



To: The Leader and Executive Councillor for Strategy and Transformation: Councillor Lewis Herbert

Report by: Andrew Limb

Relevant scrutiny committee: Strategy & Resources Scrutiny Committee 11/10/2015

Wards affected: Abbey Arbury Castle Cherry Hinton Coleridge East Chesterton King's Hedges Market Newnham Petersfield Queen Edith's Romsey Trumpington West Chesterton

FUTURE LOCATION OF ARCHIVE OF CITY COUNCIL DECISIONS AND RECORDS

Key Decision

1. Executive summary

1.1 The City Archives are the records of the city council and its predecessors, from the thirteenth to twenty first centuries. It includes lease books 1558-1842, treasurer's accounts 1835-1974, valuation records 1860-1972, rating records 1880-1977, records of the Clerk, records of the Council's committees, architectural plans and drawings, correspondence, leaflets, minutes, reports and agenda.

1.2 These City Archives are a subset of the wider Cambridgeshire Archives (the sum of such records from all the Cambridgeshire councils, excluding Huntingdonshire) and are distinct from the Cambridgeshire Collection. The latter is comprised primarily of published material (books, maps and similar), is held at the Central Library and is likely to be subject to a separate decision making process by the County Council at a later date.

1.3 The City Council's archives have been on deposit as part of the Cambridgeshire Archives at the Cambridgeshire Record Office, Shire Hall, since 1975. The City Council's original decision to deposit the archives at the County Record Office contained a proviso that they should not be removed outside the city.

1.4 Subject to the outcome of final decisions by the County Council, the City Council now needs to decide therefore whether to agree to the move of the City Archives to the County's proposed new record office at Ely, effectively over-writing the 1975 decision; or to withdraw the archives and make alternative provision, at its own cost, of an accessible, climate-controlled storage facility. These were the two options considered.

2. Recommendations

2.1 The Executive Councillor is recommended:

To agree to the City Council archives being moved to the County Council's proposed new record office at Ely, as part of the Cambridgeshire archives, subject to the County Council confirming its plans to relocate the Cambridgeshire archives there.

3. Background

3.1 Between 1973 and 1975, City Councillors discussed where the City Council's archives should be stored. This was in the context of the development of the new Central Library. A preferred option was to deposit the City Archives with the County Record Office, not least so that the archives would be available to "...genuinely interested members of the public through a professional archivist..."

3.2 It was eventually agreed, in May 1975, that *"the City records and archives be loaned to the Cambridgeshire Record Office at the Shire Hall, Cambridge, subject to the following conditions:*

- 1. That the records will remain in the ownership of the City Council and not be removed outside the City;*
- 2. That the City records be maintained separately from the Council records and can be withdrawn at any time."*

3.3 This is the arrangement that has held since 1975. Since then, over 300 metres worth of documents have been deposited by the City Council. These include the City Council's own records such as minutes, title deeds, rate books and valuations, engineers' reports, court books, treasurers' accounts and architects plans and drawings. These date from the 13th to 21st centuries.

3.4 Since then, the Cambridgeshire Archive collections as a whole have outgrown the space in the Shire Hall basement. Furthermore, the environmental conditions there are not suitable for the storage and preservation of archives. Water pipes in the basement have occasionally led to small floods, the temperature and humidity levels are generally too high and mould and deterioration of the archives have resulted.

3.5 Since the 1990s the County Council has sought to identify and acquire new accommodation for the Cambridgeshire Archives. Over that time 44 locations or buildings have been identified and explored. Some of these options (such as on the new Arbury development and Foster's silo near Cambridge train station) were substantially developed before being abandoned, mainly because they were unaffordable.

3.6 Following an inspection in 2011, The National Archives (TNA) imposed a three year deadline on the County Council to find new accommodation for the Cambridgeshire Archives. Failure to find suitable new accommodation by that date would have resulted in Cambridgeshire Archives losing its status as a place of deposit for public records. TNA would then have removed the Cambridgeshire public records from our care, and would have had the right to charge the County Council indefinitely for the storage, preservation and packaging of those records.

3.7 Initially the County Council worked to achieve a partnership with the University of Cambridge to build a joint building in Cambridge. However when this did not prove feasible for the University in the necessary timescale, a new search for suitable and affordable accommodation was urgently undertaken.

3.8 The Ely building (former Strikes Bowling Alley) was identified as a suitable option, providing an affordable building that could be readily adapted for the purpose, with on-site parking and good access to public transport and the facilities of the city on hand.

3.9 County Council Members unanimously approved the acquisition of the building in September, ahead of TNA's deadline of December 2014. They were also enthusiastic about its scope potentially to provide accommodation for the Cambridgeshire Collection alongside. County Council officers believe the Ely building will be a high quality local asset that will introduce many new users to the value of research and will attract families, school students and other visitors to the area. Following a projected rise in costs for the project overall, the County Council will be reviewing the project at its Health & Community Infrastructure Committee and General Purposes Committee meetings on 6 October and 20 October respectively. While many in the city would prefer the archives to remain in Cambridge, if the County Council confirms its plans to relocate the Cambridgeshire Archives to Ely, the City Council will need to make a decision on whether to allow the City Archives to move too, as part of that wider relocation.

3.10 In consultation with the Cambridgeshire Advisory Group on Archives and Local Studies, the proviso around the City archives came to light. Hence the need for a decision now to either follow that proviso and withdraw the city archive from the County archives and make alternative provision or to allow the city archives to move with the rest of the county archives to Ely.

3.11 There are two primary benefits of allowing the City Council archives to move to Ely with the rest of the County archives – cost and co-location.

Costs and benefits of allowing the City Council archives to move to Ely or seeking to retain them in the city

Cost

3.12 Since the City Archives have been deposited with the County Record Office, the County Council has been storing, maintaining and cataloguing them. The City Council has apparently made no financial contribution to these costs in the intervening forty years.

3.13 Cataloguing, and in more recent times digitising, the records is a time-consuming and expensive operation, requiring specialist equipment, software and expertise.

3.14 County Council staff have catalogued in excess of 83,000 items from the City Council archive to date, with more still to be done. Much of this, including digitisation, has been carried out with financial support totalling £67,500 from the Cambridgeshire Family History Society. If the City Council withdrew its archive, there *could* potentially be a request to refund the CFHS for the costs of cataloguing city records that they have funded.

3.15 If the City Council agrees to the City archive moving to Ely, the County Council will continue to store, preserve, catalogue and digitise the City archive at no cost. This would be in a newly converted facility with strict temperature and humidity controls which meet the national standard (PD5454:2012).

3.16 If the City Council were to withdraw its archive, it would need to find an alternative facility that would meet public accessibility, climate control and other standards. With over 300 metres of shelving, the cost of this would be significant, potentially running into hundreds of thousands of pounds of capital costs, as well as potentially more than £50,000 per year running costs (for staffing and other maintenance costs). These are rough estimates, but indicate the likely scale of potential cost.

Co-location

3.17 The other primary driver is to keep the city council's records together with other records from other agencies operating in the city, and with archives from other councils. By co-locating council records with those of businesses, charities, universities and parish churches, researchers can trace a person/family, building or issue through the many relevant threads, in one place (rather than having to move around to piece the jigsaw together). For researchers coming from further afield (e.g. other parts of the UK or overseas) this is particularly pertinent.

3.18 Family researchers in particular find this "knitting together" of a person or family's history to be an integral part of their activity. The Cambridgeshire

Family History Society is supportive of the relocation to Ely, and the better facilities it will bring.

Other considerations

3.19 The County Council is the recognised archive authority under the Local Government (Records) Act. It is effectively operating as a shared service for the Cambridgeshire councils, albeit one the City Council is not contributing to financially. By operating at the County level it can achieve economies of scale that allow it to provide a high quality facility and service with the professional expertise, equipment and software that would be hard to fund if each district or City council tried to provide this service on their own.

3.20 Retaining the City archives as part of the Cambridgeshire archives would allow the digitalisation of city records to continue. In due course, this will make physical location of archives less relevant, as more and more records become available and searchable online. This process is consistent with emerging best practice around “digital first” thinking in public services.

3.21 While moving the records to Ely would mean they were not so close-by for city residents, they would be more accessible to people from other parts of the County, and with the proposed site being next to Ely Station, would be relatively accessible still. City residents (and others) would be able to request material remotely, and have it digitised and sent to them (as a charged service) as an alternative to visiting physically.

3.22 It will still be possible to search or browse the catalogue of the City records remotely online allowing potential customers to ascertain what records are available, their possible relevance or interest and their scope and extent. Armed with that information, access arrangements will be along the same lines as currently; all members of the public will be able to visit the archives during publicised opening hours.

3.23 Physical visits to the City archive make up around 5% of the 2,000+ physical visits to the Cambridgeshire archive overall. Requests to the City archive (555 in 2014) make up around 10% of all 5,500 requests to the Cambridgeshire archive. But physical visits to the City archive make up only a fifth of all requests to the City archive, and only 2% of all requests to the Cambridgeshire archive.

3.24 Although numbers of physical city visitors to the archive have risen in the last 5 years, following the digitisation process and promotion, there were still only 104 visitors accessing the City archives in 2014. Of these, 42 were from the City. This equates to less than 0.05% of the city’s population.

3.25 While there potentially may be alternative archive facilities of the required standard in the city of Cambridge (e.g. at the University), any new arrangement with an alternative provider would almost certainly come at a significant additional cost to the City Council for a service that the County is currently providing (and offering to continue to provide) at no cost.

3.26 Moreover, in initial discussions the University have confirmed that material such as the City Council archive falls outside the University Library's collection policy and it would be highly unlikely that the University would be able to consider housing an extensive archive such as this. Officers understand that the University moved some of the records it had been holding to Shire Hall some years ago as its collections policy focuses on its core academic function and strengths rather than documents that might attract a wider public interest.

3.27 The Central Library is also understood not to be a valid alternative as the storage is inadequate in terms of environmental standards. There would also not be space to retain both the Cambridgeshire Collection and the City Archives (or the whole of the Cambridgeshire Archives collection) there.

3.28 The disbenefit of agreeing to allow the City Council archive to move to Ely would be the inconvenience to city-based researchers who would have to travel to Ely for physical access to the archive rather than have the facility in Cambridge. Set against this is the digitisation process mentioned above, and the option to have remote searches carried out by the archivists at the County Records office with results mailed to researchers.

3.29 In conclusion, while an ideal solution for Cambridge would have been the establishment of a new records office in the city, this has not proved possible over the two decades of trying. The benefits of agreeing to the move, particularly to a state-of-the art facility with the promise of further digitisation at no cost would appear to outweigh the benefits of withdrawing the city archive and finding an alternative provision within the city at considerable new and ongoing cost, during a time of financial pressure on the Council.

Cambridgeshire Collection

3.30 There would be space to house the Cambridgeshire Collection at the new Ely site too, with further co-location benefits. However, the proposal to move the Cambridgeshire Collection to Ely will be subject to public consultation later in 2015.

4. Implications

(a) Financial Implications

There would be no financial implications for the City Council of agreeing to allow the city archives to move to Ely.

There would be significant capital and ongoing revenue costs of withdrawing the city archive and making alternative provision. This could run into hundreds of thousands of pounds in one-off capital costs, and/or tens of thousands of pounds of ongoing revenue costs.

(b) Staffing Implications (if not covered in Consultations Section)

There would be no staffing implications of agreeing to allow the city archives to move to Ely.

If the City Council were to withdraw the city archives it would need to employ/contract expert staff to manage the archives in a new arrangement.

(c) Equality and Poverty Implications

Yes. Available as background paper.

(d) Environmental Implications

To comply with required national standards may require a small increase in the power consumed to maintain climate control. This would be the same under either option.

Low negative impact.

(e) Procurement

There would be no procurement required if the City Council agree to allow the archive to move to Ely. The County Council is procuring the new facility, at no cost to the City Council.

If the City Council decided to withdraw the city archive and make alternative provision it would need to procure a new site and/or new equipment to maintain, catalogue and digitise the records.

(f) Consultation and communication

The County Council has been engaging with key stakeholders through the Cambridgeshire Advisory Group on Archives and Local Studies. The City Council's Strategy & Partnerships Manager attended a meeting of this Group in May 2015 to gauge sentiment on the relocation to Ely. Council officers have liaised with staff at the University Library.

(g) Community Safety

No implications.

5. Background papers

These background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

Cambridgeshire County Council website content titled Cambridgeshire Archives moving to Ely:

http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/info/20011/archives_archaeology_and_museums/177/archives_and_local_studies/11

Equality Impact Assessment

6. Appendices

None.

7. Inspection of papers

To inspect the background papers or if you have a query on the report please contact:

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