

Deaccessioning 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

This policy explains why Suffolk Archives (SA) and its parent organisation Suffolk County Council (SCC) is committed to retrospective appraisal and reappraisal of collections and items within them to select those worthy of permanent preservation, as part of our approach to the ongoing development of our collections of original archives and diverse Local Studies printed and pictorial resources.

Collecting criteria have developed and changed since the 1930s when the first Record Office services were formally established in Suffolk. Some materials selected for permanent preservation in the early years may have been overgenerous, or no longer fall within the scope of our current Collecting and Collection Development policies. On other occasions, a detailed survey may not have been possible prior to the records being deposited, especially if they were at risk e.g. from disposal. This policy describes our quality control mechanisms to ensure current resources are efficiently and effectively used to preserve and make accessible more significant items and collections for the benefit of present and future generations.

2. How deaccessioning achieves SA core objectives

SA acquires and preserves for everyone unique and authoritative archives which constitute unrivalled sources for the study of most aspects of Suffolk life and makes them available. Planned and well-informed retrospective appraisal and reappraisal of archives and Local Studies materials ensures SA collections remain a coherent and relevant record of Suffolk.

A careful, responsible approach to retrospective appraisal or reappraisal engenders openness and trust in the authenticity, integrity and reliability of archives and ensures confidence in their use and legal admissibility, which helps SA meet the government's national strategy for archives expressed in The National Archives: [Archives Unlocked](#) and the Archives Accreditation Standard.

Sensitive, transparent, strategic and targeted retrospective appraisal or reappraisal of SA's collections facilitates improved collections care and conservation and is part of responsible collections management. Deaccessioning enables SA to replace records that are out of scope, with collections of more significance. Having leaner collections (i.e. not ones with unimportant documents) helps SA's service transformation and long-term sustainability and ensures the collections justify the resources spent on them and are fit for future use.

Deaccessioning aligns with and supports the priority themes of [Suffolk County Council](#) (SCC) especially that of efficient and effective services. Good management of collections and the information they contain is important in an age when the amount of information generated is growing exponentially.

3. Risks of not deaccessioning

Suffolk's documented information is one of its most important assets for supporting culture and memory as well as business processes and accountability. It is therefore essential that the right material is preserved long-term and made accessible. Failure to retrospectively appraise or reappraise collections effectively can result in:

- Precious resources being used inefficiently:
 - If the archives or Local Studies materials are duplicates or their contents duplicate information already held in another format or context. Local Studies items will be inspected to ensure they really are duplicates and not different editions that contain major changes.
 - When items or collections are already well represented in our collections e.g. building control plans, evidences of title etc.
 - If materials are of a low historical or informational value or do not contribute to an understanding of the creating body or individual.
 - Due to excessively long closure periods, complex access restrictions or other limitations placed on the use of collections or items within them or the disclosure of information by depositors, donors etc.
 - When historical or cultural significance is outweighed by such serious physical defects, deterioration or other damage that any new technology or techniques are unlikely to render materials usable in the future.
 - When items are dangerous and pose a significant risk to other collections, or the health of users e.g. through contamination.
 - When materials are better suited to or are a specialism of another repository. Examples of this may be due to format or language, but there may be other reasons.
- A negative or biased personal and cultural impact on individuals and organisations and the recorded history of the county
- Failure to meet legislative, and business requirements leading to legal, financial and reputational consequences.
- Irretrievable loss of historically important collections or items.
- Accusations of poor management or decision making, illegal activity or fraud, bad public relations and reputational damage. This results in a loss of trust in the service and SCC by users, depositors, donors, residents, and other stakeholders. Future deposits or donations may not be offered or offered to another organisation or funding withheld to the long-term detriment of the service and its users.

These risks are enhanced by technical, organisational, or business change and increase over time if not managed from the outset.

Many of the benefits are described in earlier sections of this policy. Deaccessioning and transfer to another repository can result in improved access to, and enjoyment of, an item or collection by the public if it is placed with related material and in an improved context.

4. Scope

This policy applies to the management of, but is not limited to, manuscripts, printed, typescript and computer-generated text, prints, drawings, watercolours, engravings, posters, glass plates, lantern slides, photographs, recordings, newspapers, microform, music and other notation, maps and plans, printed books, pamphlets, periodicals, guides, newsletters, maps, sale particulars etc. These may be in hard copy or digital formats.

All those responsible for collections management, development and access must adhere to this policy for material whether it was:

- Originally deposited, bequeathed, purchased or given to SA under the terms of our then operational Collecting Policy.
- Received from SCC departments, the Records Management Centre, other local authorities, statutory bodies etc as a statutory deposit or an official transfer or presentation after the records were no longer required for current use.
- A surrogate or access copy created from 'original' documents in any media in either hard copy, microform or digital format.

This policy covers deaccessioning from catalogued and uncatalogued collections. The majority of deaccessioning is however likely to occur as a result of cataloguing uncatalogued collections and might be described as deferred or retrospective appraisal. SA may decide to review specific classes of record or undertake a countywide survey to assess which collections require retrospective appraisal or reappraisal.

Deaccessioning involves the formal removal of a collection or an item from the accession register and custody of SA and is different from the routine weeding of collections e.g. in line with Micro-Collecting Policy guidelines. SA discusses with all new donors, depositors or owners at the time of transfer potential disposal of duplicate material etc weeded out by Archivists. It also shares with them the Micro-Collecting policy, where applicable. This discussion may not have occurred when items were deposited in the early years of the Record Office. Reasonable attempts will therefore be made to contact the depositor/owner (see below) when items are deaccessioned, unless the collection belongs to SCC or a predecessor authority.

5. Criteria for deaccessioning

SA's rich collections have been built up through the generosity of past and present depositors and donors. All deaccessioning decisions will be taken carefully by a professional Archivist based on archival principles to guard against any irretrievable loss that could result from the disposal of the wrong records.

- SA will use the criteria expressed in the Collecting and Collection Development Policies to decide if the material falls outside the scope or geographical area of these policies. It will also consider whether the collection is:
 - A foundation or special collection assembled for a specific purpose for example a parochial library
 - Already split between SA and other repositories, and might be better reunited by searching on Discovery etc.
- The material's significance for current and future historical, cultural, educational research and how deaccessioning would affect public access to its informational content will be considered. The uniqueness, and irreplaceable nature of some items and collections, as well those with strong local association will also be taken into consideration. This may include investigating the construction of the original items e.g. whether an item has a special binding, has been grangerised or annotated.
- The potential financial value will be judged and where necessary independent expert commercial advice will be sought and potential purchasers advised to do the same. Any proceeds from the sale of duplicate material etc will be ring fenced and used solely for the further long-term preservation, development and use of collections.
- SA will investigate whether a collection was properly appraised when it was first deposited or donated. Acquisition paperwork, agreements, legislation, regulations etc will be considered to ensure there are no known impediments to disposal or any special conditions attached to the original acquisition. Checks will also be made on ownership and to see if a grant or funding was received to purchase, conserve or catalogue the collection or item from a national or local charity or benefactor. A risk assessment will be carried out for collections which are undocumented and ethical implications taken into account.

Records will be retrospectively appraised or reappraised solely on their evidential and informational value, taking into account that research trends change over time. Some records may be used less frequently due to poor or inadequate cataloguing, or lack of knowledge about the collection by staff and researchers or due to the format or language of the material. In such cases SA will investigate improvements to the cataloguing, indexing and interpretation of the collection. Low usage, financial and space constraints or savings will not be used on their own as criteria for disposal. Original analogue records will normally be retained following digitisation. Pressure for disposal from other external forces will be resisted especially if it seeks to manipulate evidence, conceal or distort facts. Some duplicate material may be retained specifically to go in loans boxes or handling collections.

6. Methods of disposal

SA will be responsible for collections and items within them until disposal is completed. The SA Entry Form has a section covering disposal. Materials to be deaccessioned may be:

- **Transferred to another archive repository**
This is the preferred option. There is a strong perception that items should remain in the public domain. Reasonable attempts will be made to determine if other archives, libraries, or

repositories might be interested in the material. Approved repositories (approved by TNA as Places of Deposit, or an Accredited Archive or Museum Service) and collecting bodies will be offered items and collections if it is considered they are a more appropriate place to care for and make the material accessible subject to any relevant statutory provisions being met. SA will hope to transfer items or collections to repositories along with associated catalogues and paperwork where there are similar levels of public access to that enjoyed within The Hold. Depositors will be contacted as below.

If SA becomes either temporarily or permanently unable to provide proper care for collections, they will be transferred to another appropriate repository with similar overall objectives on such terms as may be agreed in writing with the consent of the depositor or owner (as above) and both governing bodies.

- **Returned to the depositor**

This is the next best option. If material is on deposit or long-term loan, reasonable attempts will be made to contact the depositor. When up-to-date contact details are available, the depositor will be offered the chance to receive back any unwanted material or consent to it going to another repository or being safely disposed of.

All correspondence will be sent to the depositor's last known address. It is the responsibility of the depositor to inform SA of any changes of contact details, or ownership, where applicable. If SA need to contact a depositor and are unsuccessful despite reasonable attempts to establish and trace contact by the Archivists, and if archives have been in the custody of SA for seven years or more, they will be presumed to have been donated to SCC.

- **Offered for public sale**

SA may sell donations, bequests and Local studies Materials especially if they are duplicates or are of an ephemeral or non-archival nature. All material that contains personal and sensitive information will be returned to the depositor or transferred to another repository or confidentially destroyed, not offered for sale. Different methods of sale such as public auction, online sale or tender etc will be considered. Local Studies materials may be divided into individual lots.

- **Destroyed**

Items in a poor physical state, considered to be of no monetary value, or which fail to sell will be destroyed. If owners with up-to-date contact details do not arrange for the collection of unwanted materials within 3 months of written notification by SA, they will also be destroyed. Items of a sensitive nature will be confidentially destroyed whilst other items may be recycled.

SA reserves the right to charge depositors for transferring or disposing of more than a small archive box (0.33 linear foot) of material.

7. Security and safekeeping, now and in the future

SA will always work to the highest professional standards underpinned by robust procedures, collaboration and advice in retrospectively appraising or re-evaluating and selecting material for

permanent preservation. SA will continue to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of its holdings and seek to fill gaps and remove duplication. It will also develop selection/retention schedules or micro-collecting policies within the main classes of archives enabling stricter and more uniform criteria to be followed for the permanent preservation of archives, than may have been the case in previous years. It is however, impossible to develop micro-collecting policies for all classes because of the heterogeneous nature of their contents. In these cases, Archivists will use their judgement. Archivists will also use their overarching knowledge of collections to identify records in one collection that overlap those in another and decide to retain one set that has the greatest research value.

SA will work with SCC's Information Governance Team, LG Inform Plus guidance and the SCC Taxonomy to select council archives for permanent preservation.

SA will where practical preserve the integrity of collections. On occasion, it may however split collections and transfer material to another appropriate repository.

Records will be kept of all retrospective appraisal or reappraisal, deaccessioning and disposal decisions and actions. The accession register will be marked up and information retained on the depositor, donor or purchase files. Transfer of title will be made as appropriate.

Where records are involved in ongoing legal proceedings, any retrospective or reappraisal and deaccessioning decisions will be postponed until these proceedings are concluded to avoid any prejudicial effects.

Deaccessioned books that are sold will be marked to indicate that they have been legitimately sold. The National Archives (TNA) will be notified of any major deaccessioning decisions especially where a significant collection is reappraised following the publication of the catalogue on Discovery so TNA records can be amended (see below).

Standards and codes of Practice to be used as guidance:

- Public Records Act 1958
- Data Protection Act and General Data Protection Regulations 2018
- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Environment Information Regulations 2004
- Lord Chancellor's Code of Practice on the management of records
- Permanent Directions issued under Section 9 (2) of the National Heritage Act 1980 for archives accepted by HM Commissioners of Revenue and Customs under the Acceptance in Lieu scheme (Arts Council England will provide advice)
- Conditional Exemption Tax Incentive Schemes undertakings between the owner of a collection and HMRC regarding preservation and access (The National Archives and Arts Council England will provide advice)
- Archives Accreditation
- Archives and Records Association UK and Ireland Code of Ethics (March 2024) [Code of Ethics — Archives & Records Association](#)
- International Council on Archives Code of Ethics [ICA Code of Ethics - ICA](#)

Sources of advice

- The National Archives

Advice from TNA will be sought particularly on deaccessioning public records, especially if New Burdens Funding has been received for the care of the collection. Transfers of public records received under s4(1) of the Public Records Act to an alternative Place of Deposit will only take place after an Instrument of Transfer is approved under the Public Records Act s4(3). Public records received under s4(1) will not be destroyed without the approval of the Lord Chancellor. Records received under s3(6) of the Public Records Act are no longer considered Public Records and may be deaccessioned and disposed of without approval. TNA will however be informed of these decisions so it can update its records. TNA will also be consulted regarding the transfer or disposal of any tithe records, or the transfer or removal of any manorial documents.

- Diocesan Registrar
SA is the designated Diocesan Archives for the deposit of records of the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich and of its constituent archdeaconries, deaneries and parishes.
- CILIP
Advice will be sought from CILIP for Local Studies collections and rare books especially those in specialist libraries e.g. Cullum Collection, Parochial Libraries, Ipswich Town Library etc.
- The Charity Commission for England and Wales
- Arts Council England
- Museums Association

8. Responsibilities

Appraisal and deaccessioning decisions will normally be made by Archivists. Complex decisions will be referred to the Collections Manager, who will take them to the Suffolk Archives Management Team. Any significant disposals will be formally approved by the Management Team. TNA, academics and local experts on collections or specialist areas of research and other repositories will also be consulted where appropriate. SCC's legal and communications advisors may also be consulted. Such consultations will help to ensure the right decisions are taken and information about them communicated to guard against any reputational damage. The method of disposal will be decided by the Archivists in consultation with the Collections Manager, depositor and other repository as appropriate. No private sale or gifts of collections or items will be made to SA or SCC staff or volunteers.

9. Related documents

This policy informs the Collecting, Collection Development and Access policies and work plans and will be monitored and reported on as part of the annual performance review of the SA. We will monitor material being deaccessioned to ensure criteria are being adhered to.

10. Review period

This policy will be reviewed every three years.
Last reviewed July 2025

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