

JOINT ARCHIVES COMMITTEE

A meeting of the Joint Archives Committee was held on Wednesday 5 March 2025.

PRESENT: Councillors C Male, R Cook, U Earl and P Storey

OFFICERS: Tara Connor, Christopher Di-Niro, Ruth Hobbins, Richard Horniman, Claire Jones, Gaye Kirby and Marnie Ramsey

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Councillors S Nelson and C Richardson

24/52 **WELCOME AND FIRE EVACUATION PROCEDURE**

The Chair welcomed all attendees to the meeting and explained the fire evacuation procedures.

24/53 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Name of Member	Type of Interest	Item / Nature of Business
Cllr R Cook	Non-pecuniary	TVCA Cabinet Member

24/54 **MINUTES OF THE JOINT ARCHIVES COMMITTEE - 4 FEBRUARY 2025, 14 JANUARY 2025 AND 2 OCTOBER 2024**

The minutes of the Joint Archive Committees held on 4 February 2025, 14 January 2025 and 2 October 2024 were submitted and approved as correct records.

24/55 **TEESSIDE ARCHIVES EXECUTIVE REPORT**

The Head of Culture and Archives Manager were in attendance and presented the Executive report to the Committee.

The report outlined the following:

Collections

The largest deposits of this period were plans of Ayresome Ironworks (Gjers Mills) and plans from British Railways Property Board. The plans covered varying time periods and required conservation before they would be accessible to the public. The listing of the records of the Teesside Federation of the WI that were received following the closure of the St. Mary Centre in Middlesbrough had been completed

The annual accession return had been completed and submitted to the National Archives in January.

Restore had confirmed their intention of moving the collection to a new facility in County Durham. The Place of Deposit Manager at the National Archives was required to visit the site to ensure it could be appointed as a Place of Deposit for Public Records. The visit was scheduled for 11 March and included the Archives Manager and Conservator and the National Archives Engagement Manager for the region.

Public Access and Outreach

The service had continued to be busy. The Community Engagement Officer had been successful in securing some small grants and had provided a wide range of events and activities that appealed to a broad audience. The Archives Supervisor who managed the volunteers had completed her MA in Curating with Teesside University and had assisted with engagement sessions. The volunteers were valued and provided a great deal of assistance to the service

Conservation and Preservation

The Conservator had been working on a number of collections, reacting to new collections and also to the requests from members of the public and staff. Work completed included;

- Assessed and repackaged a collection of 20 photograph albums and almost 800 photographs showing the ICI Nylon works.
- Three large maps of the Teesside area were fully cleaned and repaired prior to being digitised.
- The Federation of the Women's Institute had deposited their large collection of documents, scrapbooks and photographs, many of which required stabilising and repackaging to protect them for the future.
- A large collection of rolled engineering drawings created by Giers Mills which showed Ayresome Ironworks had been received. All required extensive cleaning and some required full conservation.
- Disaster planning training for the Archive staff had been led by the Conservator
- The Conservator attended a Symposium at Durham on ethics and decision-making. Talks with demonstrations of conservation work had been given to groups of 11-12yr olds with a future careers theme, which showed options for their future.

Marketing and Communication

There had been requests to include material from the collections in exhibitions in Rome and South Georgia, illustrating the wide reach and appeal of the archives. Teesside Archives had supplied images for use in association with the recent royal visit and maintained a regular presence through content shared on social media.

Key Performance Indicators

The following Key Performance Indicators were presented:

In person visits to the archives from September 2024 – January 2025:

Local Authority	No. of Visitors	% of total
Hartlepool	16	3.1%
Middlesbrough	259	49.8%
Redcar & Cleveland	100	19.2%
Stockton	60	11.5%
Other UK	84	16.2%
Rest of the world	1	0.2%
TOTAL	520	100%

Total number of document issues (Sep 24 – Jan 25): 924

Total number of enquiries (Sep 24 – Jan 25): 1,717

Engagement Activity delivered by Local Authority from September 2024 – January 2025

Local Authority	No. of People	% of total people
Hartlepool	25	3.1%
Middlesbrough	343	42.0%
Redcar & Cleveland	218	26.7%
Stockton	97	11.9%
Tees Valley	133	16.3%
Other	0	0%
TOTAL	816	100%

N.B Stockton Reference Library exhibition numbers (Last Orders) had been removed from the figures as only library user numbers (9,009) were known.

AGREED that the report was noted.

The Head of Culture presented a report which sought the approval of the 2025/26 budget for Teesside Archives. It was explained that the proposal included a 3% pay award for staff, rent increases and a slight reduction in storage costs.

The Local Authority contributions were also presented within the report.

AGREED that the proposed budget for 2025/26 was approved.

24/57

TEES VALLEY HERITAGE FEASIBILITY UPDATE

The Head of Culture presented an update on the Tees Valley Heritage Feasibility Study.

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 reviewed the existing heritage offer and developed a comprehensive, compelling and sustainable heritage vision for the region. This included finding a long-term solution for the Teesside Archives.

To date, significant progress had 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.

The independent assessment of the Teesside Archives service was noted as a professionally run archive service that had 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 was noted as 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.
- A restricted public service offer, low or no profile with funders and residents, and limited relationships

The report considered the future of the Archives Service; costings, assessments of different building options, case studies and digital preservation.

It was noted that digital preservation was the digital equivalent of an archive function for paper records and was fundamental in ensuring the long-term survival, authenticity and accessibility of digital records through a digital preservation infrastructure and was a key element of Archive Service Accreditation.

Teesside Archives did not have a digital preservation system. A previous bid by Teesside Archives for installation and use of the Preservica system was rejected by the funding boroughs as unaffordable in the long term. In the meantime, the boroughs had 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 belonged to or were in the custody Teesside Archives had sought to undertake basic activity such as creating a Digital Asset Register but was unable to undertake more meaningful activity. The Local Authorities needed to invest in a digital preservation system to secure their own records and preserve the modern historical records of the region.

Following the application to remain an Accredited Service, Teesside Archives received confirmation in November 2024 that it had retained its accredited status. This status was provisional, and its retention depended on Teesside Archives 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 Head of Culture advised that the final report is expected at the end of March 2025. Members were of the view that an additional meeting of the Joint Archives Committee should be arranged in order to discuss the findings of the Tees Valley Heritage Study.

AGREED that:

- The information was received and noted.
- The Archives Manager would draft a letter on behalf of the Committee, to the Secretary of State/Department for Culture, Media and Sport in regards to potential partnerships/guidance on statutory responsibilities of public bodies and the maintaining of documents.
- A meeting of the Joint Archives Committee would be scheduled for 7 May 2025, 5pm to discuss the final report of the Tees Valley Heritage Study.
- Tees Valley Combined Authority and Teesside University would be invited to the meeting.

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INTERIM ARRANGEMENTS

The Head of Culture presented a report to inform the Committee of the interim arrangements of the Teesside Archives Service.

The Service Level Agreement (SLA) for the Teesside Archives Service was extended to 31 March 2025 with agreement from the Joint Archives Committee (JAC), whilst the service awaited the outcomes from the heritage feasibility work which was expected to complete in October/November 2024.

The work had been delayed and it was proposed that the committee agreed to a further one-year extension to the existing Service Level Agreement to 31 March 2026, via a Deed of Variation, to allow time for proposals around the future governance of the service to be considered.

It was noted that previous discussions had taken place in respect of making changes to the existing SLA. However, as the Joint Archives Committee was an executive function of the Council, changes would require an approval process beyond the authority of the Executive Members of JAC. It was suggested that a reasonable approach was to delay any fundamental changes until the requirements to support a new vision and operating model for Teesside Archives had been achieved.

The current staffing provision for the Teesside Archives Service was provided in the report, equating to 1.2 FTE per Local Authority. Due to the maternity leave of an Archivist which commenced in March 2025, a flexible arrangement had been adopted to increase the hours of the Archive Assistant and Community Engagement Officer as and when required to provide support for the service.

In addition to the existing staffing establishment, the Archives were likely to require a full-time Digital Engagement/Archivist post to work on bringing born digital records into the archives, as well as managing the public-facing digital platforms including the procurement of a new cataloguing system. Future staffing arrangements would be considered in the context of the new operational model to be agreed by JAC further to receipt of the Heritage Feasibility report and costings.

The Committee were advised that the five-year Restore contract for storage of the Teesside Archives collection would end in July 2026. There was provision to extend the contract up to a maximum of five 12-month periods, however the procurement framework allowed a maximum length contract of seven years in total i.e. to July 2028.

The Committee was advised that it was unlikely to have secured a new Archive facility with on-site storage by July 2026 and therefore the service had begun to explore storage options for an interim period and conversations had begun with other partners locally to assess if there was a desire for shared storage space. Proposals would be presented to the JAC in October 2025.

Once a direction of travel for the Archives Service had been achieved, the service would discuss potential financial support with prospective funders (e.g. TVCA, National Lottery

Heritage Fund).

AGREED that:

- The information was received and noted.
- The Service Level Agreement was extended to 31 March 2026.

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ANY OTHER URGENT ITEMS WHICH IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIR, MAY BE CONSIDERED

None.