

Cheshire Archives and Local Studies Vision 2015

A. Introduction

This vision for Cheshire Archives and Local Studies in 10 years' time is the result of discussions with users, staff and stakeholders of the service. It aims to bring together the context in which we operate and conveys the ideas and aims of these groups. It is not yet a fully funded vision, but is a basis for future fundraising and work.

The vision will inform future plans such as annual plans and funding applications. It will guide the priorities for the service in the next few years and will be reviewed regularly.

B. Context headlines

- Cheshire Archives and Local Studies service is based at Duke Street, Chester and provides a shared service to both Cheshire West and Cheshire East Councils.
- The service collects and preserves historical records and the local studies collections relating to both the ancient and modern county of Cheshire, the diocese and the city of Chester.
- It provides core archive services to Warrington and Halton Borough Councils under a Service Level Agreement.
- It has 11km of shelving in specialist strongrooms storing the collections on various sites.
- The records are available for study free of charge. Public access to original items in the collections is provided via a searchroom that is open 4 days a week.
- Access to archives is also provided via <http://archives.cheshire.gov.uk>. This website hosts the collection catalogue, Cheshire image database, digitized tithe maps and related documents and links to other databases.
- Cheshire Archives and Local Studies has a partnership with www.findmypast.co.uk to provide access to digitized images online.
- To care for the collections and to provide a service to the public, a conservation service works to preserve and conserve documents, maps, plans and photographs to preserve them for future generations.
- The service runs an activity programme including monthly talks, attendance at events countywide, introductory talks for groups and a university programme.
- Cheshire Archives and Local Studies service also supports community projects in developing their heritage projects. E.g. <http://www.anfieldbc.co.uk/archive.html>
- All this work is supported by a programme of volunteering, which supports work in conservation and indexing collections.

Pressures on the service:

- The collections are stored across two sites (from April 2016). Indeed almost 50% of collections are stored in locations other than the HQ in Duke Street. This causes delays

in access to the archives, difficulties in managing the collections and spreads precious resources thinly.

- The space that we have for storage of future collections is running out. From April 2016 we will have enough space for about 5 more years' worth of new acquisitions.
- Only 75% of the storage meets the required storage standard. In the long term this will damage the collections and prevent public access to the collections.
- Some of the collections are stored in poor conditions already causing damage and some collections are stored in locations for which we pay an ongoing charge. This has an impact on our overall budget.

Our current users:

- We have fewer users researching in the onsite searchroom than in previous years. Many more are using our website and making enquiries via email and phone.
- More people are undertaking genealogical research online and via our partner websites.
- We know that people are interested in participating in more activities than we are able to provide.
- We know our users have a limited demographic and we want to get a wider range of people involved.

Recent changes:


- As with all council services we have fewer resources to enable us to deliver the service. We need to make sure that we are using those resources efficiently.
- People using the service expect immediate access to collections and information which we are unable to provide when collections are held in a number of locations. They also expect immediate access to information and advice online.
- New technology offers us new opportunities to provide existing and new services using digital tools, both online and onsite.
- More people are interested in volunteering than before.

Likely future changes:

- We know that in the future we are likely to have to run the service using fewer resources.
- A recent change to how long public records are closed (20 year rule) means that more archives will be coming into the care of the service.
- Today's digital world means that in the future we will have more digital records to manage and provide access to.
- People will be accessing services in different ways, especially those who have grown up with the web. The web and digital access could become their primary method of communication in the future.

C. Our Vision

Our vision for the service is:



EASY ACCESS TO HISTORIES: COLLECTING EVIDENCE OF CHESHIRE COMMUNITIES'
LIVES PAST AND PRESENT,
FOR EVERYONE, FOR THE FUTURE

D. Our Mission

The service identifies, collects and cares for archives and publications that are the evidence of Cheshire communities' lives past and present. We deliver access for all to our collections for information, learning and enjoyment to make sure archives survive so that future generations will be able to do the same.

E. Headline Outcomes

We have developed 7 headline outcomes that we are seeking to achieve over the next 10 years:



1. Cheshire Archives and Local Studies has secured a new building with a welcoming environment that is more attractive and accessible to visitors, which provides access to collections and with space for staff, volunteers, collections and future growth.

To reach this outcome our planned activity includes:

- Creating new public space in our main building (s) which:
 - Are accessible, welcoming and bright
 - Provide more browsing space and opportunities to interact with collections more easily.
 - Provides more public spaces for activities
 - Gives people confidence in using the archive services
 - Attracts new and more regular visitors and draw people into the service
 - Brings archives alive and make the collections relevant to all generations, using hi-tech tools including sound and vision
 - Reflects and explores the themes of Cheshire's history e.g. Salt, Railways.
 - Creates exhibition spaces
- Creating new means of access to collections in a variety of locations around the county. These could be heritage hubs containing sound/film booths and other digital tools in libraries, museums and a variety of other sites. These sites could also be a focus for our activity outside the main building (s)
- Creating new collections storage which reaches the required storage standards. It will house collections in a safe and efficient manner, with room for expansion.
- Creating improved spaces for staff and volunteers to work on collections. This will support more efficient working and allow increased numbers of volunteers.

*Let's create a space that's
welcoming to enjoy a coffee
and research your family
history.*

Visioning workshop participant

2. Cheshire Archives and Local Studies uses Information Technology to bring the collections closer to people. The service has made a major improvement in its provision and use of Information Technology

To reach this outcome our planned activity includes:

- Updating hardware, software and online offer. Improving databases. Using Linked data.
- Keeping ahead of the IT game and keep an eye on trends in how people are using IT
- Providing WIFI to enable BYOD (Bring your own device)
- Using IT to interpret collections and engage people with heritage using tools such as augmented reality, wall projections/public art
- Crowdsourcing descriptions of archives
- Consolidation and developing a digital preservation programme
- Including an IT person on the development project group

In buildings Information Technology will be used to:

- Support interactivity with collections
- Allow different ways of access to collection
- Personalise the service for users throughout
- Provide access to born digital records
- Improve user interface
- Create your access point to democracy access point

“We want a massive improvement in IT provision – Let’s get ahead of the game!”

Visioning workshop participant

Online Information Technology will be used to:

- Provide easy access to information
- Meet the needs of different users in accessing and engaging with collections
- Provide easy routes into a visit to the archive service
- Provide standalone online contact with the service
- To engage new users and to bring people into the service
- Create an online query service: Ask the Archivist!

- Personalise the service available. e.g. My map of Cheshire

Let’s develop dynamic collections information – captured as people work with collections

Visioning workshop participant

3. Cheshire Archives and Local Studies is reaching more and a wider range of people through new public activities onsite and around the county, through its use of information technology, through new opportunities to showcase the collection and by having a more welcoming, accessible, well located building. We have transformed local provision in libraries and established local Heritage Hubs.

To reach this outcome our planned activity includes:

- A programme of research and consultation to enable us to understand current audiences, current non-users and the needs of potential users. We will ask non-users how they would like to access our services and identify priority audience groups that we want to reach.
- An aim to excite people about the heritage of Cheshire. We will explain the collections but also tell the stories they contain.
- An increased, regular programme of Public Relations, including social media.
- Develop Heritage Hubs around the county providing digital access to collections.
- Working with library services and their users to transform local access points.
- Attending different events in Cheshire which will reach different audiences to our current users
- Talking to users and find out how they are using the service and what their priorities are for the future
- Prioritising working with schools as schoolchildren will be our future users. Our offer will reach wider than the history curriculum, into science, technology and a range of subjects.
- Continue the evaluation of current outreach activity
- Digitisation programme with partners and alone.
- Prioritising the mass audiences
- Securing a dedicated staff resource for this work
- Creating an ongoing programme of pop up archive services at motorway services, festivals, train stations. Later on a longer term basis at healthcare sites, libraries and museums
- An expanded volunteering programme
- Finding new creative ways of telling stories via theatre, drama, music partnerships
- Considering how we can provide more personalised access to collections
- Working with tour operators, hotels, retailers to drive users to the service, to provide access to collections in different ways and to interpret archives more widely. Becoming more closely involved in the visitor economy of Cheshire.

Let's have a more visible archive service!

Visioning workshop participant

4. Cheshire Archives and Local Studies has developed new and innovative partnerships leading to an increased profile across Cheshire and beyond.

To reach this outcome our planned activity includes:

- Being proactive in seeking partnerships through a dedicated resource.
- We will seek partnerships which will enable us to deliver our vision for the service with for example:
 - Local authorities
 - Universities
 - Schools
 - Public health/adult social care
 - Arts & Cultural organisations
 - Libraries
 - Online – Commercial partners and online communities
 - Local groups

5. Cheshire Archives and Local Studies has increased and diversified funding, putting the service on a more sustainable basis.

To reach this outcome our planned activity includes:

- A programme of income generation through a range of charged additional services.
- Developing the range of merchandise we sell, especially items based upon our collections.
- Working to develop services for the community which can be commissioned by other organisations and delivered with a range of partners. e.g. health and wellbeing activities for the NHS.
- A fundraising programme

6. Cheshire Archives and Local Studies is a recognized centre of excellence in collections, staff, knowledge and services, consolidating and developing expertise.

To reach this outcome our planned activity includes:

- Consolidating our status as an Accredited Archive Service
- A programme of sharing our knowledge with other archive services
- Developing the expertise of our staff and volunteers through a programme of training and development.

7. Cheshire Archives and Local Studies is a stronger, more visible, better recognised corporate resource for Cheshire West and Chester, Cheshire East, Warrington and Halton Borough Councils.

To reach this outcome our planned activity includes:

- Creating new evidence of the impact of the service and mechanisms to collect this evidence.
- Tell the stories of how the service assists the councils in delivering their purpose including supporting democracy, saving money, risk management and adding value.
- Providing a clear explanation of why the archive and local studies services undertakes its work
- Using the councils Intranet to convey these messages
- Undertaking an internal promotional campaign which is tied to achieving Archive Service Accreditation
- Organising a programme of advocates throughout the organisations at a high level that can advocate for the service and collect evidence.