

Conservation Policy

Our vision

Working with partners to be the physical and virtual heart of Suffolk's past, present and future archives and to encourage all those interested in the county's history in their journeys of discovery.

Our mission

Suffolk Archives helps residents and visitors engage with our county's rich heritage. It collects, conserves and communicates the recorded history of Suffolk from the 12th century to the present day, empowering people in exploring their roots, remembering their past, and planning their future.

1. Purpose of policy

The Conservation Policy is designed to:

- support the long-term preservation of all collections including those in digital formats for current and future access
- ensure the highest standards of conservation are followed and codes of ethics adhered to
- reflect the aims and objectives of the organisation including the SA Vision, and Mission, service transformational plans and Suffolk County Council (SCC) priorities
- facilitate compilation of strategic plans and procedures for the conservation and management and maintenance of collections and the accommodation used to protect and provide access to them
- assist in developing priorities
- provide and maintain documentation systems for both preservation and conservation
- inform a focused use of resources
- identify accountability and responsibility
- raise preservation awareness among staff, volunteers and users through good housekeeping, training, continuing professional development, display including online or via social media
- assist with identifying financial, staff, volunteer etc resources for the efficient and effective care of collections in all formats and policy development

2. Definitions

Conservation includes measures and or actions aimed at safeguarding cultural heritage while respecting its significance, including its accessibility to present and future generations. It can be divided into:

- **preventative conservation** – indirect measures and or actions aimed at avoiding and minimising future deterioration, damage and or loss
- **remedial conservation** – actions applied to an item to prevent or arrest damaging processes

Preservation encompasses the retention and protection of different formats of archive and local studies materials and or their informational content in order to maximise their useful life.

3. Introduction

Suffolk Archives (SA) acknowledges that a focused and inclusive approach to the long-term preservation of collections requires strategic development of both preventive and remedial conservation programmes. Priorities for these must evolve in line with the corporate and strategic goals of the organisation. A risk management method will underpin this process, informing decision-making and the establishment of priorities. In this way, conservation procedures and plans (preventive and remedial, also known as collection care) will be appropriately highlighted within the strategic framework, reflecting priorities and the most effective use of resources.

4. Risk management for conservation

SA is clear that the assessment of risk to the collections is key to the long-term preservation of all collection formats. The purpose of risk management is to identify and address each risk, but this may result in differing responses as each risk and the organisation's capacity to respond to it will vary. Consequently, responses will consist of the following graded objectives to:

- eliminate the risk
- control the risk
- manage the other issues that affect the severity of the risk
- accept the risk; but plan to address the risk in the future

SA will actively undertake risk management for conservation by:

- assessing the level of risk to the collections at all stages of collection management including controlling and stabilising environmental factors
- identifying practical and operational procedures and protocols to address the risks
- developing the awareness and skills of staff to meet the challenges
- carrying out remedial and preventive work in-house and commissioning external specialists where appropriate
- providing alternatives to consulting original material

5. Conservation standards

To underpin this policy SA is informed and guided by the following professional standards and methodologies:

- **British Standards Institution**, *Conservation of Cultural Heritage. New sites and buildings intended for the storage and use of collections*, BS EN 16893
- **British Standards Institution**, *Conservation and Care of Archive and Library Collections*, BS 4971: 2017
- **British Standards Institution**, *Conservation of Cultural Heritage. Specifications for the management of moveable cultural heritage collections*, BS EN 17820
- **The Collections Trust**, *Benchmarks in collection care for Museums, Archives and Libraries: A self-assessment checklist*, MLA 2011

These documents will enable SA to present a:

- consensus for managing collections
- range of benchmarks against which to measure performance

- means by which to assess and evaluate
- process to identify funding, either internally or from external sources

6. Communicating conservation

SA will ensure that this policy is promoted, publicised and understood by staff, volunteers, management and stakeholders in the following ways:

- via direct communication with users, depositors, donors, local communities, schools, colleges, the University of Suffolk and related corporate departments
- via the production of advisory leaflets and access to advisory information on both the staff intranet and the public website and social media
- via training for staff, volunteers, students and local communities and where appropriate other stakeholders
- via promotion in public exhibitions, talks, demonstrations, hands-on workshops and professional activities

7. Conservation procedures

SA, having identified the levels of risk to collection materials, will develop procedures to define the extent of risk. SA will address the identified risks using data derived from collection surveys and benchmarking exercises. These activities will:

- present options for management to address needs and improve access to the collections
- assist in estimating the cost, time and resources (both in materials and staff resources, and including volunteer input) of the different options to address collection needs
- inform preventive and remedial work
- provide vital management information and supporting data for the compilation of funding applications.

8. Identifying and implementing priorities

SA recognises the importance of having clear lines of responsibility for Collections Care. The SA Management Team, supported by the Collections Team including the Conservator is responsible for conservation management. It will use these conservation procedures to compile priorities and so inform the development of a strategy to address the risks to collections. It will consult The National Archives and other experts where appropriate. Priorities will be influenced by the following factors:

- availability of resources both financial and staff resources and including volunteer help
- access to specialised services and/or spaces to address collection needs
- the provision of efficient and effective strongrooms, a conservation workshop, sorting, quarantine, drying, cleaning, cataloguing, searchroom and exhibition etc spaces with appropriate equipment and environments
- the overall objectives of the organisation
- enabling access by remedial conservation and digitisation programmes
- reflecting and supporting evolving user needs

SA will compile a Conservation Strategy that draws on this policy process to formulate programmes of work that directly reflect the needs, priorities and resources of the organisation.

SA acknowledges that a policy is a time-bound document and that the priorities and objectives of any organisation can change over time. This Conservation Policy must be flexible and able to respond to change – both to local operational impacts and the wider economic and political contexts.

9. Related documents

This policy should be viewed alongside the other policies for Collections Information, Collecting, Collections Development and Access.

10. Review period

This policy will be reviewed every three years or earlier if a response is needed to any changes. Last reviewed July 2025.

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