

# Business Case for Digital Preservation at Teesside Archives

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## Executive Summary

Teesside Archives requires additional funding to allow for the provision of a digital preservation system so the service can care for digital records to recognised standards.

## The Challenge

Teesside Archives service exists to create, maintain and preserve the collective memory of Teesside. Our mission is to make our collections of unique records of historical and evidential value accessible to current and future generations locally, nationally and world-wide to inspire an interest in the history, industry and communities of Teesside and promote a sense of local pride and identity.

While systems and processes for the management of paper records have been in place for decades, the management of digital records presents an entirely new challenge. Born digital and digitised records are currently stored on a variety of servers and hard drives without any provision for their long-term preservation. The service is not able to adequately provide access to these records and cannot offer safe storage to records created in digital formats by the four Teesside Boroughs such as Council Minutes and reports.

## Addressing the Challenge

Teesside Archives has limited staffing and resources and requires an increase in funding to allow for the procurement of a dedicated digital preservation solution. This web hosted solution would provide 100% data integrity and file format preservation to ensure the records will remain accessible in the long-term.

Online access to selected digital resources would revolutionise the use of key collections for people living in the four Teesside Boroughs and wider communities reducing the need for people to travel into Middlesbrough to benefit from the service.

The provision of a dedicated digital preservation solution would allow the service to conform to best practice and save time and money by reducing the requirement for on-site digital storage while improving search functions to make the records easier to locate.

## Project Overview

Due to staff and resource limitations our intension is to initially get the preservation part of the system in place to safeguard the records. Once this initial phase of the project is complete, the service will look at adding the access module to make appropriate parts of the digital collection available more widely.

## Budget

## Benefits

**Joint Archives Committee:** Ensuring the service is fit for purpose and peace of mind that essential resources are secure and preserved for future generations. The opportunity to

bring the service up to best practice standards by leading the region in addressing the challenge of digital preservation.

**Heads of Service:** Increasing the capacity of the service to preserve and manage born digital records allowing key records to be transferred from the Teesside Boroughs. Preventing data loss through corruption, ransomware attack or human error and with improved workflows to save time and money. Increased access facilities to help make key collections available to people in the Boroughs.

**Archives Staff:** A fit for purpose, easy to use digital archive, fully hosted and managed by an external company, allowing the team to continue to grow digital collections securely and maximise their use.

**IT Team:** Responsibility for irreplaceable digital archive assets moved to an expert provider, freeing up primary storage and solving the problems faced to provide access to these collections.

**Researchers, Public & Local Communities:** Increased and immediate access to selected digital collections when needed with a simple search interface and improved online access allowing resources to be shared more widely across the Teesside Boroughs, nationally and worldwide.

**Depositors:** Increase confidence in the ability of the service to safely and securely store and preserve born digital records for the long term allowing for an increase in the transfer of modern records from the four Teesside Boroughs and other organisations.

### Drivers

Having secured Provisional Archives Accreditation a required action to allow the service to move to full Accreditation is to continue working with governing and funding bodies to develop a solution for the long-term preservation of born digital material. This action must be achieved by July 2020.

The intention to relocate the service to new premises in the coming years also presents a compelling reason to invest in digital preservation now to allow for increased access to vital collections using digital surrogates while the move is undertaken.

There is an immediate need to safeguard the digital aspect of the collection and protect it against the risk of corruption or loss. Local IT services cannot offer the quantity of storage required and do not have the capacity to carry out the various preservation functions necessary to ensure the long term survival of the digital records.

### Risk

Born digital records produced by the Teesside Boroughs are at risk of being lost, leading to a catastrophic situation where decades of records fail to survive creating legal risks and a loss of corporate memory. If not properly managed the records are at risk of becoming unreadable due to format obsolescence.

Investment made in creating and collecting born digital and digitised records is lost if the data is not subsequently stored securely and gets corrupted or lost.

Current IT provision is not sufficient for the long term preservation of archival data with iPortal only suitable for current and semi-current records and not photographs or audio files.

Access to digital records would remain limited with a dependence on the Archivist to arrange access where possible. The service would continue to struggle with awareness of collections and the ability to engage local communities.

The lack of an appropriate system for digital preservation could lead to reputational damage to the service and its funding authorities due to potential loss of collections and poor access provision for customers.

### Alternative options

**Manage the data in-house:** This invites huge risks for data corruption, data loss and human error. It is costly to keep large volumes of data on primary storage. It has the potential to slow down other IT systems on the network. There would be no archival management system in place if data were kept in-house, nor would there be any file format preservation activities; therefore access, management and preservation of the data would be extremely difficult.

**Do nothing:** This option, whilst the most common, is of most concern. Due care and attention has been paid to analogue archival collections for centuries and the same level of care needs to be applied to digital assets. Perhaps arguable even more attention needs to be paid to born-digital material due to its transient nature. If nothing is done to securely store and preserve the file formats of any digital collection, it is 100% certain that the file will ultimately be rendered utterly inaccessible, in orders of magnitude shorter timeframe than any analogue media ever created.

### Recommendations

To increase funding to Teesside Archives on a permanent basis for the provision of a digital preservation system to allow for the safe storage and preservation of digital records with potential to develop online access.

### Collections at Risk

**Cleveland Police historic photographs** Over 16,000 images were transferred as part of recent high profile deposit due to the closure of Ladgate Lane site. Over 42GB of files were deposited on a USB memory stick, copied on to an external hard drive with no provision for providing access.

**British Steel digitised photographs** Over 10,600 photographs and negatives were digitised by staff and volunteers as part of the British Steel Project with the intention to increase access to the collection. The 6GB of files is currently stored on an external hard drive with no provision for access.

**Digitised specialist newspapers** Various publications including Steel News, the newspaper of British Steel Corporation; and the Teesside Star, a local colour newspaper in existence during 1966 are being digitised by volunteers for preservation purposes. The original newspapers dating from 1960s to 1980s are delicate and cannot withstand frequent use by researchers so a digital surrogate copy is being created. Currently, the images are stored on an external hard drive with no provision for access.