

Joint Archives Board

1 July 2026

Joint Archives Service – Capital Project and Service Update Report For Review and Consultation

Cabinet Member:

Cllr R Biggs, Regeneration, Economic Growth & Strategic Assets
Cllr Andy Martin, Customer, Communications and Culture, BCP Council

Local Councillor(s): All

Senior Leadership Team:

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Statutory Authority: Local Government Acts 1962 & 1972; Public Records Act 1958; Freedom of Information Act 2000; Environmental Information Regulations 2004; Data Protection Act (GDPR) 2018.

Report status: Public

Executive summary: This report provides an update to the Joint Archives Board (JAB) on the work of the Joint Archives Service in the five months since the Board last met on 4 February. The key issue to report to the JAB is the positive result of the service's application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund. This decision means that work has now commenced on a major project *Past Lives, Future Proofed* which it is expected will result in major capital investment in the Dorset History Centre and a significant programme of public engagement lasting into 2031.

Recommendation(s): It is recommended that the Joint Archives Board:

Notes the detail of this report and the implications resulting from the *Past Lives, Future Proofed* project for the Joint Archives Service and its staff and customers over a prolonged period of time.

Reason for Recommendations: Effective oversight of Joint Archives Service budget via the Joint Archives Board is required under the terms of the *Inter-Authority Agreement on Archives, 2022*. The recommendations will be placed before the executives of both funding councils.

1. Capital Project *Past Lives, Future Proofed*

- 1.1 The service's application *Past Lives, Future Proofed* to the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) was submitted in November 2025 with a four-month assessment period. The London and South of England committee met on 5 March and a decision was taken to support the project's Development Phase with a grant of £603,000. This has been matched by £80,000 from the Joint Archive Service's (JAS) own funds – drawn partly from its service reserve and partly from its donations reserve – funds which had been deliberately ringfenced for this purpose over a significant period. Additional in-kind contributions through volunteer time have been included in the overall calculation.
- 1.2 The JAS has commenced the 18-month Development Phase of the project which will result in a second stage application to NLHF intended for submission in November 2027. If successful, this in turn will result in a further grant of £3.8 million which will fund the majority of the Delivery Phase of the project and the capital improvements to Dorset History Centre.
- 1.3 The project has three key ambitions and will:
 - Create a two-storey repository block accommodating c. 22,000 boxes of physical archives;
 - Improve the public spaces including a new entrance and lobby area;
 - Deliver a major programme of public engagement focussing on collections and audiences, building partnerships and long-term collaboration.
- 1.4 During the Development Phase various additional staff and contractors will be employed in order to assist the core JAS team in testing and refining the project proposals and in preparing the Delivery Stage application. These are:
 - Project Archivist (18 months) 1.0 fte
 - Project Community Engagement Officer (18 months) 0.8 fte
 - Design team (consultants) including project manager, architect, quantity surveyor, mechanical, structural and electrical engineers and a fire specialist.
 - Evaluation consultant
- 1.5 The NLHF has also appointed two project mentors whose role it is to support the project team, act as 'critical friends' and to report back to the NLHF to ensure that the project is delivering to specification, time and budget.
- 1.6 The two project posts have been recruited to and the briefs for the consultancy-led work have been tendered with appointments anticipated in the near future. The JAS is working closely with Dorset Council's Assets and Regeneration Service which is acting in the 'intelligent client' role to facilitate and support the design work and to ensure quality and value for money. It will be important for example to plan for a period of closure of the DHC building

whilst building works are undertaken – and whether an alternative, temporary service model can be provided instead.

- 1.7 JAS staff will oversee the work of the new project staff. They will also engage with the consultants to ensure that the final design proposal which will inform the next application to NLHF is both visually and practically appropriate for the service as well as ensuring that it falls within the cost envelope available to the project.
- 1.8 The service will also be responsible for composing the application to NLHF and liaising with the Lottery officers throughout the process. In addition, the JAS will be responsible for raising the match fund requirement to ensure that the full budget for the project is in place before the commencement of the Delivery Phase. Two internal staff groups have been created to work on the repositories/staff areas of the building and the public spaces respectively. The application included allowances for inflation and contingency. However, in the case of the latter, NLHF would need to approve any variation from the original cost plan before funding is released. NLHF funds projects in arrears so there will be sometimes monthly requests made of it for costs incurred throughout the life of the project.
- 1.9 The Development Phase of the project will provide an opportunity to explore the costs, risks and outcomes proposed for the Delivery Phase including the volunteer input and digital outputs. It is important that the proposals outlined initially stand scrutiny and that the audiences we engage with view identified priorities in the same way as the service. Above all, the project must align with the NLHF's Investment Principles and deliver high quality outcomes whilst embedding sustainable practices and long-term organisational health within the JAS.
- 1.10 In terms of fundraising, the JAS has a significant but realistic target to meet in order to generate the full sum needed to complete the Delivery Phase of project. This is **£4.6 million**:

Delivery Phase Funds (assumed or committed)		
Source	Amount	Status
NLHF (Delivery Phase grant)	£3,800,000	Subject to successful Stage 2 bid
Dorset Council	£540,000	Subject to successful Stage 2 bid
Dorset Council Community Infrastructure Levy	£50,000	Subject to successful Stage 2 bid
Dorset Archives Trust	£50,000	Subject to successful Stage 2 bid
Dorchester Town Council	£5,000	Subject to successful Stage 2 bid
Dorset Council Section 106	£45,000	Subject to successful Stage 2 bid
Total	£4,490,000	

- 1.11 As can be seen, all the additional or ‘match’ funding is contingent upon a successful second stage application to NLHF – which is viewed by other bodies as the ‘gateway funder’. This means that there currently remains a gap of **c. £110,000** to bridge. The JAS will seek support from a range of sources in order to ensure that full project funding is in place. We have consulted with the leaders of other recently delivered cultural capital projects to find out how they were able to meet the funding challenge and have benefitted from their advice and experience. The service will be working closely with its support charity the Dorset Archives Trust. The latter can apply for funds that are not open to local authorities and in the case of personal giving, DAT is able to harvest Gift Aid. The service will be applying to a number of charitable trusts and foundations as well as approaching depositors and a wider range of stakeholders.
- 1.12 In order to submit a high-quality application in November 2027, the JAS team will need to focus first and foremost on *Past Lives, Future Proofed* so that both the capital and engagement elements of the project have been well scoped with ample evidence of need and demand, alongside rigorous analysis of costs and risks. In this way, we would hope to be able to move seamlessly into the Delivery Phase of the project in mid-2028 with a three-year plan of action.

2. Service Development Plan 2026-31

- 2.1 A new Service Development Plan is under development and will be shared with the JAB at the Board’s next meeting. It is certain that the *Past Lives, Future Proofed* project will dominate the JAS’s activities in the coming years given its size, value and significance to the service’s long-term resilience and sustainability. There will of course be business as usual activity undertaken – public service provision, the accession of collections and advice and guidance to partners and stakeholders. The success of the application to NLHF has significantly mitigated a key service risk – that of storage capacity being reached with no prospect of additional repository space being created.

3. William Barnes Project

- 3.1 The William Barnes archive project began in October 2025 after a £36,000 fundraising drive led by the William Barnes Society and Dorset Archives Trust. The project archivist has now completed their task, and the catalogue of this important collection is now available on DHC’s website: <https://archive-catalogue.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/records/D-BAR>. The collection is now available alongside that of Thomas Hardy providing full public access to the archives of these two prominent Dorset literary figures.

4. Ancestry

- 4.1 After signing an additional 10-year contract with Ancestry.co.uk work has now started at DHC on the further digitisation of records. These are principally parish records but also include records of other denominations and anything

else that is name-rich and therefore of interest to genealogists. Ancestry have recruited a staff member to work on this for a nine-month period. They will be based at DHC for the duration of the project. It is anticipated that the new material will assist in driving additional interest in the Dorset content hosted by Ancestry. The new contract with Ancestry has also enabled both Dorset and BCP Council library services to benefit from free provision of the resource on their public network terminals. This represents a combined saving of c. £20,000 to the two councils.

5. Collections Projects

- 5.1 Work continues on the **Wessex Water** archive. The externally funded project runs until March 2027 and will result in a major new resource relating to the origins of public water provision in Dorset through to the latter part of the 20th century. In addition, work on structuring and assessing the **Pitt-Rivers estate** archives continues with private funding provided. DHC's participation in the Bristol-based regional project '**Sounds of the Southwest**' continues with more rare and fragile audio material being digitised and made available via the project team. The JAS still intends to seek funding to undertake work on the archive of Sylvia Townsend Warner although this will need to wait until later in the year.

6. Staff Development

- 6.1 Skilling up the South West – a project led by Gloucestershire Archives funded by a grant from The National Archives has just concluded. It has benefitted all 8 archive services in the region with funding made available for staff training – via visits to peer services to share ideas and techniques, skill-sharing and learning. As well as this there has been a focus on digital preservation and the challenge of cataloguing backlogs. The programme has been of great benefit to staff from the JAS who visited services in Cornwall, Plymouth, Wiltshire and Gloucestershire as well as the three apprentices who also visited Clarks Museum and Archive at Street.

7. Document purchase

- 7.1 The service was fortunate enough to recently acquire a rare royal charter at auction. The document dates from 1313 and the reign of Edward II. The purchase price of over **£8,800** was entirely met by a grant from the Friends of the Nations' Libraries and generous support from Dorset Archives Trust for which we are very grateful. The charter relates to Forde Abbey in the far west of the county and recounts the grant of privileges to the abbot and monks by the monarch.

8. Conclusion

- 8.1 The JAS along with its stakeholders were hugely buoyed by the NLHF funding decision in March. The confidence placed in the service to delivery this multi-million pound project has been very positively received. The JAS is now focussed on ensuring that the project's Development Phase meets its stated

outcomes to schedule and cost and that in so doing the groundwork for a strong and sustainable future for the service is laid.

1. Alternative options considered

There is no alternative model for delivering archive services currently under consideration.

2. Legal considerations

None

3. Financial implications

All activities described in this report are covered by either the JAS revenue budget, capital resources, reserves or an externally sourced grant.

4. Natural environment, climate & ecology implications

DHC has significantly improved its energy performance through a major project to reduce consumption whilst ensuring the maintenance of high-quality environmental controls. This, combined with the generation of solar energy through PV panels on roof elevations has rendered the building highly energy efficient.

5. Well-being and health implications

The JAS contributes to wellbeing outcomes for both councils and improving the quality of life for residents of BCP and Dorset Council areas and attracting visitors to the county lie at the heart of its work.

6. Other implications

None

7. Risk implications

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

Current Risk: Medium

Residual Risk: Medium (due to pressure on archive accommodation – although mitigated by the recent NLHF decision).

8. Equalities

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.

9. Appendices

None

10. Background papers

None

11. Report sign-off

This report has been through the internal report clearance process and has been signed off by the Director for Assurance and Governance (Monitoring Officer), the Director of Resources (Section 151 Officer) and the appropriate Portfolio Holder(s)