs, and introducing asset transfer bodies to MDOs, and the wider museum community</u>

We are keen to ensure that MDOs in each of the nine regions are aware of the resource and have the background they need regarding the issues facing these community groups. Their longterm success will be greatly helped if they work closely with MDOs and access the ongoing support they offer.

To achieve this, we would arrange a series of phone calls which each of the nine regions to introduce them to the guide. These conversations would be used to put MDOs in touch with asset transfer groups in their area (subject to the consent of the groups in question).

In addition to linking up asset transfer bodies with MDOs, this piece of work will connect asset transfer bodies with AIM through a membership offer (funded by AIM) which grants a year's free membership to AIM to all asset transfer groups as a welcome to the sector. This addresses an issue identified in Bethany Rex's PhD research where members of new museum managers felt that existing support structures were not for them.

<u>Project costs:</u> AIM requests a total of ⬛⬛⬛ to enable this project to go ahead. The budget is provided below.

Service	Quantity/Days	Unit costs/ Day rate (£)	Total (£)
X 1 working group for members of Asset Transfer Bodies	2 BR	██	██
Desk research (relevant policy, audit of existing resources)	3 BR	██	██
Research and writing-up of resource	4 BR	██	████
Writing-up contributions from AIM (i.e., viability of business plans, costs involved with managing/operating a museum)	2 AIM		████
Telephone calls to MDOs to introduce the resource	1 BR	██	██
Expenses (working group costs, inc. travel, refreshments, room hire)			██
AIM membership offer	Up to 15	████	████
Editing and design of the Success Guide			██
Total Cash elements			██
Value of in-kind contribution			██
Total project cost			██
Amount requested as grant			██

Contact

████████████

Executive Director, AIM

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