

RECORD OFFICE FOR LEICESTERSHIRE, LEICESTER AND RUTLAND DIGITAL PRESERVATION POLICY

PROVISION OF THE SERVICE

The Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland is provided by Leicestershire County Council in partnership with the City of Leicester and County of Rutland. This service is the means by which all three local authorities meet their legal responsibilities to collect, care for and provide access to records.

Digital Preservation Policy Statement

The Record Office understands that **digital preservation is a real and growing challenge** for the service as more material is **'born digital'** or **digitised for use in multiple formats**. We aim to **collect relevant digital archives** from within or relating to Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland. We also aim to **explore the creation of digitised material** in order to widen access to our records. Digital material will be **stored according to best and most cost-effective methods taking into account best current practice and the constraints of resources**. Digital material will be **made available to all** using suitable technology to accommodate the needs of **present and future users**.

Explanation:

1. Digital Preservation is a real and growing challenge

Digital preservation is defined by the National Archives as 'a set of technical processes to ensure that digital documents and records remain accessible over the long term'. This is a real and growing challenge for all archive services. Organisations routinely create their records electronically and individuals now produce 'blogs' and digital photographs instead of diaries and scrapbooks. The daily lives of thousands of people living in Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland are recorded on social media and in text messages.

Digital material has specific preservation challenges and can be stored upon a variety of media such as CDs, DVDs, memory or data sticks, hard drives and in 'web' and 'cloud' based systems. Formats can vary widely and change quickly; often without prior warning from manufacturers. Digital preservation carries many of the same challenges as hard copy records which demand specific resources and a proactive approach.

It is our policy always to seek advice on best professional practice from relevant organisations such as The National Archives (TNA) and the Digital Preservation Coalition (DPC). We also work within the resources and policies of Leicestershire County Council and those of our stakeholders.

2. Born digital

The National Archives Preservation Policy defines a born digital record as 'one that has been created and accessioned electronically as opposed to having been digitised from a paper record'. Increasingly organisations from local authorities to businesses and voluntary groups and individuals create and store quantities of born digital material which may be of archival importance.

3. Digitised for use in multiple formats

Many records are also digitised and we aim to support and use multiple formats to ensure the widest possible use of the records. Accessible copies of material in digital formats will be created for use in the archive searchroom and at suitable other designated premises. Where appropriate multiple copies of material may be created for use in other locations and by other services, for example, by funding or project partners.

4. Collect all relevant digital archives from within or relating to Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland

We aim to actively to obtain material regardless of format, employing all the criteria we would apply to hard copy records when deciding on archival value. No material of value shall be rejected because of its format and we shall always strive to preserve such information in the most appropriate ways taking into account provenance, evidential and legal issues, access and storage.

We acknowledge that digital records are less bound by geographical location than physical collections and as such, a different approach is needed as there may be relevant material created or stored anywhere in the world. We will use our usual methods of acquiring collections (see our **Collections Policy and Collections Development Plan**) and aim to highlight the need for digital material and undertake more active acquisition once effective storage solutions are in place.

5. Explore the creation of digitised material

One of the advantages and challenges of retaining digital archives is that access may be given to certain types of material easily to customers across the globe. We will explore and develop appropriate digitisation projects with suitable partners to make records more accessible to all users including those who cannot make a personal visit.

Our reprographics service will aim to supply digitised copies where possible: these are cheaper, more environmentally friendly and build up a library of resources, aiding preservation of the originals. Granting access and supplying a copy are often synonymous. Confidentiality, depositor rights, legal obligations and copyright and loss of control will all be considered when allowing access to digital archives to remote users.

6. Stored according to best and most cost-effective methods taking into account best current practice and the constraints of resources

Storage: It is difficult to obtain any consensus on the longevity of most types of digital information and even harder to obtain a guarantee from providers as to minimum life spans. The question of obsolescence in digital storage media is also a major concern. This cannot be addressed by us in isolation but we continue to monitor developments and take action to migrate data where appropriate.

Current practice: Digital material is stored on the council's secure server and, where appropriate, the physical object upon which the material is held, such as a CD, is stored in the strongrooms at the Record Office which conform to PD5454. The server space required will be actively reviewed by ROLLR and relevant individuals at Leicestershire County Council to ensure that it remains adequate and secure.

It is acknowledged that PD5454 is the standard for the storage of paper and parchment archives and as such permits levels of humidity and temperature which may be too high for many types of digital media which can degrade quickly. It is also usually possible by visual inspection to see that paper records are degrading; while digital materials tend to look the same to the naked eye. Spot checks on the continued viability of digital media will therefore be undertaken periodically.

Advice from our ICT department is sought periodically and the current view is that the purchase of a Sony Optical Disc Archive Drive will be suitable to store digital material and backups on discs which are guaranteed in the long term. This is being explored and appears to be a cost-effective medium term solution.

Where a more suitable or specialist storage facility exists we shall seek to transfer digital material under an agreement which enables Leicestershire County Council to retain ownership and control. Currently film and moving images are stored by the Media Archive for Central England (MACE) with access copies available at ROLLR.

Long term Preservation: The migration of digital material to a new media will need to be considered on an ongoing basis and advice sought from suitable experts.

It is our policy to create hard copies of data where this is possible and practicable. At the present time this offers the best solution in terms of preservation, legal integrity and access; is not prohibitively expensive and does not negate the possibility of a long term digital solution in the future. We are not currently satisfied that digital media in any known format offers the longevity we require and the instability of the market (which we cannot influence or control) is likely to mean that any technological investment is fraught with risk.

Where the creation of a hard copy is not possible (for example, a film) we shall seek specialist advice on the best methods of preservation including the creation of surrogates in multiple formats.

7. Made available to all

Accessible copies of material in digital formats will be created for use in the archive searchroom and at suitable other designated premises as well as online. Where appropriate multiple copies of material may be created for use in other locations and by other services, for example, by funding or project partners. We view digital preservation and digitisation as methods of extending access to collections. For more information see our **Access Policy**.

8. Present and future users

It is always difficult to predict future use and interest and digital records have particular challenges in terms of the difficulty of collection them and maintaining them over a long period of time. This policy, is also aspirational, in that we aim to meet the needs of present and future users by sampling records, caching websites and online resources and creating digitised collections. We aim to keep the needs of present and future users under review to ensure a robust approach to digital preservation matters.

9. Review of policy

No policy can cover every eventuality in perpetuity. The statements in this policy are subject to periodical review, to ensure that they remain relevant and appropriate. This may be undertaken annually or in response to a specific need or event such as new legislation.

All managers and staff are expected to act with integrity and in a professional manner at all times, seeking to find solutions in the spirit of the policy, where it fails to give specific guidance. Any shortcomings or useful additions should be highlighted as soon as possible.

The Record Office aims to maintain policies which are current and living documents, supporting a flexible approach to service provision rather than rigidly dictating it. They will enshrine our values and guide our actions; thereby providing a clear indication of what we will do and how we will act.

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