

Digital Surrogates 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

Suffolk Archives (SA) is committed to preserving its rich and diverse collections for the benefit of current and future generations. This is achieved through the development of conservation and access policies and practices that align with national standards. One key strategy is the digitisation of documentary materials - including items that are printed, written, drawn, painted, or filmed - which offers a significant opportunity to both enhance access and protect vulnerable originals.

This policy outlines SA's approach to investing in and undertaking the digitisation of archives, images, and printed materials to:

- Preserve unique and at-risk originals: digitisation helps protect items that are frequently accessed or fragile due to their physical composition or historic damage (e.g. from mould, insects, fire, or water). While digital surrogates support access, they are not substitutes for the originals, which retain intrinsic evidential and historical value. Once digitised, originals will be stored in environmentally controlled strongrooms to prevent further deterioration, unless inherently unstable.
- Protect high-value materials: creating digital copies of valuable originals helps safeguard against accidental damage, loss, or theft.
- Expand remote access: digitisation broadens the reach of collections to local, national, and international audiences. It encourages inclusive engagement, supports sustainability, and facilitates new ways of accessing, researching, and understanding archival materials.
- Support efficient and flexible use of materials: digital content can enhance internal workflows, raise the profile of SA, and contribute to income generation through services and programming.
- Enhance understanding through collaboration: digitised materials support partnerships with the University of Suffolk, local schools, community groups, and institutions such as the National Maritime Museum. This includes opportunities for virtual reunification - digitally bringing together related collections held in separate institutions.

SA will also consider acquiring digital surrogates from external organisations or individuals only when:

- The originals are not available,
- The originals are at risk or unlikely to survive,
- The content has significant value or relevance to SA users,
- Or when the surrogate complements existing or potential future collections held by SA.

Such acquisitions may also be accepted as part of a larger archival deposit.

2. How digital surrogates achieve SA core objectives

The 2010 Collections Trust report, *The Cost of Digitising Europe's Cultural Heritage* indicated it will never be cost effective to digitise more than 64% of a repository's collections because of record formats or infrequent use. However, an active SA digitisation programme will support Suffolk County Council (SCC) priorities; in particular those relating to economic growth through tourism, efficient and effective services, improved quality of life and emotional wellbeing, protecting and enhancing our environment [Our Ambitions for Suffolk - Suffolk County Council](#)

The targeted expansion of SA's digitisation programme facilitates improved collections care and conservation. The planned generation of digital surrogates of original 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. It also helps cultivate an open approach to knowledge, enriching society intellectually, economically and culturally contributing to the government's national strategy for archives expressed in The National Archives [Archives Unlocked 2017](#)

User engagement with digitised materials, alongside feedback on the collections more broadly, will be regularly monitored to guide ongoing and future developments. Insights gained will shape future digitisation priorities and ensure the service continues to meet user needs.

3. Risks associated with surrogates

These can be summarised as:

- Lack of physical interaction with original materials can reduce users' understanding of their context - including the physical makeup and size of an object, which can be important to the original purpose or meaning.
- More limited attendance by customers in branches reduces direct support from archive staff.
- Online selection may create unrealistic expectations about the availability and depth of digital resources.
- Digitisation involves costly processes, including metadata entry and long-term preservation amid rapid technology changes.
- Some users struggle with or dislike reading digital formats or lack the necessary access or skills.
- Increased risks of copyright infringement, unauthorised access, and potential manipulation of digital documents.
- Possibility of accidental loss, misplacement, or retention of incorrect digital files or data.

4. Scope - What sorts of digitisation

SA actively seeks opportunities to digitise significant historical collections. A flexible, responsive approach is adopted to reflect evolving user and commercial interests, advances in technology, and the availability of external funding. A range of business models, independent or in partnership,

may be employed depending on the nature of the collection and the specific opportunities. All digitisation activity draws upon SA staff time and resources, which can be substantial.

4.1 Commercial Partnerships

Digitisation with commercial partners will focus on large-scale, homogenous collections with established markets. Many projects will centre on family history content, while others, especially in partnership with international publishers, will support the education sector, including higher education. These partnerships may involve:

- Licensing agreements under which commercial partners fund digitisation, indexing, online access, and marketing.
- SA receiving a digital copy of the images and income through royalties.
- Digital files created as TIFF or JPEG formats depending on the project scope.
- In some cases, SA may commission digitisation services only, without licensing or access agreements.

4.2 Grant-Funded Projects

Projects supported by grant-awarding bodies may involve digitising entire collections or selected components. Digitisation may be outsourced or conducted in-house, particularly where items require specialist handling. Public funders and charitable organisations will often require that resulting digital images be freely accessible to the public.

4.3 Strategic and Community Partnerships

SA will work with local and national organisations to increase digitisation capacity, achieve economies of scale, and expand public impact. This may include:

- Collaborating with community groups on locally significant projects, such as photographic collections.
- Outsourcing digitisation to other repositories that hold related material.
- Participating in national digitisation consortia to enhance resource sharing and visibility.

4.4 In-House Digitisation

Smaller or medium-sized digitisation projects will be completed in-house by SA staff and trained volunteers as part of regular operations. These may include:

- Collections of limited commercial potential but high research or heritage value.
- Fragile or rare items requiring careful handling.
- Regularly used collections suitable for ongoing digitisation workflows.

4.5 Sponsorship and Crowdfunding

Sponsorships and public appeals may be used to fund digitisation activities. This includes:

- Appeals to key sponsors for specific projects.
- Crowdfunding campaigns to support digitisation and metadata creation to enhance searchability and access.

4.6 Customer Orders and On-Demand Digitisation

SA offers a digitisation service to fulfil customer requests in line with its access policy. For partial scans (e.g. one page of a register), the resulting digital image will not be retained unless the entire item is later digitised in full.

Where possible, digitisation will be completed from original materials rather than existing microform copies to ensure high-quality, full-colour images and to maintain control over reproduction rights.

4.7 Digitisation Standards and File Management

SA follows a "digitise once" policy, preserving high-resolution master files (e.g. TIFF) in its digital preservation system, Preservica.

- Lower-resolution access copies (e.g. JPEGs) will be created for public use.
- Digitisation will use high-quality, uncompressed, lossless formats to maximise future reuse and longevity.

4.8 Licensing and Procurement

- SCC will provide clear licensing documentation for both commercial and non-commercial uses. Licences will typically be non-exclusive and time-limited.
- Licensing agreements may include the use of existing metadata created by SCC, partners, or other institutions.
- All tenders will comply with SCC's procurement standards. Framework contracts or preferred vendor status may be awarded following competitive procurement.
- Contracts will define access and preservation requirements, ensure SCC receives a copy of all digitised materials, and allow termination for underperformance.

4.9 Rights and Ownership

Intellectual property rights and depositor wishes will be respected.

- Royalty revenues may be shared with collection owners, copyright holders, or metadata creators.
- Where appropriate, SA will claim secondary copyright over digitised materials created through its programmes to safeguard long-term public access.

4.10 Metadata and Cataloguing

SA will continue to catalogue collections and digitise existing paper catalogues and indexes to produce the high-quality metadata required for effective digital access.

4.11 Preparation for Digitisation

All items will be assessed for suitability by trained staff before digitisation. For large-scale projects, a representative sample will be reviewed by the Collections team. Conservation treatment will focus on minimal intervention to stabilise items for safe handling rather than full restoration.

4.12 Public Access to Digital Surrogates

- Digital surrogates will be made available in SA searchroom, John Blatchly Local Studies Library (JBL) and online.
- Where surrogates replace access to originals, users will be offered free access to read-only versions online or on physical media e.g. portable hard drives
- Charges may apply for off-site access or for personal copies.
- Free access at partner venues may be arranged, subject to agreements with funders and commercial partners.

5. Criteria for digitising collections

Suffolk Archives will determine what material is selected for digitisation based on an assessment of benefits, costs, available resources, and potential partnerships. Key considerations include, but are not limited to:

- Demonstrated public demand, especially from existing and potential users such as family historians, particularly for name-rich content.
- Geographic and educational relevance, including countywide significance for informal learning, community history projects, or identified use within schools, colleges, and universities in Suffolk.
- Preservation needs, where digitisation addresses vulnerability by reducing physical handling of fragile items or improving access to materials that are deteriorating or otherwise difficult to use.
- Conservation requirements, including the extent of any preparatory work needed before digitisation and the resources available to support it.
- Historical, informational, or monetary value, including local, national, or international significance and potential to promote Suffolk's heritage.
- Size and accessibility of the original, especially where large or cumbersome items present challenges for in-person access in the searchroom.
- Format and fragility, such as glass plate negatives or other sensitive media requiring specialist handling.
- Risk of future inaccessibility, where the collection is likely to be withdrawn from public access or its content otherwise lost.
- Income generation or engagement potential, such as collections that could support exhibitions, events, or other public programming.
- Technical feasibility, including the format of the original and the quality or availability of metadata. Non-standard formats may require specialist equipment, and uncatalogued items will require metadata creation prior to digitisation.
- Ownership and rights, including copyright status, access restrictions, and intellectual property considerations. Collections owned by SCC that are out of copyright and free from access restrictions are more easily published online.
- Project scale, referring to the volume of material and number of images the digitisation effort will produce.

6. Standards, codes of practice and sources of advice

SA will ensure established technical standards, best practice and processes for digital capture, processing, storage, preservation and access are embedded in all projects and shared with partners. Quality assurance on work done by partners will be embedded in contracts/agreements. Expert advice will be sought as necessary.

7. Publication of digital surrogates

SA is committed to making digital surrogates of its collections publicly accessible in a lawful, ethical, and responsible manner. Reasonable steps will be taken to obtain the necessary permissions for the publication of digital files in compliance with relevant UK legislation, including the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 and its subsequent amendments, including provisions relating to orphan works.

Key principles guiding the publication of digital surrogates include:

- Orphan Works: Where SA has not been able to identify or contact the copyright holder, digital surrogates may be made available online under a takedown policy. A clear statement will be published alongside the material, including contact details, to allow for swift resolution of any complaints or rights claims.
- Depositor Permissions: SA will seek approval from owners of deposited collections, where possible, prior to the online publication of digitised material. All permissions and agreements will be documented. If requested, disclaimer or rights statements will be published with the material.
- Enhancing Access: Optical Character Recognition (OCR) SA will investigate how this could be applied, where appropriate, to digitised printed materials to improve text searchability and user experience.
- Use and Promotion: Digital surrogates may be used across a range of SA platforms and activities, including:
 - The SA website and social media channels
 - Exhibitions (both online and physical)
 - Publications, events, and learning resources.This helps promote engagement with the collections and supports education, research, and public interest.
- Monitoring and Evaluation: SA will use tools such as Google Analytics to monitor public engagement with digital collections. Usage data will help assess the impact and reach of digitisation projects and inform strategic planning for future digitisation activities.

8. Responsibilities

The Collections Manager will have overall responsibility for the 'born-digital archives', while the Operations Manager will be responsible for the daily management and preservation of digital surrogates and access. Both managers will work in conjunction with SCC IT, external providers e.g. Preservica and Orangeleaf and members of the SA Strategic Management Team. Staff and volunteers trained in digitisation will ensure surrogates are created to the required standards with the associated basic descriptive, technical, structural and administrative metadata. The archivists will be responsible for ensuring more detailed metadata is added as required especially descriptive, structural and administrative metadata and for the quality control of the digital copies and metadata.

Digitisation plans will be developed in conjunction with SCC IT, external providers, commercial organisations, grant funders, partners, users, staff and owners.

SA will also actively research digitisation practices in other archives, drawing on their successes and lessons learned. This will inform SA's own digitisation action plan and support continuous improvement.

9. Related documents

Digitisation is an integral part of SA's overall service delivery and strategic planning. This policy supports and informs key areas, including the Collecting Policy, Collection Development Policy, and Access Policy.

10. Review period

This policy will be reviewed every three years, ensuring it remains current, effective, and aligned with national best practices.

Last reviewed June 2025.

Suffolk Archives, The Hold, 131 Fore Street, Ipswich, IP4 1LR

01473 296666

archives@suffolk.gov.uk

www.suffolkarchives.co.uk

If you need help to understand this information in another language please call **03456 066 067**.

Se precisar de ajuda para ler estas informações em outra língua, por favor
telefone para o número abaixo. 03456 066 067

Portuguese

Jeigu jums reikia šios informacijos kita kalba,
paskambinkite 03456 066 067

Lithuanian

Jeżeli potrzebujesz pomocy w zrozumieniu tych informacji w swoim języku
zadzwoń na podany poniżej numer. 03456 066 067

Polish

Dacă aveți nevoie de ajutor pentru a înțelege această informație într-o
altă limbă, vă rugăm să telefonați la numărul 03456 066 067

Romanian

إذا كنت بحاجة إلى المساعدة في فهم هذه المعلومات بلغة أخرى، الرجاء الاتصال على
03456 066 067

Arabic

Если для того чтобы понять эту информацию Вам нужна помощь на другом
языке, позвоните, пожалуйста, по телефону 03456 066 067

Russian

If you would like this information in another format,
including audio or large print, please call **03456 066 067**.



Designed and printed by  **vertas** Design & Print
Phone: 01473 260600