

Digital Preservation 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) is committed to investing in and undertaking digital preservation, our approach to the ongoing development of and the preservation and management of 'digital archives'.

Digital records, due to their format are inherently more vulnerable, requiring a separate policy. The purpose of this policy and related guidance is to produce a consistent approach to protect the county's information assets and reduce the risk of unintentional information loss ensuring continued access to digital archive material and/or its informational content.

2. Definition

Digital preservation is a formal endeavour to ensure that digital information of continuing value remains accessible and useable.

3. How digital preservation achieves SA core objectives

SA acquires and preserves for the future unique and authoritative archives which constitute unrivalled sources for the study of most aspects of Suffolk life and makes them available for everyone. Proactively collecting and preserving 'born digital' records as they replace paper archives and making them accessible ensures SA collections remain a comprehensive and relevant record of Suffolk for current and future generations.

A responsible approach to digital preservation engenders openness and trust in the authenticity, integrity and reliability of records 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*, 2017 and the Archives Accreditation Standard.

The targeted expansion of SA's digitisation programme facilitates improved collections care and conservation. The planned generation of digital surrogates of analogue archives, which are then made available online, will help SA's service transformation and sustainability, encouraging a sense of local and community ownership and raising its profile nationally and internationally.

Digital preservation aligns with and engenders the priority themes of Suffolk County Council (SCC) including efficient and effective services, economic growth and improved quality of life and emotional

wellbeing. Supporting the management of digital records and information by SCC is an important role for SA as more files are shared across the organization and customers use the material on linked platforms.

4. Benefits and risks of digital preservation

Suffolk's information is one of its most important assets for supporting culture and memory and is required to last longer than the technology on which it is created or currently stored (software and hardware). Failing to engage effectively with digital preservation may lead to informational gaps in SA's collections which could result in:

- A negative personal and cultural impact on individuals and organisations
- Failure to meet legislative, and business requirements by organisations leading to legal, financial and reputational consequences.

These risks are enhanced by technical, organisational, or business change and increase over time if not managed from the outset. There are also risks associated with people accessing records they are not entitled to see or altering records. SA will therefore collaborate with SCC IT and Information Governance to:

- ensure born digital records for permanent retention are identified, captured and transferred in a standardised and streamlined process to the archive at an early stage along with their associated metadata
- automatically generate metadata wherever possible
- decide what can be safely stored in the cloud and what needs to be on SCC servers
- move from fragmented data silos towards distributed data having due regard for ethical and legal constraints by providing graduated access i.e. what is available only to certain categories of SCC staff, or depositors/owners, what is only accessible on site in our searchroom, and what is more widely available through the SA website by implementing user controls
- implement physical and systems access controls
- redact sensitive information

The benefits are largely covered in sections 2 and 3 above. Preserving and placing digital content online not only improves access for researchers but also encourages reuse of digital content in new and creative ways.

5. Scope

This policy applies to the management of digital information throughout SA collections. Digital collections are made up of components: the original object, the file to be preserved, and the descriptive component or metadata associated with it. All those responsible for collections management, development and access must adhere to this policy for:

- Born Digital records irrespective of the creating organisation
 - Files deposited, bequeathed, purchased or given to SA under the terms of our standard Collecting Policy

- Files 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 are no longer required for current use
- Surrogates created by SA and others
Digital surrogate/access copy files created from 'original' documents in any media (manuscript, photograph, map, video, audio, digital file etc.) for the purpose of permanent preservation
- Web Archiving and Social Media
SA recognises that expertise lies with The British Library and other publication libraries and will not seek to duplicate their collecting.

6. Security safekeeping now and in the future – Sustainability

SA is committed to the safekeeping of all its collections and ensuring their long-term physical and intellectual security and accessibility. Best practice in digital preservation is continually evolving. SA will always work to the highest professional standards, underpinned by robust procedures, collaboration and advice wherever practicable.

Standards and codes of Practice – to be used as guidance:

- Standard for a Trusted Digital Repository ISO 16363/TDR
- OAIS (Open Archival Information System) Reference model ISO 14721:2025: [ISO 14721:2025 - Space Data System Practices — Reference model for an open archival information system \(OAIS\)](#) :
- Dublin Core Metadata Element Set Part 1 – Core Elements (ISO Standard 15836-1: 2017) <http://dublincore.org/documents/dces/> <https://www.iso.org/standard/71339.html>
- BS 10008 Evidential Weight and Legal Admissibility of Electronic Information <https://www.bsigroup.com/en-GB/bs-10008-electronic-information-management/>
- BS4783 Storage, transportation and maintenance of media for use in data processing and information storage – various media.
- Data Protection Act and General Data Protection Regulations 2018
- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Environment Information Regulations 2004

Sources of advice

- The Digital Preservation Coalition <http://www.dpconline.org/> including the Digital Preservation Handbook <http://www.dpconline.org/handbook>
- The Digital Curation Centre <http://www.dcc.ac.uk/>
- The National Archives <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/information-management/manage-information/preserving-digital-records/guidance/> including the PRONOM technical registry of file formats and software products <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/PRONOM/Default.aspx#> http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/information-management/redaction_toolkit.pdf
- UK Data Archive <http://www.data-archive.ac.uk/>

Business Continuity

SCC, its IT providers and SA will make all reasonable efforts to ensure all digital archives are preserved. Business Continuity Plans describe the actions to be taken to secure electronic data in the event of a major disaster. These are regularly reviewed and updated.

SA's current digital preservation system – Preservica - provides a resilient and secure storage environment in line with established standards. Digital files will be migrated to new storage media and accessible versions of software as required.

File formats including audio and image

Digital archives can be received in many different formats. SA will maintain and regularly review a list of acceptable file formats for long-term preservation. These will include files created within open format, or very widely used [lossless?] software. Archivists will ensure all incoming deposits are checked for interoperability/compatibility with our systems. If Archivists are unable to read the file, an alternative version will be requested from the depositor. The depositor will also be required to provide descriptive, structural, administrative and technical metadata. SA should be involved as early as possible in the life cycle of an electronic record or in advising on digitisation projects to ensure future long-term preservation.

Files will be regularly reviewed for obsolescence, signs of corruption and deterioration and appropriate measures taken to ensure born digital files remain in an accessible state. A surrogate copy, in an appropriated format, will be made available for public access in the Searchroom and online. We will explain what we have done so users can understand the provenance of a record.

Long term storage and migration costs

Although costs are reducing they are not insignificant, therefore owners will be asked to contribute a one-off payment towards the costs associated with their collections.

7. Responsibilities

SA Managers and Archivists will work with colleagues across SCC especially in Information Governance and IT to ensure digital continuity issues are considered and included in relevant strategies and projects e.g. SharePoint. They will collaborate to facilitate good management of information throughout its lifecycle e.g. by contributing to retention schedules.

The Collections Manager will have overall responsibility for the 'Digital Archive'. Archivists will be responsible for the daily management of digital preservation and access working in conjunction with SCC IT, external providers e.g. Preservica, Axiell (metadata), Orangeleaf (web access to digital files and images) and partners e.g. University of Suffolk and other local authorities. They will advise depositors and partnership projects where appropriate.

SA will work in line with the Collection and Collection Development policies in the selection of digital material for long term preservation. It will also support other collecting bodies in Suffolk, such as community archives and museums. It will share best practice, provide advice and seek partnership projects where appropriate. SA will develop the digital skills and knowledge of current and new staff,

trainees and volunteers, in conjunction with the University of Suffolk to meet the skills needs of the archives/heritage sector in Suffolk. They will be supplemented by and learn from externally funded project staff.

8. Digital preservation strategy

SA will use this policy to inform the development of priorities, a strategy and procedures for digital preservation in line with best practice, standards and SCC Informational Governance and IT policies and procedures

<https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/about/privacy-and-data-protection/>.

9. Related documents

This policy informs the Collecting, Collection Development and Access Policies and work plans.

10. Review period

This policy will be reviewed every three years or sooner if required.

Last reviewed July 2025

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