
Stourbridge Area Committee 10th March 2008

Report of the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services

The management of Local History and Archives resources for Dudley

Purpose of Report

1. To inform the committee of the planned programme to be carried out by Dudley Archives and Local History Service and Dudley Library Service to ensure that the valuable archival records held by the Council at Stourbridge Library are held in the appropriate place to ensure their safe keeping for the future and their availability for the current residents of the borough.
2. To inform the committee of the plans for consultation on the future development of the Dudley Archives and Local History Service in relation to the Local History and Archives collections currently located at Stourbridge Library.

Background

3. Dudley Archives and Local History Service are licensed by The National Archives to provide a service that ensures nationally and locally historic records are preserved for years to come. This includes the requirement to keep the documents in conditions that meet exacting environmental requirements, and that the documents are made available for the use of anyone who requires them. The National Archives document *Planning a new record repository, 2004* states:
 - The safety and well-being of records are of the first importance
 - The convenience of the location of staff and public should also be a priority.
4. Cabinet on the 12th September 2007 approved the recommendations included in the report **Dudley Archives and Local History Service relocation**, which will result in an archive service for Dudley fit for the 21st century.
5. The council need to ensure that the archives currently held Coseley and in libraries in the borough are managed in a way that meets these requirements until the new facility is opened. As a result some work has been carried out at Coseley to improve the conditions in which records are kept during the interim period.
6. In addition to the collections held at Coseley and managed by the professionally qualified archivists and the local history librarian at that site, some libraries across the borough, including Stourbridge, have been working with local residents and local history groups to collect local history and archive materials relevant to their area. This work has often been done separately from the work carried out by the Archives and Local History Service and includes geographical areas that fall outside the borough of Dudley and encroaches on the collection policies of the adjacent county record offices. As part of the modernisation plans for the library service it has been

identified that there has been some duplication of work carried out by the library and archives services. This now needs to be addressed to ensure the long term preservation and access to all the borough's records is in line with the standards prescribed by The National Archives.

7. It is important that the archives and local history collections for the whole borough are managed and supported in an integrated way, one of the keystone skill of an archivist is to preserve context and thus the integrity of each and every collection that is held, for a librarian it is to support access to information which includes basic local history enquiries. The future plans for both of the services include a programme of training for staff in both services to ensure that the needs of customers are met by the appropriate professional for their area of expertise, and that all staff are aware of the full range of services that are available.

Collections policy

8. The work done by the libraries has included the setting up of separate collections policies, these now need to be collated into a single effective collection policy for the whole borough.
9. The Stourbridge collection policy of 2000 states that:
 - *"...material will not be accepted that is not considered useful to the collection or worth preserving for the future.*
 - *...Will not accept items with the proviso that they will be on public view or held in a specific location..."*
10. The Collection policy will be harmonised across the borough, including the establishment of a Collection Policy Steering Group to facilitate a community-led collection policy for Dudley Archives and Local History Service. Representatives from the borough, particularly the local history groups and the Friends of the Archives, will be invited to join the group and play an active role in preserving the evidence for the history of the current area of Dudley MBC.

Improving Access to the Archives

11. A programme is being developed to make archival materials more accessible. This includes:
 - Creating a single source for the unique documentary sources on the history of Dudley by creating a database that is available on line at www.blackcountryhistory.org of all new items received by the Archives and Local History Service.
 - Developing a long term programme of retro conversion of catalogues of items already held by the Archives and Local History Service and at branch libraries to the online database, supported by bids to funding bodies to catalogue significant collections for the borough.
 - A programme of digitisation to make available photographs and other items on the online database when funding is identified.
 - A programme of conservation and preservation for all items held by the Archives and Local History Service.
 - Development of a programme of partnership working with stakeholders to improve access across the borough to incorporate preservation, digitisation (where appropriate) and outreach.

Programme of work

12. The current programme of work for the establishment of an effective borough wide service to manage Archive and Local History materials is:

December 2007 - staff at Stourbridge Library were given training on managing information enquiries on the collection currently housed at the site to ensure that customers can be helped to obtain material at any time the library is open. The previous Local History Librarian who is still available to support staff with more difficult enquiries did this.

January – April 2008 – comprehensive review of all material in the local history collections held at libraries in the borough carried out by one of the qualified Archivists.

The following items have been identified to date in the Stourbridge collection as needing to be transferred to the Archives:

- Oldswinford parish “Bache” map, 1699
- Oldswinford court map, 1782
- Register of electors Amblecote, Lye 1938
- Amblecote Rate Book, 1838 (MSS)
- Account Book 1814 MSS 621.88
- Worcs County Cricket Club Score Book
- Diary of John Donaldson Harwood – Town Clerk & Mayor of Stourbridge, 1923
- Pargeter Diaries & notebook, 1896-1906

February 2008 – May 2008 items identified as high priority for archival preservation transferred to the Coseley site. They will be accessioned as part of the archival holdings and information made available on the online catalogue. The items listed above have not been moved from Stourbridge Library to date as priority has been given to archives at other libraries where the risk to items is greater.

A transfer of one set of documents from Stourbridge Library was done on the 16th January 2008, which have now been accessioned (Acc 9514). They were an unsorted bundle of “...Bills and invoices sent to Saunder and Bowkley, ironmongers, Stourbridge...Dec 1909”. This material is believed to have been ex-H. J. Haden Collection and not been available for public access due to not having been catalogued.

June/July 2008 – establishment of the Collection Policy Steering Group including stakeholders and local history groups on the future development of the borough wide Archives and Local History Service and collections policy for the service.

Finance

13. The programme will be carried out within the current budgets of the Archives and Local History and Library Services budgets.

14. The Archives and Local History Service are actively investigating external funding options to support the future plans for digitisation of collections, and the full cataloguing and promotion of the collections that have the greatest significance to the history of the borough of Dudley.

Law

15. *‘Public records, as defined by the Public Records Act 1958 and subsequent amendments to the schedules of such records attached to it, are subject to statutory controls and are placed under the supervision of the Keeper of Public Records (the*

Chief Executive of The National Archives), and the Lord Chancellor (the Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs). (Taken from the Standard for Record Repositories)

16. Dudley Archives is a place of deposit as defined by the Act, which has to be approved by the Keeper.

Equality Impact

17. The future plans for the Archives and Local History Service are intended to improve the accessibility of the materials held by the service to all residents of the borough. This includes work with the local community, through the development of material for events including the national local history day in June, the International Festival of Glass and the Victorian day in Netherton.

18. The collection policy will support the Archives and Local History Service and consultation will enable the service to develop better links with communities whose archives are currently under represented in the collection.

Recommendation

19. *It is recommended that:-*

- the committee notes the future plans for the Archives and Local History Service in relation to the Local History and Archive collection currently held at Stourbridge Library.



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Linda Sanders
Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services

Contact Officer: Kate Millin
Assistant Director, Libraries, Archives and Adult Learning
Telephone: 01384 814745
Email: kate.millin@dudley.gov.uk

List of Background Papers

The National Archives: Planning a new record repository, 2004

Cabinet paper *Dudley Archives and Local History Service relocation* 12th September 2007

The National Archives: Standard for Record Repositories, 2004