

Joint Archives Board

8 November 2023

Capital Project Update

For Review and Consultation

Portfolio Holder: Cllr L Beddow, Culture and Communities
Cllr Andy Martin, Customer, Communications and Culture, BCP Council

Local Councillor(s): All

Executive Director: J Sellgren, Executive Director of Place

Report Author: Sam Johnston
Title: Service Manager for Archives and Records
Tel: 01305-228929
Email: sam.johnston@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Report Status: Public

Brief Summary:

Dorset History Centre has been considering its future archive storage requirements for over ten years as the repositories approach capacity. Built in 1991, there remains relatively little space left in which to house physical collections.

This report updates the Joint Archive Board on the current process for assessing the ongoing and future requirements; completing a bid to Dorset Councils Capital Programme and, if supported, the process for progressing a final stage bid to National Lottery Heritage Fund. (NLHF)

Recommendation: Joint Archives Board:

1. Acknowledges this update and provides comments to be included in reports to each council's executive as and when required in the decision-making process.
2. Notes the options appraised and financial implications of each.
3. Agrees to receive a further update following Dorset Council cabinet capital programme considerations in early 2024.

Reason for Recommendation:

To ensure that the Board is sighted upon the work undertaken to progress this project to date, including the latest options appraisal, and for Board to consider future solutions in order to be informed for supporting future decision-making processes.

1. Background and Context

- 1.1 The Joint Archive Service (JAS) has been anticipating the requirement to increase capacity for storage at the Dorset History Centre (DHC) for physical archives over the past 10 years.
- 1.2 Whilst inevitable that storage requirements will reduce over time, due to the increase in digital transactions, there is likely to be a further lengthy period of collecting a mixed economy of paper and digital transactions for archiving. By way of example, Hampshire Archives is anticipating significant ongoing accessions of physical archives until the end of the century.
- 1.3 Dorset History Centre was built in 1991 with predicted storage for 25 years of accruals. The remaining capacity is now 2,800 vacant box spaces representing c.5% of total repository capacity. Whilst it has therefore already exceeded its anticipated accrual space by over seven years, this cannot continue.
- 1.4 Our monitoring and preparation began in 2012. And in 2017, following an options appraisal and feasibility study, our first approach to the Heritage Lottery Fund was submitted unsuccessfully in 2017. This project was revisited in 2022 following a full-service review in 2021 and the signing of a refreshed inter-authority agreement in 2022.
- 1.5 Our initial Expression of Interest to the NLHF in May 2022 received an encouraging response, prompting an explicit invitation to apply by May 2023. This supported our project progressing to development stage.

Project Development and Current Status

- 1.6 Following agreement by Joint Archives Board to invest £25,000 reserve funding in engaging with a contract architectural and cost consultant and a lottery specialist bid writer. Our project titled ***Parchment and Pixels – building resilience for Dorset's archives*** was initiated with a focus and particular emphasis on digital preservation.
- 1.7 The project is intended to deliver:
 - Provision of a two-storey repository block providing at least 30 years of accommodation for physical archives including photographs, film and large or 'outsize' items.
 - Improvements to the public access areas of DHC to include re-designed, flexible spaces for a wide range of potential users and a new public entrance to make the building and its contents more intuitive and welcoming.

- A major programme of public engagement activity focussed upon collections and people – and bringing the two together. Key drivers are likely to be:
 - Opening collections for cultural, academic and community benefit.
 - Telling more of the stories of under-represented communities
 - Ensuring archives are more visible, both physically and digitally
 - Raising the profile of digital assets and educating the wider public in how to safeguard digital materials.

1.8 Applications to the NLHF require written commitment from the host authority, Dorset Council as owner of Dorset History Centre, with a pledge for match funding of c. 30% of the total project cost.

1.9 To provide Dorset Council with the information required to make a financial and resource commitment, in support of the bid, a business case was developed and progressed through the capital programme decision making process. This has included assets, property and financial colleagues supporting a refreshed options appraisal and presenting, via fully developed business case, to the officer governance boards for consideration.

1.10 The next stage for the business case is to progress, alongside all capital projects, for consideration by Dorset Council cabinet in January 2024. This project will be considered along with all service priorities requiring council funding and officer resources. We anticipate the project being delivered between 2026 - 2027.

1.11 The business case options analysed and presented included:

- Capital project to extend history centre to deliver a two-storey repository block providing c. 30 years of accommodation for physical archives; improvements to public access and facilities with public engagement. [**recommended**]

The business case concluded that the capital project to extend the history centre represented long-term value for money. Whilst the initial financial requirement would be relatively high, this was investment into an asset and the project provided wider customer access and public engagement benefits.

- Outsource future physical archives to a third-party provided off-site storage.

The business case concluded that the off-site storage solution would represent lower costs initially but as more storage was required the annual compounded revenue costs would increase eventually exceeding the cost of the capital investment in the DHC building.

1.12 The match funding requirement of Dorset Council is currently £2.18 million. The project has joined a set of 'un-funded' schemes which sit outside the Council's

current 'funded' capital programme. The project will be considered by Dorset Council cabinet in January 2024 meeting and if approved will be incorporated into the capital programme. If this occurs, a new Expression of Interest will need to be submitted to NLHF and subject to the response, the project reviewed in advance of a submission later in 2024.

- 1.13 Competition for Lottery funding is intense and the project, should it proceed will need to clearly meet the Fund's new 'investment principles' outlined in its 10-year strategy document [Heritage 2033](#). It is vital that the public engagement work that is programmed connects to new audiences and encourages different and sustainable approaches to engaging with archives.
- 1.14 The approximate match fund contribution from local authorities is c. one-third of the total cost. However, it would be possible to provide less although this would potentially lower the strength of the application as it would place greater risk upon the NLHF.

2. Possible scenarios

- 2.1 There are two possible outcomes resulting from the consideration by Dorset Council of the project proposal and the requirement for £2.18 million in match funding which represents approximately 30% of the total cost:
 - 2.1.1 **Project is supported and match funding is approved:** The project team will reconvene as soon as possible. NLHF will be approached with a new Expression of Interest and a bid submission schedule agreed. The principal loan obligation under this option sits with Dorset Council and the interest accrued on that loan would be payable (pro rata) by both Councils (as per the 2022 Inter-Authority Agreement on Archives).
 - 2.1.2 **Project is un-supported and match funding is not approved.** This will result in the need for the JAS to consider various options open to it for off-site storage. This approach was identified as another possible solution within the options appraisal. The consequence of this is that in the future, some of the archive collections managed by the JAS will be held in off-site locations. A small, but growing revenue budget will be required in order to fund this process. Archives, when required will need to be transported back to Dorchester for consultation.

3. Next steps

- 3.1 The Joint Archives Service welcomes the views and comments from the Joint Archives Board as representatives of the two funding councils in relation to the capital project. If it proceeds, staff capacity will be heavily focussed upon the development of a bid to Lottery. If it is decided not to proceed, then the service will instead need to turn its attention to other opportunities to bring investment to and raise the profile of Dorset's archives.

4. Financial Implications

A significant amount of analysis of relative costs and value for money has been undertaken in respect of this project. A capital scheme will require a significant match funding contribution. If an external storage provider is used, the small initial cost will grow substantially over time and a revenue budget will be required to fund it.

5. Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Implications

There are no immediate environmental implications. However, it should be noted that the structural elements of the project will be designed to be as energy efficient as is feasible and to use passive environmental management to the fullest extent possible. Provision has been made within the budget for a Passivhaus advisor to ensure that the most effective design is adopted.

6. Well-being and Health Implications

None

7. Other Implications

None

8. Risk Assessment

HAVING CONSIDERED: the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Medium

Residual Risk: Medium

9. Equalities Impact Assessment

The JAS has completed a full EQIA. Areas for further consideration include working with younger people and with black and ethnic minority groups and religious minorities. Improved digital provision will also assist in providing greater access to collections for people living at some distance from Dorchester.

10. Appendices

1. Summary Options Appraisal, Dorset History Centre accommodation, June 2023

11. Background Papers

None

Sam Johnston

Service Manager for Archives and Records

October 2023

Appendix 1

Summary Options Appraisal, Dorset History Centre accommodation, June 2023

Options appraised:

1. External storage to meet future demand

Description	Retain Dorset History Centre as is and buy in external storage to meet projected increased demand over next 40 years
Net revenue impact over 40yrs	£5,275,067
Options score (lower is better)	89.2
Risk score (lower is better)	9

2. Extension (plus refurbishment) to existing site to meet future demand, with Lottery bid for 60% of cost

Description	Refurbishment and extension to existing Dorset History Centre site, with bid to Heritage Lottery Fund for 60% of costs (requires engagement and activity plan). Project has been rescoped and value engineered following March 2023 business case.
Net revenue impact over 40yrs	£4,477,881 (note that significant contingency has been built into these costings as required by National Lottery)
Options score (lower is better)	64.6
Risk score (lower is better)	0

3. Sale of existing site and new build facility to meet existing and future demand

Description	Sale of existing Dorset History Centre, purchase of new site and new build facility to meet current and future requirements. No site currently identified
Net revenue impact over 40yrs	£19,630,128 NB these costs are based on new build figures provided in 2019, since when costs will have significantly increased
Options score (lower is better)	309.4
Risk score (lower is better)	25

4. Extension only to existing site to meet future demand

Description	Sale of existing Dorset History Centre, purchase of new site and new build facility to meet current and future requirements. No site currently identified
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Net revenue impact over 40yrs	£6,287,429
Options score (lower is better)	96.1
Risk score (lower is better)	0

Options not taken forward for analysis:

5. Repurposing of an existing Dorset Council site to meet future demand

Description	Repurpose an existing Dorset Council site to house projected increased demand over next 40 years, retain Dorset History Centre in current form for existing archive. Sections of County Hall are large enough to house the projected demand, and consolidation of office provision could create sufficient space for this use.
Rationale for disregarding	The County Hall space would require significant investment to meet requirements, and investigation by Dorset Council Capital Projects Team advise the additional over cost from the proposed extension scheme in its current location (option 2) would easily be more than the est. £1.8m from the sale of the land. No other appropriate DC owned space has been identified to date

6. Sale of existing site, repurpose another Dorset Council site to meet existing and future need

Description	Sale of existing site, refurbishment of a Dorset Council asset to meet current and future requirements. Sections of County Hall are large enough to house current archive and projected demand, and consolidation of office provision could create sufficient space for this use.
Rationale for disregarding	The County Hall space would require significant investment to meet requirements, and investigation by Dorset Council Capital Projects Team advise the additional over cost from the proposed extension scheme in its current location (option 2) would easily be more than the est. £1.8m from the sale of the land. No other appropriate DC owned space has been identified to date

7. Conversion of third floor of DHC into storage facility

Description	Stripping out of the majority of existing plant, strengthening of floor plate and conversion of the space into a 'box within a box' to hold c. 12,000 archive boxes.
Rationale for disregarding	Expensive to convert space (floor loading, conditioning, lift etc) and space only accommodates half of what the extension over the car park area provides. Overall project costs likely to be higher, structural risks greater and overall benefits less.

8. Extension over car park as option 2 but with car parking maintained via elevated structure on stilts

Description	As with Option 2 – excepting that structure would be over 3 storeys with the ground floor being car parking space.
Rationale for disregarding	Car parking gain would be limited due to pillars. Risks of potential fire under the repository would be present. This option would add significant additional cost due to the need to reinforce both floor plates instead of just one.

Recommendation

To take forward option 2 - Extension (plus refurbishment) to existing site to meet future demand, with Lottery bid for 60% of cost.