

# **The National Archives**

## Planning a new record repository

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This memorandum is intended as an aide-memoire for those responsible for planning a new purpose-built record repository or adapting a building to this purpose. All the issues discussed briefly here are treated fully in *Archive Buildings in the United Kingdom 1977-1992* (1993) ISBN 0 11 440244 2.

The planning of a new repository may be broken down into the following stages, each of which may involve lengthy discussions:

- presentation of the case for new accommodation to obtain funding;
- choice of site;
- preparation of brief for architect;
- consideration of architects' feasibility study, outline plans and preliminary estimates;
- preparation and acceptance of architect's detailed plans and estimates.

The National Archives is always ready to offer advice at any stage of the planning process, whether or not it will eventually inspect the building in connection with recognition as an approved or appointed repository.

## **1. Defining objectives and setting targets**

Before calling on the advice of architects, surveyors, engineers or contractors it is essential to know the answers to the following questions:

- What functions will the new building be expected to serve and how much space will be required for each of them? (see Section 4 for a general check-list of functions).
- How many people (professional, technical and ancillary staff and members of the public), what quantity of records (in linear feet/metres), and what equipment will it be expected to accommodate (a) initially and (b) before the end of its occupancy/life?
- What is the expected duration of that occupancy/life? Should there be provision for future vertical or lateral extension on the same site?
- When must the building/conversions be completed?
- What budgetary provision is available/to be sought?

## **2. British Standard 5454:2000**

The essential guidance on site, structure, security, fire precautions, equipment, climate and lighting is contained in BS 5454:2000 *Recommendations for storage and exhibition of archival documents* (British Standards Institution, 2000). Note, however, that BS 5454:2000 deliberately excludes matters of individual repository management, including the layout and equipment of offices and searchrooms.

This Standard was compiled by a technical committee consisting of archivists and scientific and technical experts. It offers the best available collective

guidance and should always be drawn to the attention of architects and other professional consultants at the outset. It provides a yardstick against which to test the brief and plans for the storage of all records. Compliance with its main recommendations is a prerequisite for buildings to be appointed by the Lord Chancellor for the deposit of public records or approved by The National Archives.

Recommended reading: *Guide to the Interpretation of BS 5454:2000 Recommendations for the storage and exhibition of archival documents* (DISC PD 0024:2001) ISBN 0 580 33296 9 by Christopher Kitching, Hugh Edgar and Ian Milford available from the British Standards Institution (BSI).

### **3. Choosing a site (BS 5454 s.4)**

The safety and well-being of the records are of the first importance. The convenience of the location for staff and public should also be a priority. Consider:

- situation away from, and protection against, hazards of fire, flood, subsidence, atmospheric pollution, noise and vandalism;
- preference for (1) a free-standing building and (2) single occupancy;
- unimpeded access for the emergency services, especially the fire brigade, to all parts of the exterior;
- easy access to other buildings of any parent body with which regular communication is required;
- if the public are to be admitted, easy access by public transport;
- access for deliveries, and parking for staff and public;
- orientation of the building to minimise direct sunlight in storage areas while providing good natural light for office, conservation workshop and reading room.

For structure and materials of the building see BS 5454 s.5.

If seeking an existing building for adaptation, look for a solid structure with good floor-loading capability. Consider its general suitability including future expansion space. Whenever possible avoid:

- flat roofs, which have a notable tendency to leak;
- basements, which may be liable to flooding or damp penetration;
- very high ceilings, which will lead to a wastage of cubic capacity unless mezzanine floors are to be inserted or very high racking used which will have Health and Safety implications;
- a multiplicity of pillars and structural supports, which will impede the free positioning of racking in the storage area and invigilation in the search room;
- water or waste pipes passing through or above the storage area;
- accommodation that will be costly to make fire resistant.

Remember that fire-extinguishing, heating and air-conditioning equipment will affect the capacity and siting of racking, and of bookshelves, benches etc, in searchrooms, offices and workrooms.

#### **4. Functions and layout**

These will vary with the nature of the particular repository, but may include some or all of the following elements:

##### **(a) Areas from which the public is to be excluded:**

- Delivery point for incoming documents/covered loading bay
- Reception room (temporary storage)
- Isolation/drying room
- Sorting room(s)
- Permanent storage area(s)/strongrooms(s)
  - for normal accessions
  - for maps and outsize documents
  - for any items requiring special environmental controls (film, magnetic tape etc)
  - for any items requiring extra security on grounds of value or sensitivity
- Temporary storage for documents reserved overnight
- Conservation workshop(s) and staff facilities
- Reprography workroom(s) and staff facilities
- Storage for packing, conservation and reprographic materials, stationery etc
- Storage for cleaner's equipment
- Office(s) for professional and ancillary staff
- Staff library and/or common room
- Staff WCs and shower(s)
- Staff kitchen facilities
- Staff restroom
- Typist(s)

- Plant room(s) (fuel, water, air conditioning, fire control)
- Computer room
- Security control room

**(b) Areas to which the public will be admitted**

- Public reception area
- Cloakroom for deposit of coats and bags
- WCs
- Sales counter/shop
- Refreshment room
- Exhibition area
- Search room(s), with provision for:-
  - reference books
  - catalogues
  - microforms
  - computer terminals
  - document tables
  - large documents and maps
  - typing and audio-visual facilities
  - ultra violet lamp(s)
  - document production counter
  - invigilation and enquiry point(s)
- Interview room
- Conference/lecture/education/project rooms
- (Car park)
- (Access for the disabled)

Before detailed plans are drawn up the architect will need to be told which functions are to be located near to each other and which separated (eg plant rooms away from record storage areas, noisy activities away from the search room). It may be helpful to compile charts indicating the flow of records and of people within the building and the relative density of their flow, and when preliminary plans are available, to check that vertical and horizontal lines of communication facilitate rather than impede the desired flow, without breaching security or fire regulations. The advice of the Crime Prevention Officer, the Fire Officer and the Health and Safety Officer should be sought.

Neither strongrooms nor searchrooms should be used as normal public thoroughfares to other parts of the building or to the outside world.

For further information about planning a repository or for details about the inspection service we provide with a view to appointing and approving repositories contact The National Archives: Historical Manuscripts Commission, Kew, Richmond, Surrey TW9 4DU, Telephone 020 8876 3444, Email: [enquiry@nationalarchives.gov.uk](mailto:enquiry@nationalarchives.gov.uk)