



**ADULTS AND COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**  
**3 JUNE 2024**

**ARCHIVES, COLLECTIONS AND LEARNING CENTRE**

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF ADULTS AND COMMUNITIES**

**Purpose of report**

1. The purpose of this report is to update the Committee on the outcome of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee workshop on the Archives, Collections and Learning (ACL) Centre.

**Policy Framework and Previous Decisions**

2. The ACL Centre supports the County Council's Strategic Plan 2022-2026, in particular the 'Great Communities' outcome, helping to ensure that cultural and historical heritage and the natural environment are enjoyed and conserved, and 'Clean and Green' by reducing energy consumption, increasing the use of renewable energy, and reducing carbon emissions. It also supports 'Improving Opportunities' by enabling the Council to continue to provide high quality and targeted cultural and historic resources to schools and young people which will be facilitated through the Centre.
3. The ACL Centre supports the Council's Strategic Property Energy Strategy 2020-2030 and is designed to help contribute towards achieving the amended climate emergency declaration to become a net zero Council by 2035.
4. The ACL Centre supports the Adults and Communities Directorate's ambition to save and make accessible the cultural and historic heritage of the County, which is also a key commitment in the Adults and Communities Strategy "Delivering Wellbeing and Opportunity 2020-2024".
5. The statutory basis of the Archive Service is derived from the Local Government Act 1972, Sections 224-229. Section 224 imposes a duty on principal authorities (which includes the County Council) to make 'proper arrangements' for the safekeeping of their records and records in their custody.
6. A statutory Code of Practice issued under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 states that 'authorities must have in place appropriate governance, organisational capability and technical measures to ensure that they manage information in accordance with the Code'.
7. On 12 June 2018, the Cabinet agreed to develop proposals for an ACL Hub (now referred to as the ACL Centre).

8. The Committee received a report on options relating to the ACL Centre on 4 March 2024, at which they requested a private workshop to explore the options put forward in the report in more detail.

## **Background**

9. The proposed ACL Centre brings together in one building the County Council's Museum Collections, Creative Learning Service (CLS) resources and the Archive Collections of the Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester, and Rutland (ROLLR), with conservation and technical facilities, public access spaces including the ROLLR search rooms, and flexible space to enable a wide variety of public activities. The Museum Service and the ROLLR are Accredited Services, recognised by Arts Council England and The National Archives (TNA) respectively. Alongside its core function, the CLS delivers the learning offer for Museum Collections and ROLLR which is a requirement of Accreditation for both services.
10. The Cabinet decision in 2018 to develop proposals for an ACL Centre was considered the most efficient way to address the multiple challenges faced in terms of collection care, storage and public access alongside the lack of suitability of current buildings and capacity for growth. This work was paused in March 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic but restarted in 2022, following an internal review.
11. The next phase of work led to the development of a Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) Stage 1 design, which was shared with this Committee in November 2023. This estimated the ACL Centre to have an upper cost of £38m, assuming a construction start date of September 2025.
12. The design proposal demonstrated the ability to consolidate and reduce the current space allocated to the elements that would be accommodated within the ACL Centre and reduce from seven sites to one. The proposal addressed the TNA requirement for an additional 25 years of expansion for the Record Office strong room and accommodated the Registration Office requirement. It did not provide expansion for Museum Collections.
13. Following the report shared with this Committee on 6 November 2023, the County Council approved the provisional Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) on 21 February. This demonstrated the challenging financial position facing the County Council and the need for the Authority to reinforce its existing financial control measures in order to address the budgets gaps and ensure a balanced budget.
14. At the same time, discussions with partner authorities showed they were facing similar financial challenges.
15. Given the challenging financial climate new options, which sought to address only the most urgent priorities, were shared with this Committee on 4 March 2024. These looked at the services delivered in partnership (i.e. the ROLLR) separately from those that relate to areas of County Council interest only (i.e. Museum Collections, CLS).
16. In order for members to gain a more detailed understanding of the issues, risks and benefits of these options compared to the proposed ACL Centre the Committee held a private workshop on 9 May 2024.

## Workshop

17. The Director of Adults and Communities provided the background to the proposal for an ACL Centre, including the cost estimate for the ACL Centre, information on the partnership between the County Council and Leicester City Council and Rutland Council and associated legal agreements. Also presented was analysis of the options proposed to address the most urgent issues that currently limit the service's ability to meet core requirements and places retention of Archival and Museum accreditation at risk.
18. The options outlined were to:
  - a) procure off site archive standard storage for ROLLR collections currently in non-compliant storage.
  - b) address the schedule of maintenance works for the current ROLLR building in Wigston to ensure it is fit for purpose.
  - c) relocate Museum and CLS collections from five existing storage facilities which are not fit for purpose, to the Eastern Annex. There are already collections stored here, so could be accommodated with minimal adaptation and would release some buildings for disposal or commercial rent.

## ROLLR

19. If the ACL Centre is not progressed options available, which would address the need to provide archive compliant storage for current and future archive collections, are limited. Compliant offsite storage, for material that cannot be accommodated in a strong room, can be procured commercially and would satisfy accreditation requirements at a basic level, but would limit public access.
20. In addition, the maintenance programme for the ROLLR, paused due to expectation the building would be vacated, would need to be re-instated immediately to ensure the building was fit for purpose.
21. The cost of these two elements is estimated at £5.5m (£1.7m capital and £3.8m revenue), for a five-year period. This is the period identified for the development of the ACL Centre following permission to start. However, if the ACL is not progressed then these costs would likely continue and increase due to the age and condition of the existing buildings, accreditation requirements, inflation and necessary increases in staffing etc. As resolving these issues is a responsibility for all members of the ROLLR partnership, it is reasonable to expect costs arising from a joint solution to be shared across the partnership.

## Museum and CLS Collections

22. In terms of Museum and CLS collections there is a proposal to consolidate collections from five storage locations which are not fit for purpose to the Eastern Annex. This would create the opportunity to release one County Council building for sale and two County Council rental properties back for commercial lease, potentially

generating a capital receipt and revenue growth opportunity through the Investing in Leicestershire Programme.

23. The storage locations proposed to be vacated are:

- Unit 1, Stephenson Court, Coalville;
- Sherrier Centre, Lutterworth (sale);
- Unit 8 at Riverside Court, Measham;
- Boiler House, Snibston;
- Sheepy Magna Workshop, Snibston.

24. The following buildings would be retained:

- Collections Resources Centre, Barrow upon Soar;
- Eastern Annex, Glenfield;
- Main Store and Loco Shed, Snibston.

25. The proposal would generate ongoing savings amounting to an estimated £0.2m over five years, or £1.1m over 25 years comparable to the life of the ACL Centre. It would also create the opportunity for a capital receipt through the disposal of the Sherrier Centre Lutterworth. This proposal would incur one-off costs to prepare and transport collections and provide appropriate storage equipment within the Eastern Annex to receive the additional items. The one-off costs are estimated to be £0.1m. However, these could be offset against the presumed capital receipt. There are no additional ongoing costs, as it would utilise vacant space in an existing building. This approach would further relieve some of the significant pressure on the service to manage the seven current storage locations, by reducing them to four. The Council's Corporate Property Steering Group is aware of the proposal. Further detail on the resource implications is set out below.

### Accreditation

26. The Record Office submitted its accreditation return in November 2023 and received a validation visit from TNA on 5 February 2024. In March, the TNA informed the service that the ROLLR had retained Accredited status on a provisional basis for up to two years, until a solution to the lack of capacity for archival standard storage could be identified and implemented. If these issues are not addressed by March 2026 Accreditation could be removed. Alternatively, if addressed, Accreditation could be extended to the usual term of six years (i.e. to 2030).

27. The Record Office strongrooms have exceeded capacity and the current temporary overflow storage does not meet required standards for archive collections. This means the Record Office is currently unable to meet all aspects of the standard.

28. The Museum Service is required to meet the Arts Council England accreditation standard and is currently waiting to be advised on its timetable for re-assessment. The buildings identified to be vacated fall below acceptable standards for storage of museum artefacts, which is assessed as part of the accreditation process, and present a health and safety risk to staff.

29. Archives and Museums have a primary duty to preserve and protect the documents and artefacts in their care. To achieve this storage facilities need to offer a stable and secure environment.

### Conclusions from the workshop

30. Following detailed discussion at the workshop, members of the Committee considered that a do-nothing scenario was no longer an option as this would still incur costs and give rise to reputational damage, in particular given the time limit imposed by the TNA following its recent accreditation assessment and its granting of accreditation on the assumption that the issues raised will be addressed within two years. There is now an increased risk of losing accreditation entirely if those issues are not now met. Members were also concerned about the current risks posed to the collections and records, and the health and safety risks faced by staff from the continued use of current premises and equipment.
31. In light of those concerns Members were of the view that the only viable option for a longer-term solution for the Record Office and Museum Service was to proceed with a new ACL Centre in the Eastern Annex with storage facility attached and that steps should be taken as a matter of urgency to move towards this. With this in mind, and noting the financial pressures faced by the Authority, it requested that to give clarity on the capital and revenue financial projections of a do-nothing scenario compared against the proposed new ACL Centre a 25 years cost projection be produced, noting that such information would be vital for the Cabinet to ultimately determine the best way forward.
32. The Members also suggested that officers should, subject to the view of the Cabinet, recommence discussions with Leicester City and Rutland Councils on the possible resurrection of the ACL Centre proposal.
33. Members were reassured that officers would formulate a plan setting out the short-term operational actions still needed to preserve the records and collections now held and asked that the Director of Adults and Communities keep the Committee updated.

### Risk Assessment

34. As previously reported failure to resolve the current storage situation is likely to jeopardise the accreditation status of the Archive and Museum Services.
35. As a provider of an accredited archive and accredited Museum Service, the Council has a duty of care in relation to the collections it holds. Secure, environmentally stable and fit for purpose buildings are fundamental requirements, alongside professional staff, to ensure long-term care and preservation of those collections and facilitate public access.
36. All of the buildings identified in this report fall below acceptable standards and therefore place collections and staff at risk. Where necessary short-term mitigation measures have been instigated, e.g. restricting public and staff access, but these are not sustainable.

37. Whilst the County Council and Record Office partners have not reached a decision on the viability of the ACL Centre, it is clear that additional revenue and/or capital spend will be incurred if minimum standards are to be met.

### **Resource Implications**

38. There is no budget in the latest approved MTFS 2023-2027 for the proposed ACL Centre, but it has been identified as a scheme requiring funding within the Capital Programme.
39. If the plan to build the ACL Centre was to proceed, the table below shows the RIBA Stage 1 estimate (2023) for the ACL Centre, with a minimum lifespan of 25 years, and proposed apportionment of costs:

Estimated ACL project costs	LCC Cost	Leicester City Cost	Rutland County Council Cost	Total Cost
	£m	£m	£m	£m
ROLLR element	12.1	7.7	2.2	22.0
Museum and CLS element	10.0	0.0	0.0	10.0
<b>Total estimated cost</b>	<b>22.1</b>	<b>7.7</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>32.0</b>

40. It is assumed that the future operating costs of the ACL centre would be lower than those of current buildings.
41. If the plan to build the new ACL Centre did not go ahead then it would not be possible to maintain the current levels of running costs due to the age of the buildings and the requirements associated with maintaining archive and museum accreditation standards. If the other options described in this paper for ROLLR storage were implemented, then there would be an estimated capital cost of around £1.7m, and additional on-going revenue costs in the region of approximately £3.8m over the next five years. These costs would potentially be partially offset by a revenue saving of around £0.2m over five years and a potential one-off capital receipt of £0.3m associated with the consolidation of the Museum and CLS collections to the Eastern Annex.
42. A more detailed appraisal will be developed to compare the new build costs with the costs associated with continuing at the current site over the 25 year period equivalent to the minimum life of the ACL Centre.
43. It should also be noted that the service was restructured in 2020 to deliver a saving on the basis of the delivery of the ACL Centre. If it is no longer proposed to consolidate collections into a single integrated provision a new increased staffing model will be required.
44. Partners benefit from the ROLLR aspects of this proposal and it is proposed costs would be apportioned to partners on the same basis as set out in para 46. The potential revenue saving and capital receipt is apportionable to the County Council only.

### **Legal Issues**

45. The workshop considered the existing partnership arrangements for the ROLLR, which is reflected in two service agreements, one between the County Council and City Council and one between the County Council and Rutland Council. These agreements commenced in 1997 and now require updating. Partners retain ownership of the archive material owned by that party and this would be returned to them in the event the partnership agreement ends. The ROLLR land and building is the property of the County Council and partners have no legal interest in the property.
46. The service agreements set out the basis on which the operating costs of the ROLLR are shared across the partnership. The proportionate financial contributions are based on the respective populations of the three authorities and the approximate percentage of archive collections relating to those authority areas. These are Leicestershire County Council - 55%; Leicester City Council - 35%; Rutland County Council - 10%.
47. The Director of Corporate Resources and the Director of Law and Governance have been consulted on the contents of this report.

### **Timetable for Decisions**

48. Following the TNA visit on 5 February 2024, the deadline to address the issues identified in the Accreditation assessment is March 2026. If the issues identified are resolved by March 2026 then TNA may choose to confirm Accreditation for the full six-year period, which would be until March 2030.
49. Currently there is no specified capital provision in the MTFS, although it is referenced as a future development. Any capital requirement would need to be identified in the development of the future MTFS and capital development programme which will be refreshed in the Autumn.
50. Following the outcome of the workshop, it is proposed, subject to the comments made by the Committee that a report be presented to the Cabinet at its meeting on 21 June 2024.

### **Conclusions**

51. The proposed ACL Centre is the option which addresses the requirements of TNA, the requirements of the County Council and likely to present the most cost-effective solution over 25 years.
52. There is now a necessity to progress a solution for the Record Office and Museum Collections within the next two years.

### **Recommendation**

53. The Committee is asked to note the report and comment on, in light of the information now provided, the Cabinet being requested to consider including the ACL Centre within the next refresh of the MTFS.

## **Background papers**

Leicestershire County Council Strategic Plan 2022-26

<https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/about-the-council/council-plans/the-strategic-plan>

Strategic Property Energy Strategy 2020-30

<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/documents/s160429/Appendix%20-%20Strategic%20Property%20Energy%20Strategy%202020-2030.pdf>

Delivering Wellbeing and opportunity in Leicestershire – Adults and Communities Department Ambitions and Strategy for 2020-2024

<https://resources.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/resource/files/field/pdf/2020/9/30/Vision-and-Strategy-for-Adults-and-Communities-Department-2020-2024.pdf>

Local Government Act 1972 Sections 224-229 -

<https://cdn.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/information-management/local-government-act1972.pdf>

Report to the Cabinet: 12 June 2018 – Archives, Heritage and Learning Collections Hub

[http://cexmodgov01/documents/s138163/6\\_June\\_Heritage%20Mus%20and%20Records%20Collections%20Hub%20final.pdf?LO\\$=1](http://cexmodgov01/documents/s138163/6_June_Heritage%20Mus%20and%20Records%20Collections%20Hub%20final.pdf?LO$=1)

Report to Adults and Communities, Overview and Scrutiny Committee: 6 November 2023 – Update on the Archives, Collections and Learning Centre

<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?MId=71110>

Report to County Council (Budget Meeting): 21 February 2024 - Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024/25-2027/28

<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?MId=7305>

Report to Adults and Communities, Overview and Scrutiny Committee: 4 March 2024 – Update on the Archives, Collections and Learning Centre

<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?MId=7728>

Investing in Leicestershire Programme – Portfolio Management Strategy 2023/2027

<https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2023-09/MTFS23-Appendix-H-IILP-Strategic-Report.pdf>

## **Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure**

54. None.

## **Equality Implications**

55. There are no equality implications arising from the recommendations in this report, as the proposal will improve the access arrangement for Archive, Museum and Learning Collections. If a decision is taken to proceed the Equality Improvement Assessment will be reviewed and updated.

## **Human Rights Implications**



56. There are no human rights implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

**Officers to Contact**

Jon Wilson, Director of Adults and Communities  
Tel: 0116 305 7541 Email: [jon.wilson@leics.gov.uk](mailto:jon.wilson@leics.gov.uk)

Inderjit Lahel, Assistant Director of Strategic Services  
Tel: 0116 305 7379 Email: [inderjit.lahel@leics.gov.uk](mailto:inderjit.lahel@leics.gov.uk)

Franne Wills, Head of Service, Communities and Wellbeing  
Tel: 0116 305 0692 Email: [franne.wills@leics.gov.uk](mailto:franne.wills@leics.gov.uk)

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