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Suffolk County Council – Lowestoft Records Office Consultation  
Endeavour House  
8 Russell Road  
Ipswich  
Suffolk  
IP1 2BX

24 October 2018

Dear Sir or Madam

#### **Suffolk County Council Record Office: Lowestoft Consultation 2018**

This is the response from the Town Council to the above consultation. We acknowledge that the existing strongroom arrangement for records in Lowestoft is not fit for purpose and that improvements or an alternative is needed. We would be pleased to engage with the County Council about any fair and reasonable proposals for improvements to records management, considered with appropriate public engagement. It is reasonable to expect meaningful consultation with both the Town Council and the community about the options to ensure preservation, enhancement and accessibility of Lowestoft's heritage collections. We do not believe this has happened and consider that the current consultation is too vague and insufficiently far-reaching.

Heritage forms an important part of Lowestoft's potential for developing a greater social and economic offering. The existence of the Town Council, since 1 April 2017, provides a focus and a local partner for organisations and people who share our aspiration for Lowestoft to be valued as a major urban area of Suffolk, no longer sidelined in favour of Ipswich and Bury St Edmunds.

We consider that plans for changes in managing the Record Office service have been rolled out without due regard to the importance of the heritage of Lowestoft, with the danger of causing a great disservice to the existing population and future generations. Extra steps should have been taken to engage with the population here. Lowestoft has significant levels of deprivation (which make it more difficult for the community voice to be made known) and, historically, there was no Town Council to help safeguard local interests. This failure to engage properly and to consider options which would better represent our local heritage interests, has led to frustration and upset among many local people.

The plans for the Hold and changes to records management, which have been underway for many years behind the scenes, have failed to:

- Explore in a meaningful way options other than those that directly relate to boosting the success of the Hold bid. The current consultation includes considerable space dedicated to strengthening the outreach activities that were incorporated within the bid to make the centralisation of the service more palatable to funders.
- Consider and plan for reasonable alternative locations for the records to be retained locally.



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- Incorporate funding options for suitable local access within the bid for the Hold or in any subsequent financial considerations. The consultation gives no reasons for the statement that it is 'not a viable option financially' to develop a new strongroom facility for the north-east of the county. Considering this matter over a matter of weeks is inadequate when compared to the planning that has been involved in developing the plans for the Hold since 2010.
- Engage properly with local people and organisations, including this Town Council
- Explore the potential for a funded full-time service to redress the balance. It is not clear why local organisations and people in a deprived area such as Lowestoft should have to pay extra to gain access to their own records, either via travel to Ipswich or internet provision, when those in Ipswich have free access.
- Consider fully the records which should remain in Lowestoft. It is disappointing to see that all the 'consultation' offers is to be clear about what objects will be moved, to ensure that objects are correctly classified and to retain the Port of Lowestoft Research Society Collection (which was never housed in the strongroom).
- Provide reassurance that the resources exist to ensure reasonable progress is made to create the needed digital access.
- Consider measures which might improve local access to records, including any which are moved to Ipswich. It is completely unacceptable to assume that vulnerable groups, such as the disabled and those on low-income, could travel to Ipswich or would have to pay for online access where more privileged groups and those living in Ipswich have free access.
- Clarify the impact on the future of Lowestoft library.

The Council wishes to place on record that it does not consider that it has been actively and meaningfully engaged with, either before or as part of this consultation process, and strongly objects to any statements made to the contrary.

Should you wish to discuss this response or engage with the Town Council about this issue, please do feel free to contact me.

Yours faithfully

*Shona Bendix*

Shona Bendix  
Town Clerk