

Invitation to Tender Collections Management System

This Invitation to Tender was amended on 10 Dec 2025. Changes in red.

Executive Summary

The Horniman Museum and Gardens (HMG) is seeking to replace its end-of-life collections management system with a new, digital-first solution that will enhance efficiency, transparency, and best practice across its diverse collections and related activities. This project will span three to four years, focusing initially on data migration, followed by phased development and alignment of functions and procedures.

Introduction

The Horniman Museum and Gardens' current collections management system is used to catalogue and manage diverse collections including Natural History, Anthropology, Musical Instruments, Living collections (an aquarium, a butterfly house, a small zoo, the gardens), a Handling Collection, an Archive, and items of value and interest that are not part of any formal collection. The system supports the 21 Spectrum procedures, but only partially. A core objective of this project is to develop new digital first procedures, aligned with and supported by the new system, promoting efficiency, transparency, and museum best practice.

The current system supports a number of services and functions beyond the cataloguing and management of collections including:

- Populating, through middleware, the collections-on-line catalogue embedded in the Horniman's website (fully in scope for this project)
- Populating, through middleware, national and project based online re-use of collections information including the Museum Data Service (fully in scope for this project)
- Acting as a de-facto Digital Asset Management System (**in scope for this project**)
- Acting as a de-facto basic Electronic Records Management System (optionally in scope for this project)

The current system interacts with varying degrees of integration with other information systems including:

- A wiki (DokuWiki) which acts as a research and community engagement Content Management System (in scope of this project)
- Middleware that validates and restructures collections information from the current system and other sources (replacement of which is optionally in scope for this project, but the preference is to maintain the current provider of this service)
- A Library Management system (optionally in scope of this project)

The current collections management system is now end-of-life and the Horniman invites tenders to replace it.

Project Overview

The Mimsy Replacement Project seeks to identify, procure and implement a collections management solution that can catalogue and manage the diversity of the Horniman's collections. In addition to replacement for the current system the Horniman seeks to:

- Cleanse all data prior to, or during, migration to a new solution.
- Review and adapt collections management procedures to be digital first and fully supported by the new solution.
- Provide digital first mechanisms for research engagement by diverse stakeholders, integrated with other collections knowledge through Content Management function embedded or fully integrated in the new solution.
- Extend the use and usefulness of the CMS to staff and other stakeholders beyond current users.
- Review and improve/replace the collections-on-line catalogue.
- Strengthen Digital Asset Management function.

The Horniman predicts that this project will span over four years, with out of the box implementation and data migration the early focus. Subsequently function and procedure development and alignment will be delivered in phases as the relevant teams are able to dedicate their attention to them.

Following feedback from potential bidders, and reflection by the Horniman Senior Management Team, it is anticipated that while a contract for this work will be awarded in 2026, the work by the successful bidder to implement a replacement system will not begin until 2027 (see Timeline below for more detail).

This pause before implementation:

- Avoids this replacement project running concurrently with other significant Horniman projects including a major gallery refurbishment, substantial capital works, and commemoration of the Horniman's 125th year as a public purpose-built museum.
- Gives the Horniman more time to define in detail the processes the replacement system will be implemented to support.
- Gives the Horniman more time to prepare the data in the current system for migration, with the advantage of knowing the system the data is being prepared to migrate to.
- Spreads the cost of the project over an additional year, assisting the Horniman in navigating a challenging 2026/2027 fiscal year.

Project outcomes:

- Coherent, consistent, Spectrum compliant collections data migrated.
- A collections management solution that supports all the Horniman's Collections Management and Use of Collections activity through efficient digital first procedures

- Diverse external stakeholders able to engage with, including adding to, the body of collections information.
- Digital assets managed and connected to appropriate records. Potential for commercial use of digital assets enabled.
- A simple but comprehensive on-line catalogue, searchable and browsable by diverse audiences, and referenceable in diverse on-line contexts

Core Function Requirements

The Horniman has identified the following as Core Requirements. All these are essential for an offer to be considered:

- 1. Collections Management Compliance**
 - a. Full compliance with Spectrum standard for collections authority and procedure data capture and processing.
- 2. Flexible Data Model**
 - a. Must support diverse collection types: Natural Science, Musical Instruments, Anthropology, Archives, Living collections, Handling collections, and other museum property.
- 3. Customisable User Interface**
 - a. Ability to create and apply custom views based on rules or ad hoc needs.
 - b. Users should be able to define their own views and reports without technical support.
- 4. Advanced Search and Export**
 - a. Powerful, user-friendly tools for data retrieval, indexed text search, and formatted export/reporting.
- 5. Workflow Management**
 - a. Configurable workflows that users can manage and adapt without programming.
- 6. Text and Media Handling**
 - a. Support for large bodies of text (including HTML markup).
 - b. Ability to manage and link various media types to any record, including rights, derivatives, and versions.
- 7. Community Contributions**
 - a. Tools to enable and manage community contributions and crowdsourced data.
- 8. Terminology Management**
 - a. Bulk management and updating of structured and unstructured controlled vocabularies.
- 9. Barcode Tracking**
 - a. Barcode-based movement control for physical items **via an online/offline mobile device application.**
- 10. Admin Tools**
 - a. Simple, intuitive admin tools usable by documentation professionals without coding skills.
- 11. Database Access**
 - a. Direct access for data analysis, cleaning, and transactional bulk updates (with preview/check before applying changes).
- 12. Integration Capabilities**
 - a. API for integration with middleware or other systems.
- 13. Public Catalogue**

Customisable online catalogue with:

- a. Hierarchical and cross-referenced records
- b. Persistent URLs for external linking
- c. Advanced search features
- d. Customisable branding to match Horniman online design style.

Optional Function Requirements

A. Library Management Integration

- a. Ability to integrate with or provide basic Library Management System (LMS) functionality.

B. Records Management Integration

- a. Support for Electronic Records Management Systems (ERMS), or built-in records management features.

C. Knowledge Platform Integration

- a. Compatibility with Microsoft 365 or similar platforms to support document sharing, collaboration, and knowledge workflows.

D. AI and Automation Potential

- a. Capacity for future integration with AI tools (e.g., large language models) to support:
- b. Automated metadata generation
- c. Semantic search
- d. Entity recognition and linking

Discovery Sessions

Following a registration of interest, and evidence that the solution being prepared meets at least the first six core requirements above, a discovery session lasting up to 4 hours may be booked with the project lead, to examine and/or discuss the current data/function or any other aspect of the project.

Submission Requirements

Any vendor interested in submitting an offer should register that interest by email to jwhitsoncloud@horniman.ac.uk at the earliest opportunity, or at the latest by 30th November 2025. Registering interest will trigger receiving any amendments or clarifications to the Invitation to Tender, and an invitation to apply for a discovery session as above.

Submissions should include, in writing:

- Evidence that any proposed solution meets all the **Core requirements**.
- A **Methodology** setting out:
 - how data will be prepared for migration
 - a plan for how data and function will be migrated, including the development of revised procedures, taking account of the variable availability of procedure owners and stakeholders over a potential timeline of up to four years.
 - a plan for any of the optional requirements
 - details of who from the supplier's team would be involved in the various elements of the planning and implementation.
- Detailed **Costings** including:
 - Any financial implications from deferring the start of implementation to Apr 2027

- a breakdown of any discovery and planning costs.
- Implementation project costs, by phase/year. **An even distribution of costs over the 4 years of the project is preferred.**
- Licence costs including all lifetime and annual licences assuming:
 - 1 x product owner
 - 2 x additional product administrators
 - 35 editing users **(15 concurrent)**
 - 100+ viewing users
- Hosting costs per annum
- Training costs, initial and ongoing
- A 3-year heightened support period while museum processes are aligned and integrated with the solution.
- Ongoing regular support costs
- Additional solution lifetime development costs
- Any other costs potentially to be incurred.
- **Technical specification** including:
 - What data format/s and platforms the solution will use
 - Hosting provision (the Horniman would prefer not to host the data or solution software)
 - Data protection compliance assurance
 - Requirements of involvement of the Horniman IT team (preferably kept to a minimum)
- **Risk Management**
 Submissions should include the greatest potential risks they foresee to the project outcomes, budget, and timeline, how these risks will be recorded, and what they will put in place to mitigate those risks. The allocation of risk management tasks to the Horniman is acceptable.
- **Training and Support** provision including:
 - Product owner and administrator training
 - User training
 - Initial
 - Ongoing
 - Materials provided
 - Ongoing support provision including details of any SLA.
 - Details of any product user community group
- **Sustainability, Ethics and EDI**
 The Horniman has made strong commitments to being an ethical, equitable, and sustainable business. Any submission should include evidence that the supplier has made similar commitments.
- **References**
 A minimum of two references should be provided, from current UK users of the solution offered, preferably museums with similarly diverse collections as the Horniman.

Evaluation Criteria

Evaluation will take place in two phases:

- 1) Evaluation of written submissions
 - a. Written submissions will be evaluated against core requirements on a simple **pass/fail basis**.

Other elements will be scored and weighted as follows:

- b. Cost 40%
- c. Other submission requirements 60%

- 2) Evaluation of performance at interview
 - a. Interviews will be lengthy (over one or two days or more) and will involve diverse staff requesting live demonstrations of how the proposed system meets their needs. An indication of the functions to be demonstrated will be provided in advance, but this may not be comprehensive, and some requests may be off-the-cuff.
 - b. All staff participating in these interviews will score against their needs, and against the experience of interacting with supplier representatives.

Timeline

For the reasons given in the Project Overview above, it is anticipated that despite a contract being awarded in 2026, the Schedule of Works (SoW) leading to implementation, alignment and deployment of the replacement system will be deferred until 2027.

The implementation phase of this timeline is suggestive only. This timeline is subject to change. Tenders may include suggestions for alternative timetables.

06 Nov 2025	Invitation issued
Nov 2025	Expression of Interest registration
Until 19 Dec 2025	Window for Discovery sessions
31 Jan 2026	Deadline for Submissions
Feb 2026	First sift, invitations to interview sent
23 Mar – 03 Apr 2026	In depth interviews
May 2026	Offer made, contract negotiation
May 2026 – Mar 2027	Horniman works on data preparation and process definition (No requirement for vendor to support during this period)
Apr 2027	System solution implemented – not live
Apr – May 2027	Admin / Owner training
May 2027 – Feb 2028	Iterative data migration to new system
Jan 2028 – Mar 2028	General user training
Mar 2028	Replacement System solution live
Apr 2028 – Mar 2031	Procedures reviewed and implemented
Mar 2031	Project end

Award of Contract

Following the evaluation process the Horniman will make a recommendation to award the contract through its internal governance procedures.

Once approval to award has been obtained, the Horniman will send letters via email to all those suppliers who submitted a tender to advise:

- Whether their bid has been successful or unsuccessful
- How to request feedback for unsuccessful bids

Contact Information

All clarification requests or other queries should be sent to the project lead:

Jonathan Whitson Cloud

Head of Knowledge and Information Management

jwhitsoncloud@horniman.ac.uk

All clarifications and additional information provided in response to clarification and other query requests will be shared with other registered interested parties as addendum to this Invitation to Tender.

References

[Collections Trust Spectrum Standard](#)

[Horniman Corporate Plan](#)

[Horniman Climate and Ecology Manifesto](#)

[Horniman Data Protection Policy](#)

[Horniman Collections on-line](#)