

Teesside Archives – Joint Archives Committee Meeting

Wednesday 7 May 2025

Digital Preservation Briefing Paper

Overview:

Following the discussion at the last JAC meeting, this briefing paper has been produced by the Archives Manager and Head of Culture to provide more details on the investment required into the Archives Service to support the storage and preservation of born digital and other digitised material held by Teesside Archives.

The need to address this issue is pressing, as the volume of material that is now being generated in 'born digital' format is accelerating. Public Records and the core records of the Teesside boroughs are now being created in this way, and they form the statutory element of the Archive Service. Furthermore, The National Archives has updated its Accreditation requirements and the importance of the ability of an Accredited archive service to look after digital material is now a fundamental requirement which we are not adequately addressing at the current time.

In addition to managing archival records, an investment in digital preservation would also enable material to be housed for partner services like museums, as well as being central to the success of the proposed 'Vessel' facility which is identified in the Tees Valley Heritage Feasibility Report as a centre for the digitisation of collections.

The proper safe keeping in archives of born digital records is a statutory function of the Archives Service. The purpose of this briefing paper is to outline the current challenges around the storage, management, accessibility and long-term preservation of digital records, and to outline a potential solution to this challenge.

Context:

Digitisation is important to heritage-based services for both preservation and access. Here in the Tees Valley, the role of digital material is central to the new vision outlined in the Tees Valley Heritage Vision & Feasibility Report which proposes a way forward for the Archives Service through 'The Vessel'. In summary, digitisation should:

- Increase external access to heritage materials
- Enhance visibility and outreach
- Help preserve originals
- Improve internal access

Drivers for digitisation and digital preservation include:

- Research
- Value to the public

- Physical condition of originals
- Technological obsolescence (NB we have already experienced loss of digital files and analogue cassette tapes are at high risk of loss)

Challenges around digitisation and digital preservation include:

- Equipment
- Space
- Time
- Staffing
- The requirement of good digital infrastructure (see below)
- Environmental impact

Doing nothing poses a number of risks. The service is already struggling to keep digital files on hard drives that risk loss of records. Digital formats become outdated and without an appropriate digital preservation system information will become unreadable in the future.

Option for Discussion:

Having articulated the need for a digital repository, Preservica has been identified as the best system to meet those needs. Thanks to New Burdens funding (current balance of £115,991), the service currently has the funds to purchase this system and support the running costs for 3 years, which is the minimum initial contract – total cost: £66,810.

We would also require an investment in staff resource and would recommend an initial one-year fixed contract for a Digital Archivist to manage the set up and initial population of Preservica, which could also be funded through New Burdens – total cost: £43,172.

As shown in Table 1, this would result in a total investment from the New Burdens fund of £109,982 leaving a small balance of £6,009 to cover any contingencies that may arise.

However, this investment would only get us so far. There would need to be a commitment from the partners in the Archives Service to support the ongoing annual cost of Preservica beyond Year 3 (£15,250 pa). There would also be an ongoing requirement for staff resource beyond Year 1 to manage the system and the archiving of digital records. We estimate this to be £25,000 pa, which would equate to circa 22 hours per week. The hours required would be determined by what the partners agree around the system's use, the records it will receive from each LA/other partners, etc.

Appendix 1 includes a full breakdown of costs from Preservica.

Financial Considerations:

Table 1 below gives an indication of the costs over the first three years and summaries proposals for where the funding would need to come from.

Table 1: Digital Preservation Costs (Years 1-3)

	Preservica	Staffing	Total	Propose Funded from
Year 1	£36,310	£43,172 (Grade I, top of scale, plus on costs)	£79,482	£79,482: New Burdens
Year 2	£15,250	£25,000 - Investment in ongoing staff resource would be required – TBC depending on the number of partners depositing records.	£40,250	£15,250: New Burdens £25,000: Archive Partners
Year 3	£15,250	£25,000 – As above	£40,250	£15,250: New Burdens £25,000: Archive Partners
Total	£66,810	£93,172	£159,982	£109,982: New Burdens £50,000: Archive Partners

As detailed above, the New Burdens grant of £115,991 can be used to fund the following:

- £66,810 acquisition of the Preservica system, including 3 years running/maintenance costs.
- £43,172 for a full-time Grade I Digital Archivist for one year.

An additional £25,000 pa would need to be found in years 2 and 3 for staffing. From year 4 onwards, the costs would increase to £40,250 pa to include the annual Preservica fee. These costs would need to be funded from a mix of increased income to the service which may arise from the implementation of the system, the introduction of new partners and/or a review of the current staffing structure. This is to ensure that the implementation and ongoing costs associated with it are deemed to be cost neutral to the OLA's.

Table 2 below shows the cost of the increase to the OLA's should funding not be found from other sources. This is based on the Year 4 onwards costs, as these are the highest.

Table 2: Additional Cost to LA's from Year 4

Authority	Cost	Cost + Uplift
Hartlepool	6,637.23	7,168.20
Middlesbrough	9,849.18	10,637.11
Redcar & Cleveland	9,728.43	10,506.70
Stockton	14,035.18	15,157.99
	40,250.00	43,470.00

Potential Impacts:

Topic	Impact
Financial	One off cost of the Preservica system, plus an ongoing annual cost to run/maintain the system. Ongoing staff cost of managing/preserving digital records. Depletion of New Burdens funding which, when required, has been used to subsidise the service.
Legal	Meeting the statutory duty of the four Local Authorities to retain and make available public records. Legal contract to be put in place with Preservica.
Risks	<i>Risks of doing nothing:</i> Loss of local authority records / failure to meet statutory duty re the retention of public records. Key information is lost that could negatively impact on the councils in the future e.g. their ability to prove key decisions were taken, due process followed, etc. Failure to meet the National Archives Accreditation standard. <i>Wider risks:</i> Failure to secure the additional investment required to manage digital Preservation beyond the initial 3-year contract. Possible rising service costs due to recontract with Restore (due July 2026).

Next Steps:

The service has taken the first step on the digital preservation journey by creating a Digital Materials Register. It has identified 20,976 files or 248.12GB of 'born digital' data. In addition, there is a quantity of digitised material, currently less than 1TB, but expected to grow in future. Should we get to the point where we have more than 1TB of data, Preservica would charge an extra £460 pa for storage.

Further work needs to be undertaken with LA partners to identify where the additional investment will come from, in order to be able to bring a formal proposal back to JAC. Opportunities should be explored through the proposals detailed in the Heritage Feasibility Report and through conversations with potential partners including TVCA and the LA museum services.

If the additional investment is identified, a formal proposal could be brought back to JAC in October.

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