

Bath & North East Somerset Council

MEETING	Planning, Housing and Economic Development, Policy Development & Scrutiny Panel	
DATE:	6 September 2016	
TITLE:	Archives Centre	
WARD:	Abbey	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM		
List of attachments to this report:	N/a	

1 THE ISSUE

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to apprise the Panel of the work undertaken to date towards creating a Local History Centre for Bath and North East Somerset in line with best practice elsewhere.

2 RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 That the Panel note the report.

3 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCE, PROPERTY, PEOPLE)

- 3.1 The report is for information only and there are no resource implications at this time.
- 3.2 There is no provision in the Capital Programme or the emerging Capital Programme for a Local History Centre.
- 3.3 Revenue budgets currently accommodate costs related to managing archives under the existing arrangements.
- 3.4 A business case outlining the impacts and benefits, including the financial impact on the revenue budgets, would be required to be taken through usual Council approval processes if a new facility project were to be taken forward.

4 STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS AND BASIS FOR PROPOSAL

- 4.1 The Council is empowered to collect archives under the *Local Government (Records) Act 1962*, the *Local Government Act 1972*, ss.224-229 and the *Local Government Reorganisation (Property Etc.) Order 1986 s.12*. Bath Record Office is appointed as a 'place of deposit' under the *Public Records Act 1958* for certain public records specified in that Act and will collect those public records.

- 4.2 The Heritage Services Service Plan 2016/17 includes an action: “Within the Council’s wider accommodation strategy develop the one-stop-shop History Centre concept for the Record Office and Bath Library local history collections”.

5 THE REPORT

Background.

- 5.1 Bath Record Office was formed in 1967 to care for the archives of the Council, to build collections of unique original records relating to the city of Bath, and to make them available to the public. It is housed in, and has outgrown, inadequate and inaccessible premises in the Guildhall basement in Bath. The Office now has over 3km of historical records, the earliest dating to 1189.
- 5.2 The Record Office collections are recognised as being of great importance. The World Heritage Site Management Plan recognised “the exceptional quality and completeness of the Record Office archive collections” in documenting the development of the city from medieval market town to today’s vibrant city, one of Britain’s prime urban landscapes and top visitor destinations. The Plan has also identified the urgent need for improved accommodation for and access to the collection.
- 5.3 In 2005 the Record Office archive collections were awarded Designated status by the Museums Libraries & Archives Council (MLA), in recognition of their value in documenting the history of the city. Designation is Government’s way of recognising collections in the regions that are of national and international importance. Bath is one of only three unitary authority record offices whose entire collections enjoy this status.
- 5.4 Bath Central Library’s Local Studies collection is part of the Council’s public library service. Much of its content was donated to the City of Bath in the 19th century before the creation of the first public reference library in 1900 and lending library in 1921. The collection includes items of local or historic interest including books, images, newspapers, maps and other ephemeral material. There is a degree of overlap between this collection and the archives collection in Bath Record Office and many customers need access to both resources.

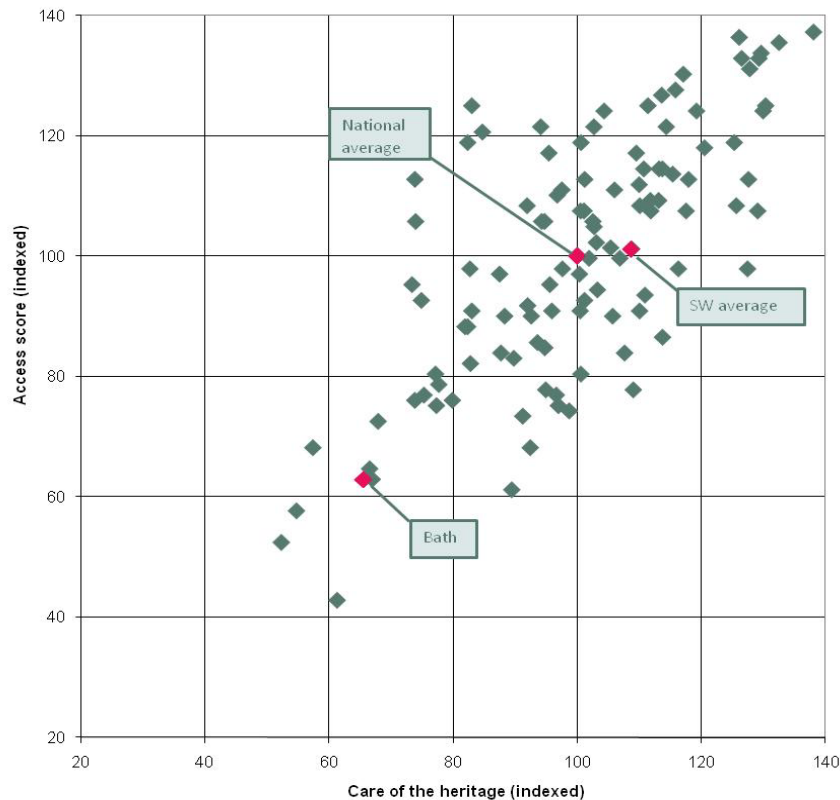
Recent Activity.

- 5.5 In recent years the Record Office has been successful in attracting external funding. In 2014-15 a grant of £41k from the National Cataloguing Grants Programme for Archives funded the creation of online catalogues of 800 years of Council records, assisted by a team of 25 volunteers. The results can be seen at www.batharchives.co.uk/our-collections.
- 5.6 In 2015-16 a Heritage Lottery Fund grant of £74.7k funded *Our Heritage, Your Story*, a community outreach project that engaged community groups across Bath and North East Somerset, including the Riverside Youth Hub which made a film about the project, and the Black Families Educational Support Group which worked on a project about black people in Georgian Bath and the city’s role in the anti-slavery movement. Currently a programme of reminiscence sessions is being held with the Bath and Ethnic Minorities Senior Citizens Association.

- 5.7 Outreach projects have included a public Open Days and day courses at Paulton, Midsomer Norton and Keynsham Libraries and Bath Guildhall, as well as attending roadshows at Farmborough, Hinton Charterhouse, Peasedown St. John, South Stoke, Swainswick, Westfield and Weston.
- 5.8 The HLF-funded project also included eight free day course on Family History which were heavily oversubscribed, leading to further courses being arranged. A further grant of £5k from the Medlock Foundation will fund more outreach work in 2017 with day courses on Family History in Peasedown St. John, Midsomer Norton, Keynsham and Bath.
- 5.9 In 2016 the Bath Festival Fringe Arts programme included *Out of the Archive*, an exhibition by nine artists inspired by the Record Office collections.
- 5.10 Over the summer of 2016 the Record Office has hosted ‘drop-in’ opportunities for Council staff, with 32 attending over four days.
- 5.11 2017 will mark the 50th anniversary since the opening of Bath Record Office in 1967.

The case for a Local History Centre.

- 5.12 In 2002 the Culture & Leisure Time Best Value Review recommended that the Council create “a centre of excellence for local and family studies”. Following on from this, Record Office and Libraries staff undertook a survey of Record Office and Library users which revealed overwhelming support for the creation of a dedicated Local Studies Centre in which the Record Office and the Library’s Local Studies and Special collections would be brought together.
- 5.13 In January 2007 a stakeholder workshop was convened to look at the possibility of bringing together the Record Office collections and Bath Central Library local studies collection into a one-stop-shop centre of excellence. The seminar looked at examples of best practice elsewhere in the UK where similar facilities have been brought together in this way.
- 5.14 In February 2008 a Briefing Note was prepared for the Cabinet Member (Tourism Leisure & Culture) outlining the urgent case for additional space and improved facilities for the Council’s important archive collections.
- 5.15 Following the stakeholder workshop and with the agreement of the Cabinet Member, officers commissioned a feasibility study with the brief
- “to identify the options available to the Council for the creation of a public research, study and information facility based upon its internationally important Archives and Local Studies collections and recommend the option that offers the most cost effective solution, the best public service and the highest standard of collections care.”*
- 5.16 The report was undertaken by David Bournnell Associates (DBA) and published in 2010. It highlighted the assessment of regional archives made by The National Archives (TNA) in respect of their access arrangements and the level of care they are able to offer their collections. This is shown in the graph below.



5.17 The TNA report also found that many of the better-performing archives in the South West region offer an integrated service combining archives with local studies material, along the lines envisaged of a new Local History Centre.

5.18 The DBA report identified the minimum requirements for a combined new facility as being a secure environmentally-controlled facility with a total of 1,290 m² space, comprising 780 m² collections storage, 345 m² public space (reception, toilets, search facilities, etc); and 169 m² for staff and service areas. This would allow for 20 years expansion space. [As a result of ongoing deposition of archives in the Record Office, the overall space requirement was revised upwards in 2014 to 1,651 m².]

5.19 The feasibility study by DBA took place at a time when the future use of the Guildhall was under review. Their report concluded that, if major changes of use were to be considered for the Guildhall, a new combined Record Office and local studies collection, perhaps alongside other heritage attractions, should be considered as an important part of the development. However, if other plans for the Guildhall were adopted, DBA recommended that the Council seek to develop a Local History Centre on an accessible site either on the outskirts of the city (less central but lower land values and likelihood of parking) or in the city centre. None of these options were costed.

5.20 In 2011 the Leader of Council asked the Cabinet Member (Sustainable Development) to convene a working group to consult with users, draw up a vision for a Local History Centre and recommend a way forward. The working group comprised the Cabinet Member, Head of Heritage Services, Principal Archivist, Libraries & Information Manager, Trevor Osborne of the Trevor Osborne Group, representatives of Bath Abbey and Bath Preservation Trust and a freelance researcher / regular service user.

5.21 The working group drew up the following vision for the project:

To create a world-class History Centre that brings together the unique Record Office archives and the resources of the local studies library. In an imaginative new-build or conversion, visible, accessible and situated in the heart of Bath, the History Centre will engage new audiences and improve the service offered to the existing very active user base.

5.22 The working group also sought the advice of the Council's Commercial Estate Manager and Regeneration Team Leader regarding the likely availability and cost of suitable sites where a History Centre could be built or converted from an existing building. It became clear that opportunities for a stand-alone development of this kind, where there is limited space available and land values are high, are unlikely to be found in central Bath. It was concluded that the best prospect of developing a History Centre would be as part of a larger development or regeneration project. This remains the current position.

5.23 In 2014/15 the Leader and Chief Executive approved a 10:100 project to amalgamate the Record Office archive collections with the Library's Local Studies collection in the Guildhall using vacated space in the north wing basement. Work on this project is under way but it is not seen as a long-term solution to the need for a Local History Centre fit for the 21st century.

The need.

5.24 The public appetite for information about building history and genealogy has never been stronger, driven in part by TV programmes about building restoration projects and family history.

5.25 Despite being home to a 'Designated' collection, the Record Office does not meet all the requirements of TNA's Standard for Record Repositories. It scores very low in premises, facilities and governance, although it is approved to hold public records on TNA's behalf. However in CIPFA surveys the quality of public service at Bath Record Office has been voted by users the best of any archive in the South West region.

5.26 Bath Record Office is the only South West archive not to have had a refit in the last 25 years. Its archive stores are full and it currently makes use of any additional space that becomes available in the Guildhall on an ad hoc basis. Other than the 10:100 project mentioned at 5.17 above there is currently no strategic plan for development.

The bigger picture.

5.27 Around the UK numerous local authorities have recognised the importance of their archives by creating centres of excellence where their collections are stored in optimum conditions to ensure their preservation in perpetuity, and where people can study them in secure and user-friendly search rooms. A characteristic of these new developments is that no two are alike as they each bring together complementary collections and services from their own areas. A selection of examples include:

- Norfolk County Council (2004): a partnership with the University of East Anglia that created the Norfolk County Archive on the university campus at Norwich;

it also accommodates the East Anglian Film Archive and the Norfolk Sound Archive. It received a grant of £4.3m from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

- Wiltshire & Swindon Councils (2007): a £11m partnership that created the Wiltshire & Swindon History Centre at Chippenham to house their archive collections. It also incorporated the County's museums office, archaeology service and historic buildings team.
- Wolverhampton City Council (2009): a £7.5m partnership project between the Council, English Heritage and the Advantage West Midlands RDA to restore the grade II* listed Molineux Hotel that had stood derelict for nearly 25 years and house Wolverhampton Record Office in it. The project included a grant of £3.3m from the Heritage Lottery Fund.
- Somerset County Council (2010): twin £15m capital projects to create the Museum of Somerset at Taunton Castle and Somerset Heritage Centre on an industrial estate on the outskirts of the town; the latter brings together the offices of the County's archives, local studies, museums, historic environment and Victoria County History departments.
- Worcester City Council (2012): a £60m partnership between the Council and the University of Worcester to create 'The Hive' to house an integrated public and university library, the first of its kind in Europe. The Hive also accommodates the Council's archive and archaeology services and the one-stop shop for all Council services. The project included £14m of PFI funding.
- Devon County Council (2012): Devon Heritage Centre opened on the outskirts of Exeter on the site of the Devon Record Office (itself a new development in 2005) beside the city's eastern Park + Ride and very close to the M5 Jn29. It brought together the archive collections of Devon Record Office and East Devon Record Office with the local studies collections of the West Country Studies Library, Exeter City Library and the Devon & Cornwall Record Society.
- Cornwall Council (2015): £11.7m HLF award for a planned new County Archives Centre in a partnership project with Redruth Town Council and a private sector partner. The Council is putting in £4.6m. The project will bring together the collections of Cornwall Record Office, the Cornish Studies Library, Cornwall & Scilly Historic Environment Record, the 'Designated' archives of Hard Rock Mining and significant works on the Cornish language.
- Plymouth City Council (2016): in August 2016 HLF announced an award of £14.8m for a new £34m Plymouth Heritage Centre to be developed as a partnership project between the Council and the University of Plymouth. It will bring together the collections of the City Museum & Art Gallery, Plymouth & West Devon Record Office, the Central Library Local History collections, the South West Film & TV Archive, the South West Image Bank, and some of the Naval Heritage Centre collections in Devonport. There will be a contemporary arts programme curated by the University's Peninsula Arts.

6 RATIONALE

6.1 A single Local History Centre is the preferred choice of service users and stakeholders. It would achieve efficiencies and economies of scale and would provide

the storage conditions that the archive collections need and the search facilities that the service users deserve and have become accustomed to elsewhere.

6.2 A new Local History Centre would align with the themes of the Corporate Strategy 2016-2020, in particular ‘A New Relationship with Customers and Communities’ and ‘An Efficient Business’.

7 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

7.1 None.

8 CONSULTATION

8.1 The s151 Officer has been consulted in the preparation of this report. The DBA report of 2009/10 involved considerable consultation with service users and other archive holders in the district. Visitor feedback continues to be monitored and, where necessary, acted upon on an ongoing basis.

9 RISK MANAGEMENT

9.1 A risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations has been undertaken, in compliance with the Council's decision making risk management guidance.

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Background papers	N/a
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