

Joint Archives Committee, 5 March 2025

Tees Valley Heritage Feasibility Update

1. Background

In February 2024, Focus Consultants 2010 LLP were appointed by the Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA) as the lead consultants to deliver the development of the Tees Valley heritage sector vision, feasibility study and business plan. In collaboration with the project team, consisting of Purcell Architects, Blue Sail Marketing and archive consultant Elizabeth Oxborrow-Cowan, Focus are reviewing the existing heritage offer and developing a comprehensive, compelling and sustainable heritage vision for the region. This includes finding a long-term solution for the Teesside Archives. This is especially important as the current arrangement for the Archives Service is most likely to lead to an ongoing reduction in the service for our customers/audiences and difficulties in meeting our statutory responsibilities.

Following an Options Workshop with the project Steering Group held in December and considering the feedback highlighting the need for a tangible, bold, and ambitious vision, TVCA have asked Focus to prioritise the development of this vision. This will be translated into concrete market propositions to guide the next stages of the project and provide a framework for appraising potential delivery options.

To strengthen this process, Haley Sharpe Consultants have been appointed to work alongside Focus, bringing their expertise in heritage interpretation, audience engagement, and strategic planning. Their appointment builds on the work undertaken to date, expanding the scope to create a clear and compelling vision for the future of archives and heritage across the region. Their work provides the missing piece needed to bring together the wider vision for the heritage sector and archives in Tees Valley, ensuring it is not just an aspiration but a practical, deliverable framework that connects with audiences, supports sustainability, and aligns with broader regional ambitions.

Building on the groundwork laid by Focus Consultants, Haley Sharpe Consultants are shaping a vision that redefines archives as dynamic, relevant, and integral to the region's cultural landscape. Through workshops, consultations, and sector analysis, they are addressing gaps in storytelling identified by Focus and the Steering Group. Their work ensures that archives are not viewed in isolation but as a vital part of a broader, evolving heritage offer, with a clear role in place-making, education, and community identity.

2. Work to Date

To date, significant progress has been made through:

- Extensive stakeholder engagement across the heritage, culture, and local authority sectors.
- Thematic analysis identifying emerging themes and priorities.

- Market appraisal to understand current positioning and future opportunities.
- Visioning workshops to explore ambition, delivery mechanisms, and the role of the archives.
- Development of emerging options for heritage delivery mechanisms and the future of the Teesside Archives.

3. Emerging Themes and Thinking

- **Central Role of Teesside Archives:** Partners are united in the belief that the Archives should sit at the heart of the heritage delivery model for Tees Valley. There is a collective commitment to bold and ambitious thinking to ensure its sustainability.
- **Connecting Narratives:** A key opportunity is aligning the Archives with wider heritage narratives and place-based storytelling to create stronger, more meaningful connections across the Tees Valley region.
- **Shared Services:** Options for shared services, such as marketing, skills development, and programming, are being explored to build long-term resilience and realise economies of scale.
- **Sustainability Through Digitisation:** There is strong consensus that digitisation must be a core priority. Stakeholders agree that “we’ll have to do it at some point, so why not now?” The importance of addressing born-digital materials as part of the Archive’s future offer has also been emphasised.
- **University Collaboration:** Teesside University has expressed readiness to support the Archives, particularly through their expertise in digital technologies and resources, which could play a key role in accelerating digitisation and enhancing access.

4. Independent Assessment by the Consultant Archivist

a) Summary of Teesside Archives

This is a professionally run archive service that has significant potential to serve the Tees Valley region given the quality of its collections, the aspirations and knowledge of its staff and the possible opportunities with other heritage and cultural activity in the region. However, it is severely constrained by several serious factors including:

- A fragmented and disinterested governance and funding environment
- A lack of suitable and sufficient accommodation in which to serve the public, work effectively, collect and store Teesside’s archival heritage, access collections, generate income
- The lack of digital preservation system to assure the survival of Teesside’s modern experience as captured in digital records
- A very tight funding environment which constrains all public services
- Consequently a very restricted public service offer, low or no profile with funders and residents, and limited relationships

b) Cost of Teesside Archives (benchmarking exercise)

Benchmarking was undertaken against four comparators that provide a single archive service for multiple local authorities, with the funding split distributed on population size: Glamorgan Archives, Gwent Archives, West Glamorgan Archives, West Yorkshire Archives Service (WYAS).

Table 1: Service Cost Comparison

	Teesside Archives	Glamorgan	Gwent	West Glamorgan	WYAS
Population 2021 Census	569,369	1,112,100	587,700	380,800	2,351,600
No of funding authorities	4	6	5	2	5
Approximate size of archive collections Cubic metres	951	1,296	481	631	4,215
Gross revenue expenditure	£273,755	£908,297	£1,024,138	£330,750	£2,207,405
Population compared with TA	N/A	195%	103%	67%	413%
Collection size compared with TA	N/A	136%	51%	66%	443%
Size of gross revenue expenditure compared with TA	N/A	332%	121%	121%	806%
Cost/ head of population	£0.48	£0.82	£1.74	£0.87	£0.94
Average gross expenditure per local authority	£68,439	£151,383	£204,828	£165,375	£441,481
Average gross expenditure per local authority compared with TA	N/A	221%	299%	242%	645%

Looking at the gross revenue expenditure, it can be seen that Teesside Archives is funded to a significantly lower level than the other services (all of which have faced funding cuts over recent years) and has been for many years. The gross revenue expenditure cost (which will be offset by a small amount of income generation in all cases) of the archive service per head of population in the comparators is ranging from double to almost four times the amount provided to Teesside Archives. On an average basis the local authorities of Teesside pay a half to

almost a seventh of other local authorities, even after on-going funding cuts in the comparator services.

Table 2: Staff Cost Comparison

	Total staff FTE	No of cubic metres per FTE	No of FTE staff per local authority
Teesside Archives	4.7	202	1.2
Glamorgan Archives	13.1	99	2.2
Gwent	15	32	3
West Glamorgan Archives	6.5	97	3
West Yorkshire Archives	20.9	202	4

Staffing at Teesside Archives is small compared with the four comparators. Bearing in mind that all the comparators have had staffing cuts over the last fifteen years which have left them significantly understaffed, Teesside Archives still has the smallest staff in absolute and relative terms. Furthermore, three of the comparators' staffing includes staff dedicated to records management for the local authority funders, to assist the securing of local authority records into the archive service whilst Teesside Archives has no such staff member.

c) Opportunities for Investment into Teesside Archives

- Wide ranging, relevant and detailed collections held by TA that have relevance of collections to communities and demographics right across the region – *'The material is truly unique – it tells the story of the locality but also dispel the myth that Teesside is a backwater e.g. Sydney Harbour bridge. It reveals a whole world of international trade and how work in Teesside informed business practice e.g. businesses funding hospitals'*
- Collection knowledge, flexibility and aspiration of staff to engage people with collections in new ways
- Professional skills of staff to collect and conserve collections, gather and structure information, and build networks
- Range of other heritage collections and cultural locations provides endless opportunities for joint working and engaging public experiences across the region
- Significant amount of capital investment provides attractive new locations in which TA can present its collections, work in partnership and create relevant and enriching public engagement
- Value of the TA collections to support the interpretation, maintenance and engagement with other heritage collections and landmarks in the region
- Impending anniversaries providing opportunities for TA to work with others and raise its profile e.g. Captain Cook tricentenary 2028, Middlesbrough's bi-centenary 2030

- Widening the partnership to include other stakeholders e.g. TVCA and Teesside University.
- TA has a very strong reputation with those partners and audiences with which it has worked
- TA is experienced of and is open to working with a diverse range of partners and audiences e.g. artists, poets, industry, etc
- Strong exemplars to learn from that demonstrate the impact of a dynamic, high profile archive service e.g. The Box (Plymouth), Archives+ (Manchester), The Story (Durham), The Hold (Suffolk)
- The reputation, profile impact and regional remit of TVMG
- Political and social agendas which TA can contribute to e.g. poverty proofing, literacy, visitor economy
- Wide range of potential local partners beyond the heritage sector to which TA could have relevance e.g. Age UK, Navigator North, English Heritage, National Trust
- TA can provide services that others in the region know they need e.g. digital preservation, looking after the products of oral history and community engagement, providing expert conservation advice
- Great potential in telling more 'hidden' and 'new' histories e.g. women, migrant populations
- TA providing a driver for cross-borough working in heritage more widely
- Libraries and museums in the region provide ready-made contact points with large numbers of residents who would be natural audiences for TA
- The strong reputation for engagement and flexibility of TA with individuals who have worked with TA
- Economies of scale by housing external archive collections in TA and using that move as a mechanism to sift out duplicate material

d) Assessment of Different Building Options

New single site:

Description

- The whole operation of TA is moved into a bespoke building, either free standing or attached to the building of an existing public service provider such as a museum or library. It is in a central or highly accessible location.

Considerations

- It is assumed that TA would still have access to the services of a borough council with regards to areas such as HR, IT support, marketing and building maintenance (including cleaning)
- It would need to be confirmed whether there would be any rates relief/exemptions.

Benefits

- If delivered with ambition can transform the profile and relevance of Teesside Archives as a civic service and visitor attraction
- Delivers a range of public spaces that can be used to deliver new services, develop new audiences and generate income

- If appropriately designed can have income generation capacity built in through attractive spaces for hire and functionality for different types of charged for events, digitisation suite for a commercial reprographics service
- Staff have appropriate working spaces so they can work efficiently and safely
- Collections are stored in conditions meeting professional standards so ensuring their longevity
- Supports TA to gain Archive Service Accreditation
- Drives efficiency for the boroughs by having a single archive service without duplication of elements such as a searchroom, public conveniences and seminar/group room.
- Can provide attractive, functional spaces for use by the other heritage services in the region.

Issues

- Having sufficient resources to meet the capital cost
- Having sufficient resources to meet the long-term staffing and maintenance of a large building and matching service
- Identifying a suitable site
- Could perpetuate TA's separation from other heritage and library services but could be mitigated if co-housed with other organisation(s)

New dual site:

Description

- The public spaces and certain staff working spaces are moved into a bespoke building in a central or highly accessible location, which is either free standing or attached to the building of an existing public service provider such as a museum or library.
- The collections storage, digitisation suite and conservation laboratory are all on a separate site that can provide a large footprint site at a low cost i.e. out of town. The off-site storage facility will also include staff office so that staff can work on collections easily.

Considerations

- It is assumed that TA would still have access to the services of a borough council with regards to areas such as HR, IT support, marketing and building maintenance (including cleaning)
- It would need to be confirmed whether there would be any rates relief/ exemptions

Benefits

- If delivered with ambition can transform the profile and relevance of Teesside Archives as a civic service and visitor attraction
- May provide cost savings over a single site by having the storage block in a cheaper location – would need more work to establish.
- Delivers a range of public spaces that can be used to deliver new services, develop new audiences and generate income

- If appropriately designed can have income generation capacity built in through attractive spaces for hire and functionality for different types of charged for events, digitisation suite for a commercial reprographics service.
- Staff have appropriate working spaces so they can work efficiently and safely
- Collections are stored in conditions meeting professional standards so ensuring their longevity
- Supports TA to gain Archive Service Accreditation
- Drives efficiency for the boroughs by having a single archive service without duplication of elements such as a searchroom, public conveniences and seminar/group room.
- Can provide attractive, functional spaces for use by the other heritage services in the region.

Issues

- Having sufficient resources to meet the capital cost
- Having sufficient resources to meet the long-term staffing and maintenance of a large building and matching service
- Retains TA's current inefficiency of having collections offsite which means:
 - All consultation of material by the public must be pre-booked
 - More staff time is taken up with retrieving material as staff will do the collecting themselves (unlike the current Iron Mountain situation where deliveries are undertaken by Iron Mountain)
 - Staff must go to the offsite store to research collections
 - Staff are taken away from the public site so are less available for face to face public service
- Requires management of two separate buildings
- Could perpetuate TA's separation from other heritage and library services but could be mitigated if co-housed with other organisation(s)

Multi-site (disaggregation of the service)

Description

- Each council takes up operational responsibilities for archives relating to its geographic boundaries. Each council either develops a service and workspace and either builds a new store to professional archival standards or keeps its collection with a commercial heritage storage provider.

Considerations

- Each borough will have to be approved as a Place of Deposit by The National Archives in order to hold key 'public records' such as court and coroners' records. This is covered by achieving the Archive Service Accreditation Standard.
- There will have to be a massive amount of work to transfer ownership of collections from Teesside Archives to each borough. In many cases it may not be possible to contact the original donor to seek their approval.
- Whether to decide to have certain shared facilities e.g. a digitisation suite (to generate reprographics income and provide a full service as well as create a significant amount of digital content for online activity), where this would be sited and how its costs would be met.

- It is envisaged that the local services such as the libraries and museums will engage with the borough archives to maximise its use and reach to the public i.e. not all outreach will be undertaken by the small archive staff.

Benefits

- Collections are located in the vicinity and communities to which they relate
- Removes the governance complexity of a regional service
- Gives the borough complete autonomy over the direction of its archive service
- Provides opportunity to co-locate with local museums and libraries and integrate the archive into local services
- Provides opportunities for genuine cross borough working with the other archive services and wider heritage and library services

Issues

- How to decide on the responsibility of collections that relate to the whole region notably Cleveland County Council
- Where to site the conservator and the conservation laboratory and digitisation suite – this service is critical to the care of the TA archive collections as well as providing advice to museums and libraries holding their own archive collections. It is not financially practicable to have one conservation laboratory per site.
- Duplication of spaces and public services meaning higher capital costs and staff time e.g. the searchroom and its operation would require four sets of staff, of say an archivist and an assistant, rather than one set so less capacity for delivering other services
- Duplication of costs – buildings, staff, software licences, etc.
- Individual sites' staffing is below a critical capacity to do expansive work such as new types of engagement and funding bids.

Through the feasibility study, work is being done to look at the staffing implications of each option.

In addition, at the request of Hartlepool Borough Council, we have estimated the costs of withdrawing records from the Restore facility. The costs in Table 3 below are based on the withdrawal of 3,820 items belonging to Hartlepool. Please note that this doesn't include archives that cover more than one borough, where a separate agreement/budget would be required.

Table 3: Cost of removal of HBC records from Restore

Activity	Qty	Unit Cost	NET Cost
Retrieval from Restore	3,820	£0.75	£2,865.00
Perm Out	3,820	£2.69	£10,275.80
Pallet and shrink	120	£5.00	£600.00
NET Cost of Perm Out			£13,740.80

Transport costs will be additional and likely to be in the region of **£2,000 - £3,000**. Future annual storage and staffing costs for the exiting individual LA would need to be determined by them separately and will vary depending on location and staffing arrangements.

e) Digital Preservation

Digital preservation is the digital equivalent of an archive function for paper records. It is fundamental to ensuring the long-term survival, authenticity and accessibility of digital records through a whole range of structured, on-going activity¹ managed through a digital preservation infrastructure. It is a key element of Archive Service Accreditation.

Digital preservation is a proactive and thoughtful process that includes core activities on an on-going basis: providing the means to move the digital object into the digital preservation system; accurately identifies the technical format which drives conservation decisions; checks for corruption and change; creates new digital objects (through upgrading or software simulation) to ensure the item is always accessible despite technological changes; has a full description of its content, provenance and access restrictions; maintains the original digital object which can be returned to as necessary along with key technical metadata; stores the digital objects in a secure environment; sustains stable storage media and strategies; creates access copies and provides methods of access such as catalogues and viewing facilities; keeps an audit trail of all activity with the digital object to evidence its provenance and authenticity.

Teesside Archives does not have a digital preservation system. A previous bid by TA for installation and use of the Preservica system² was rejected by the funding boroughs as unaffordable in the long term. In the meantime, the boroughs have no means of ensuring the survival of their records, fulfilling their legal obligations under the Local Government Act 1972 to 'make proper arrangements with respect to any documents that belong to or are in the custody

¹ E.g. gathering digital archives together, identifying formats, describing content and technical make-up, on-going checking for viruses and corruption, 'normalisation' to prevent technical obsolescence, controlling access and alterations, maintaining the original bit stream, providing access, maintaining digital storage

² <https://preservica.com>

of the council or any of their officers³ for the preservation and access of both digital and analogue records.

TA has sought to undertake basic activity as far as it can such as creating a Digital Asset Register but is unable to undertake any more meaningful activity.

The borough councils need to invest in a proper digital preservation system to secure their own records, and preserve the modern historical records of the region.

5. Accreditation of the Service

Following its application to remain an Accredited Service, Teesside Archives had confirmation in November that it has retained its Accredited status. This status is however provisional, and its retention depends on TA being able to satisfy some requirements by 7 November 2026 and on keeping the Accreditation Panel apprised of developments at the service in the interim.

The Accreditation Panel which made the award:

“...recognised the challenges and uncertainty faced by the archive service in recent years and noted the move to new temporary premises and that the archive collections were held temporarily offsite in commercial storage. The Panel also noted that at the time of accreditation the archive service was awaiting the recommendations following a feasibility study regarding wider heritage provision in the Tees Valley and the decisions that would affect the future of the service, including premises and governance structures as a result of this.”

We are required to provide further updates on the heritage feasibility study and future development plans for the TA to National Archives in February 2025. Within the two-year term of the provisional award, we can complete the formal application to move to a full award.

6. Case Studies

During the Feasibility Study, examples of good practice and innovation within the Archives sector have been identified and discussed with stakeholders. More detailed information, specifically in relation to specific outcomes e.g. visitor numbers, is likely to be available later in January, but here are some examples gathered to date from which positive outcomes have been identified.

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<https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa+/http://www.communities.gov.uk/localgovernment/360902/constitutionsandethics/constitutionalarrangements/guidanceproper/>

a) The Story, Durham



The Story, located in Durham, is a cultural heritage attraction that opened to the public in June 2024 at a cost of £23m. Situated in the restored Grade II listed Mount Oswald manor house, with a new build extension, it combines historical architecture with modern facilities to celebrate the past, present, and future of County Durham. The Story houses County Durham Archives, Historic Environment Record, Durham Light Infantry Collection, Local Studies and Historic Registration.

<https://www.durham.gov.uk/article/31599/The-Story-begins-as-new-attraction-opens-to-public> <https://www.thestorydurham.org/about/> <https://www.ryderarchitecture.com/project/the-story/>

Digital Access and Engagement

The Story serves as a model for integrating digital access and interactive experiences in archival settings. The Story enhances accessibility to its extensive collections through several digital initiatives:

- **Search and Discover Space:** Equipped with interactive screens and 16 computer terminals, this area allows visitors to access digital content, including the Historic Environment Record (HER), collections databases, and popular records such as church registers and newspapers.
- **Online Collections Search:** A state-of-the-art online platform enables users to explore The Story's treasures remotely, featuring artificial intelligence capabilities to enhance the search experience.
- **Digitisation Studio:** A specialist studio dedicated to expanding the range of collections available digitally, ensuring broader access for researchers and the public.

Visitor Experience

To make historical records more engaging, The Story offers:

- **Interactive Exhibitions:** Free, interactive exhibition spaces that bring to life the stories within the collections, providing an immersive experience for visitors.

- **Educational Workshops:** Designed to educate and inspire, these workshops draw on the combined collections and their fascinating treasures.
- **Events and Activities:** A diverse programme, including storytelling sessions, kids' takeover days, behind-the-scenes tours, and community projects, aimed at engaging a wide audience.

Facilities

The Story provides purpose-built facilities to support its mission:

- **Collections Room:** A secure research area for viewing collection items from the strong rooms, available by appointment.
- **Café and Grounds:** A café offering a place to relax, with views over the historic manor house grounds, enhancing the visitor experience.

Initial Impact

In the first 6 months of opening The Story had attracted 57,763 people and is on track to double the projected annual visitor figures for 2024/25. Within these figures visitors to the searchroom to consult original documents could be in the region of 18,000 for the first year. The searchroom is open 7 days a week and has in the region of 50 visitors a day. The number of original documents produced in the searchroom is up by about 20 percent.

b) Herefordshire Archives and Records Centre



Overview

The Herefordshire Archive and Records Centre (HARC), located in Hereford, is a pioneering facility in the UK for the storage and preservation of archival materials. Completed in 2015, it

was the first archive building in the UK to achieve Passivhaus certification – a quality assurance process for buildings that are designed and constructed to be energy efficient, setting a new standard for energy efficiency and sustainability in archival storage.

Design and Construction

Designed by Architype, HARC was constructed with a focus on sustainability and cost-effectiveness. The building comprises two distinct sections: a thermally isolated repository for archival storage and an administration area that includes public research rooms, an education room, restoration lab, council offices, and exhibition space. The repository was built using monolithic concrete to ensure optimal thermal mass and airtightness, while the administration area features a timber frame construction, providing a warm and welcoming atmosphere for visitors.

Sustainability Features

HARC's design adheres to the rigorous Passivhaus standard, which significantly reduces energy consumption. The building maintains stable internal temperatures and humidity levels, crucial for the preservation of archival materials, without relying on conventional heating and cooling systems. This results in operational savings of approximately 80% compared to similar facilities built to standard UK Building Regulations.

Cost Efficiency

An analysis comparing a BREEAM Excellent design to a Passivhaus design revealed that the Passivhaus option was not only more energy-efficient but also more cost-effective, with a 4% capital cost saving. This demonstrates that sustainable building practices can align with budgetary constraints, offering long-term financial benefits through reduced operational costs.

c) The Box, Plymouth



Overview

The Box, located in Plymouth, is a pioneering cultural institution that houses five heritage services including archives, museum and art gallery into a single site. Opened in 2020, at a cost of £40m, it serves as a central hub for Plymouth's heritage collections, contemporary arts, and archives, offering a dynamic space for exhibitions, research, and community engagement. The Box serves as an exemplary model for integrating multiple cultural services within repurposed historic buildings while embracing digital innovation.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Box,_Plymouth <https://www.theboxplymouth.com/about-the-box>

Repurposed Building

The Box was created by transforming several historic structures, including the Grade II listed former City Museum and Art Gallery, Central Library buildings, and St Luke's Church. These historic buildings were sensitively integrated with contemporary extensions to create a cohesive, modern facility that respects and preserves Plymouth's architectural heritage.

Digital Excellence

The Box demonstrates a strong commitment to digital innovation through several key initiatives:

- **Digital Preservation:** It has implemented robust strategies to ensure the longevity and accessibility of digital records, developing preservation policies and employing advanced technologies to safeguard its collections.
- **Online Access:** The institution offers extensive online access to digitised records, enabling researchers and the public to explore its collections remotely via a comprehensive online catalogue.
- **Digital Engagement:** Through virtual exhibitions, educational resources, and social media, The Box makes its archives more engaging and accessible to diverse audiences.

Initial impact

Since opening in 2020 The Box has had over 900,000 visitors. An analysis produced⁴ in July 2024 identified the following numbers for The Box as a whole:

- In the 2023-2024 financial year, The Box had 272,000 visits – a 10% increase on the previous year and more than three times as many annual visitors as the former City Museum and Art Gallery. Since opening, more than 26,000 children and young people have participated in The Box's schools programme and 27,000 family visitors attended free holiday workshops in 2023/4 alone.
- Over a third of The Box's visitors to date have been first time visitors. A quarter of these had never visited a similar attraction before.
- Visitors come from a diverse age range and is doing especially well at attracting under 25s and over 65s, reflecting Plymouth's demographic and student population.

⁴ <https://www.plymouth.gov.uk/news/box-continues-impress-huge-visitor-numbers>

- It was voted Devon's Best Family Attraction in the 2024 Muddy Stiletto Awards and has received a Tripadvisor Travellers' Choice award.

d) The Hold, Suffolk



Opened in 2020 at a cost of £17m, The Hold is located on Ipswich's Waterfront (part of the University of Suffolk campus) and is home to the Suffolk Archives and the John Blatchly Local Studies Library, as well as an exhibition gallery, shop, café, auditorium (seating 200) and seminar/learning/teaching spaces shared by the University of Suffolk. Many of its spaces are available for third party hire.

The Hold is a partnership between Suffolk County Council, Suffolk Archives and the University of Suffolk. It has received funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, other national organisations, and local Suffolk heritage groups.

<https://www.suffolkarchives.co.uk/about-suffolk-archives/the-hold/>.

<http://www.prsarchitects.com/projects/arts-civic-education/hold-suffolk-archives>

Ends.