



LOWESTOFT

RECORD OFFICE

CONSULTATION 2018

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Cllr Paul West

Cabinet Member with responsibility for Heritage
Suffolk County Council

The future of the Record Office Service in Lowestoft and north-east Suffolk

Suffolk Record Office (SRO) is the statutory repository for the records of Suffolk County Council and other local authorities. It is an important and informative resource, that helps us all to learn more about the heritage of our wonderful county.

Why we are consulting

The process of finding a more sustainable long-term solution to look after Suffolk Record Office collections has been ongoing since 2010. We are seeking to deliver effective services, increase digital access and work to attract new audiences.

Maintaining a strongroom for vulnerable material in Lowestoft is no longer possible as the strongroom is at full capacity. It also does not have the necessary environmental protection to safeguard our valuable records.

The consultation will focus on shaping a thriving archive service for north east Suffolk, which inspires all generations to engage with our archival heritage. Vulnerable Lowestoft Record Office (LRO) collections will be safeguarded at The Hold building, which is designed to provide state of the art, purpose built, storage.

The new service will continue to operate from the Lowestoft library building, and we are seeking your views on the best way to reshape the service.

Background

In January, SCC announced plans to change and transform the SRO service provided in Lowestoft. They involve safeguarding vulnerable collections, currently held in the strongroom at LRO, by moving them to The Hold, which will provide the best possible conditions. The Hold is due to open in Ipswich by 2020. Other vulnerable collections from the current Ipswich Record Office and Bury St Edmunds Record Office Outstore will also be moved to The Hold as part of the transformation of the service across the county.

At pre-engagement workshops held in April 2018 with local stakeholders, SCC agreed to look at developing a business case with local partners for a new strongroom archive storage facility for the north-east of the county. However, the conclusion is that this is not a viable option financially. We shall therefore concentrate our efforts on investing in wider digital access to our collections and improving outreach activity across the whole county.

Placing vulnerable collections into safe storage at The Hold does not mean the closure of the Record Office in Lowestoft - it instead heralds a new era for a new service with much wider public participation. We want this new, revitalised service for north east Suffolk to lead the way and be up and running before The Hold is open. As a direct result of feedback from the pre-engagement sessions, we are now committed to ensuring the new look service is staffed.

Feedback from the pre-engagement sessions can be viewed at www.suffolk.gov.uk/lroconsultation



What we seek your views on

1. Opening Hours

SCC has determined it can staff the new service for 30 hours per week. We are seeking feedback on which days of the week you would like the service open and which times of day you would prefer. For example, you might like to see a new late evening opening once a month to accommodate those who work regular office hours as well as Saturday or Sunday opening to accommodate visitors. Some of those present at the pre-engagement workshops suggested partial opening fewer days a week.

Once we have a better understanding of the preferred days of the week and times of opening, we may be able to augment the 30 hours through:

- Local partners making a financial contribution towards the staffing of the service
- Recruiting of volunteers to help

2. Events and Activities

We are seeking comments on your priorities for the events, activities and learning you would like to see delivered.

During the pre-engagement workshops, local people told us they would like outreach in the Lowestoft area to focus on:

- Going out to schools as well as getting them to visit
- Projects with care homes and particularly work with dementia patients
- Outreach programmes supporting health and wellbeing and with groups working with people with learning disabilities
- Travelling exhibitions
- Activities delivered in partnership with others (e.g. museums)

Findings gathered from across the county during the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) Development phase 2016/17, have also shaped a 4-year Activity Plan, which is now made possible by our HLF grant for The Hold: a Suffolk Archives Service for the 21st Century. The consultation is seeking your views on which of these events and activities you would be most interested in for north-east Suffolk.

What outreach activities would you like to see us deliver for Lowestoft and north east Suffolk?

The consultation survey includes potential options to be ranked in order of preference. If there is anything not included on the list, please tell us what else you would like to see prioritised.

3. Collections - being clear what will be in Lowestoft or elsewhere

A full list of the documents which the LRO currently houses can be seen at www.suffolk.gov.uk/lroconsultation as part of the consultation. It indicates whether these will remain in the Lowestoft Record Office or move in 2020 because they are more vulnerable (Please note that it would not be appropriate to split collections). The list also indicates which of these materials are already accessible digitally and plans for future digitisation.

We will develop 'handling' collections (in addition to the schools Loan Boxes delivered by the Activity Plan) for use on site and across the north-east of the county during events and activities, allowing people to still see, touch and handle older/more fragile material.

4. Re-categorisation of collections to allow some to remain

Some of the records currently held in the LRO strongroom are copies or transcripts of material held elsewhere in other record offices and The National Archives, or of archives brought in by organisations or individuals who gave the record office permission to make a copy. Some other collections also held in the strongrooms, such as sales particulars, electoral registers and local newspapers, are not as unique/irreplaceable because they are printed. Archivists have therefore reclassified these as local studies collections rather than more vulnerable archives so they can remain in the transformed service on open shelving.

Another collection that it is suggested could remain in the transformed service, is the Port of Lowestoft Research Society Collection (Ref 552). It has never been kept in the strongroom as it is continually being added to. It is kept in a locked room off the searchroom, so authorised members of the society can have easy access for filing and checking information.

The list of collections has been annotated to show the materials that would be re-categorised and remain.

5. Digitisation

Increasing digital access to collections makes them far easier for everyone to access and use, protects the fragile originals, as well as making it easier to share and use material for outreach and activities.

Digitisation is not a 'quick fix' solution and resources must be used to best effect. There were many suggestions for digitisation made at the pre-engagement workshops. However, the consensus was that it is difficult for stakeholders to recommend specific prioritisations as everyone has different interests, but name rich, large-scale data used by family historians would be good to digitise and that digitisation only works effectively alongside good cataloguing. SRO has already started to digitise the LRO Shipping Agreements (Ref 24), which are a name rich collection.

We are not seeking to use resource to duplicate the activities of national digitisation programmes.

Each project or collection is different and precise costings are required to assess the necessary investment and timescale. It depends on a range of variables such as the quantity of the items, their state of repair and how it is done whether it is done in-house, by an external contractor, with project funding/a grant, or by a commercial partner working under licence. The type and format of the vulnerable items being digitised also has an impact:

- a. Volumes are quickest to digitise especially if they can be scanned as double page openings
- b. Photos take longer as they require cropping
- c. Large maps requiring image stitching take much longer

Once the digital images are made further time is required to upload them to our digital preservation system, create metadata, link them to the catalogue record and make them available to download from the website.

We are seeking feedback on which collections or documents you would like to see prioritised for digitisation. (In some instances, it would not be appropriate to digitise all the items within a collection). We can analyse the results to develop more precise costs and plans. Please use the list of the collections referred to above to see the most requested collections, those already being digitised, or those we suggest should be considered for digitisation.

6. Volunteering

We are seeking feedback on volunteering opportunities that will be available at the new service location. Volunteer activities identified so far include:

- a. Meeters and greeters
- b. Answering simple research queries
- c. Helping staff set up/break down exhibitions
- d. Delivering a talk (e.g. for volunteers with specific areas of expertise)
- e. Carrying out research to inform displays and exhibitions
- f. Helping SRO staff supervise school visits (both incoming and outgoing)
- g. Helping customers use the PCs, fiche/film, and interactive AV elements
- h. Helping customers navigate finding aids which have not yet been digitised

We would like your feedback on the above proposals and whether there are any other areas you would be interested in helping with.

Timeline



How to have your say

We value your views on how we might transform the service, taking advantage of new technology to encourage a more diverse range of people to engage with the area's heritage celebrating the past, looking to the future, and developing new skills, whether they are local communities, young people, schools, day visitors, or tourists.

Our preferred method of response is for people to complete the online survey on our website at:
www.suffolk.gov.uk/lroconsultation

By calling **0345 603 1842** (Mon - Fri 8.30 - 18.00) you can request a hard copy of the survey.

Alternatively, you can email **LROconsultation@suffolk.gov.uk**

Please return hard copy surveys to:

Suffolk County Council - Lowestoft Record Office Consultation
Endeavour House
8 Russell Road
Ipswich
Suffolk
IP1 2BX

Please ensure that your responses arrive with us by 23.59 on Thursday 1st November 2018

We will use the information you have provided in consultation responses in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and General Data Protection Regulations 2018. We will check and share this information where necessary within SCC, with other local authorities, TNA, grant funding bodies e.g. HLF, and archive professionals and consultants.

If you need help to understand this information in another language please call **03456 066 067**.

Se precisar de ajuda para ler estas informações em outra língua, por favor telefone para o número abaixo. 03456 066 067

Portuguese

Jeigu jums reikia šios informacijos kita kalba, paskambinkite 03456 066 067

Lithuanian

Jeżeli potrzebujesz pomocy w zrozumieniu tych informacji w swoim języku zadzwoń na podany poniżej numer. 03456 066 067

Polish

Dacă aveți nevoie de ajutor pentru a înțelege această informație într-o altă limbă, vă rugăm să telefonați la numărul 03456 066 067

Romanian

এই লেখাটি যদি অন্য ভাষাতে বুঝতে চান তাহলে নিচের নম্বরে ফোন করুন 03456 066 067

Bengali

Если для того чтобы понять эту информацию Вам нужна помощь на другом языке, позвоните, пожалуйста, по телефону 03456 066 067

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