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Gloucestershire Museums Archaeology Storage Resilience Pilot

BRIEF FOR OPTIONS APPRAISAL

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Gloucestershire Museums Archaeology Storage Resilience Pilot: Brief for options appraisal

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. This document is a brief intended to inform the submission of tenders by appropriately qualified specialists to undertake an options appraisal on behalf of Gloucestershire Museums (represented by the Wilson Art Gallery & Museum).
- 1.2. The appraisal is intended to provide an evidence base for various options available to the museums of Gloucestershire in managing archaeological archives going forward. In particular to address the challenges presented by:
 - A lack of storage space;
 - A lack of archaeological specialists; and
 - A lack of long-term funding.
- 1.3. This brief by way of background information for the tender provides an outline of the current situation for museums in Gloucestershire, considering organisation and current backlog. It outlines the potential future governance structure of the county following Local Government Reorganisation and it considers steps taken to date to address the archaeological archive backlog.
- 1.4. It goes on to outline the options which need to be considered as part of the appraisal and how a resulting report should be structured. It is a requirement that specialists and consultants tendering for this work will have a knowledge of museum and archaeological archive curation and be familiar with grant funding opportunities for museums.



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2. Background

Gloucestershire Museums

2.1. Gloucestershire has six museums that curate archaeological archives and are accepting (or have accepted) archives from commercial archaeological fieldwork. These are:

- Corinium Museum.
- The Dean Heritage Centre.
- Museum in the Park (Stroud).
- Museum of Gloucester.
- Tewkesbury Museum; and
- The Wilson (Cheltenham).

2.2. The collection areas and policies of each museum and the overall approach to archaeological archive deposition as they currently stand are outlined in the 3rd Version of the Gloucestershire Archaeological Archives Standards which will be supplied alongside this document.

Current deposition backlogs

2.3. Currently only one museum in Gloucestershire is accepting new archaeological archives – Corinium. The remainder have stopped accepting new archives over the course of the last ten years. The situation with regard to each museum's archive deposition backlog is as follows:

- **The Dean Heritage Centre;** about a dozen archives (size uncertain) await deposition with the Dean Heritage Centre. However, they have stopped accepting notifications from 2022 onwards so the real number is unknown.
- **Museum in the Park (Stroud);** Has 13 archives on its list of pending depositions which were notified prior to closure to new depositions in 2014 (precise extent unknown). In addition, it is estimated that there are around 1,100 boxes of new archaeological archives awaiting deposition since 2014. This is based on an informal notification list kept by the Museum.



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- **Museum of Gloucester;** stopped taking notifications in 2023. Archive awaiting deposition is estimated to be around 1300 boxes.
- **Tewkesbury museum;** approximately 315 boxes and two oversize objects.
- **The Wilson (Cheltenham);** approximately 200 boxes.

2.4. To give some notion of the impact on a local archaeological contractor, Cotswold Archaeology (based in Kemble) currently hold the following undeposited archives in Gloucestershire as of late 2025:

- **The Dean Heritage Centre:** none
- **Museum in the Park (Stroud):** 32 projects, 114 boxes
- **Museum of Gloucester:** 39 projects, 1020 boxes
- **Tewkesbury Museum:** 2 projects, 7 boxes
- **The Wilson:** 11 projects, 153 boxes

2.5. This is a total of 74 projects and 1224 boxes for a single contractor. Many more archaeological contractors operate in the county. Development management archaeologists in Gloucestershire have estimated that Cotswold Archaeology undertake perhaps 40% of the archaeological fieldwork in the county. This would suggest, very simplistically, that perhaps 3,060 boxes were outstanding for the county at the end of 2025.

Museum organisation

2.6. Each of the Museums in the county are organised slightly differently. As outlined below:

- **Corinium Museum** is operated by Freedom Leisure (under a ten year contract with Cotswold District Council). The collections and buildings are owned by Cotswold District Council.
- **The Dean Heritage Centre** is a registered charity which is self-funded and run by Dean Heritage Museum Trust governed by a board of trustees. The site is owned by Forest of Dean District Council.
- **Museum in the Park (Stroud);** is governed by Stroud District (Cowle) Museum Trust (registered charity and owner of the collections) in partnership with Stroud District Council (collection manager & Museum service provider).



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- **Museum of Gloucester** is governed and funded by Gloucester City Council.
- **Tewkesbury Museum** is governed by Museum Trustees and supported by Tewkesbury Town Council.
- **The Wilson** (Cheltenham) is managed on behalf of Cheltenham Borough Council (CBC) by The Cheltenham Trust. The Trust is part funded by CBC but supplements this with commercial income.

Local government reform

2.7. The ‘two tier’ model of local government in Gloucestershire (the districts and the county) is due to be replaced over the course of 2027-28. Currently three proposals for a new unitary structure for the county have been submitted to central government. These are:

- A single unitary authority covering the whole of the county;
- Two unitary authorities divided into broadly east/west areas; and
- Two unitary authorities divided into a ‘Greater Gloucester’ area and the rest of the county.

2.8. Central government is currently considering the best structure for the future and will choose a preferred structure in summer 2026. New unitary shadow authority or authorities will be elected in May to December 2027, and the new structure will be introduced in April 2028. More details are available here: <https://futuregloucestershire.org.uk/>

2.9. Local Government Reorganisation represents an opportunity for increased cooperation and joint working between the various Museums. It seems likely that they will be more closely linked moving forward. This presents an opportunity for a collective response to archaeological archive curation issues.

Archive curation projects to date in Gloucestershire

2.10. The archive storage problem has long been recognised by the museums in the county. Various attempts have been made to address the issue. To date these have included:



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The Gloucestershire Archaeological Archive Standards

2.11. The standard was first produced in 2016. It was developed in partnership with Museums throughout the county, the Museum Development Officer, Gloucestershire's local government archaeological officers and a number of archaeological contractors. It was intended to produce a more uniform and sustainable standard for the creation, compilation and transfer of archaeological archives in Gloucestershire. The third version of this standard is currently in production.

Rationalisation projects

2.12. The Museum of Gloucester has undertaken several projects to rationalise archaeological archives in its care. These include the 2015 Gloucester City Excavation Archive Enhancement Project funded by Historic England. That project (which utilised volunteer help) resulted in the deposition of 14 sizable archives held but not deposited by the museum. The project resulted in a c.50% space saving for those archives and the creation of a proper inventory of the material each archive contained.

2.13. A second project, focusing on Roman ceramic building material, was undertaken in 2016. This was entirely a volunteer project and resulted in significant space savings from the rationalisation of CBM curated by the museum.

2.14. Most recently, the Museum of Gloucester has completed the National Lottery Heritage Fund supported 'Store to Store' project. This involved setting up a 'Discovery Centre' in a shop unit in Gloucester which acted as a mix of pop-up museum and volunteer centre. In total, 93 volunteers were able to reduce 2652 archive boxes down to 1512 (an approx. 57% space saving). The project also produced clear inventory lists for a total of 29 site archives.

2.15. The Store to Store project was able to incorporate the 'Beyond the Bones' project, another volunteer project which combined training in the curation and handling of human remains with the repackaging of 100 boxes of the human remains held by the museum.



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- 2.16. In 2017, Museum in the Park commissioned Cotswold Archaeology to scope the rationalisation potential of its archaeological archives, as part of a wider Historic England-funded project for the Society of Museum Archaeologists. The review concluded that little space would be gained by rationalisation, perhaps not even enough to accommodate the archaeological archives still pending deposition at that point in time. It concluded that it would not be worth the expenditure to conduct this work.



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3. Options for consideration

3.1. It is assumed that any approach adopted by Gloucestershire museums to address the archive backlog is likely to require several overarching actions and responses. These include:

- Reorganisation in the light of Local Government Reorganisation;
- Agreement on how to share or source specialist archaeological and conservation input;
- The undertaking of further rationalisation projects; and
- The future updating of the Gloucestershire Archaeological Archive Standards.

3.2. Outlined below are the options that need to be considered by the appointed consultant in their appraisal. Whilst there's an obvious focus on cost, statutory obligations and legal risk, there is also a need to consider the risk to heritage and reputational harm.

Option 1: Do nothing

3.3. In the event that museums do not act to address their archaeological archive backlog what will the outcome be? The appointed consultant should consider outcomes and risks from this approach, including:

- The risk to physical archaeological archives;
- The risk/liability being placed on commercial archaeological units left in possession of undeposited archives;
- Legal, reputational and enforcement risk as archaeological archiving forms part of planning conditions (and who is at risk);
- The legal risk of failing to deposit human remains (and who is at risk);
- The legal risk of non-compliance with Scheduled Monument (SMC) and Listed Building (LBC) consents (and who is at risk)

3.4. APPRAISAL TASK: As a minimum, the appointed consultant will need to consult three archaeological contractors working in Gloucestershire to understand their archive storage situation and the sustainability thereof. They will also need to



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consult Historic England and a district planning department in Gloucestershire to discuss National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), SMC and LBC considerations. The policy and evidence department at Historic England should be the correct consultees and they will be contacted in advance of the project commencing.

Option 2: Creation of a new archive store

3.5. The appointed consultants should consider, in the context of Local Government Reorganisation, the options available for the creation of a central Gloucestershire store or stores for archaeological archives. The principle being that a pooling of skills, staff time, funding and properties could make for more sustainable archaeological archive provision. This could include the utilisation of existing property currently owned by one of the two tier authorities. It could equally involve the purchase of a new property or the construction of an entirely new facility. It is envisaged that this will be considered at a high level and in outline terms.

3.6. APPRAISAL TASK: The consultants should engage with Gloucestershire Archives to understand their previous experience of new build archive creation and meet with Gloucestershire County Council Estates Team to gain an understanding of potential suitable building/site options, general challenges and costs.

Option 3: The use of a 'Deep Store' facility

3.7. Deepstore in Cheshire <https://www.deepstore.com/locations/cheshire/> is used for archaeological archive storage by Cambridgeshire County Council. In general bulk inert material goes into Deepstore whilst intrinsically interesting or environmentally sensitive individual artefacts or archives are loaned out to museums. Cambridgeshire maintains a controlled finds store which also acts as a front-end visitor facility.

3.8. A Gloucestershire Museums use of Deepstore could potentially work in a slightly different manner. Even with LGR many of the museums will have different approaches to ownership of the archives. Nonetheless, each of the museums



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could act as the controlled finds store and front-end facility for their collection area whilst the majority of archives go into Deepstore.

3.9. APPRAISAL TASK: The appointed consultant should meet with Cambridgeshire County Council and with Deepstore to understand the opportunities and risks associated with this approach, including costs and sustainability.

3.10. The consultant should also consider the use of the Restore/National Conservation Service (NCS) facility at Upper Heyford, Oxfordshire. This may potentially be able to act as a deep store facility in a similar manner and has the advantage of being closer. Information on both options are available here: <https://historicengland.org.uk/research/results/reports/6783/GatheringInformationonDeepStorageArchiveFacilitiesinEngland>

4. Stages, Products and Tasks

Start up

4.1. The appointed consultant will need to submit a project design for the approval of the Gloucestershire Museum's working group. That design will outline the objectives, tasks, actions, products and timescale for the appraisal project.

4.2. The consultant will then attend a meeting (remote is acceptable) with the working group to discuss the project before beginning.

Tasks

Establish extent of the deposition backlog

4.3. The consultant should mail out to all archaeological contractors operating in Gloucestershire (this information should be available from LPA Archaeologists) seeking basic up-to-date figures on outstanding archive deposition. Sufficient time should be allowed for return of these figures.

Outline current museum archaeological resources

4.4. Consult with Gloucestershire Museums to find out:

- The amount of currently available and in use storage space;



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- The number of specialist archaeology curators (or curators with archaeology related training);
- The number of available conservation specialists; and
- The provision for the curation of human remains.

4.5. The consultant should also establish how much income has been generated in the last decade from archaeological archive deposition charging.

Consider options for a future, county wide, rationalisation project

4.6. Discuss with Museum curators and record the short and medium-term goals of a county wide rationalisation project. Consider lessons learnt from the Museum of Gloucester 'Store to Store' project. Draft hypothetical project options and funding options for a county wide project. This should include potential location(s), timescale and partners.

Research 'Do Nothing' option

4.7. There are four separate aspects to be considered when researching the 'Do Nothing' option. These are: legal requirements, planning requirements, physical risk to archaeological archives and reputational risk, and who is affected. To fully consider these aspects, it is important to consult widely. Consultation should include with:

- **Archaeological contractors:** at least three contractors must be consulted, and they will be a mix of larger national contractors and more local, smaller organisations. It is important to understand:
 - Their current provision for archive storage (for undeposited archives);
 - The safety of those archives (for example are they secure, are they covered by disaster management plans?); and
 - The cost of storage and the future viability thereof of continuing to store.
- **Historic England:** Historic England must be consulted regards:
 - **Statutory concerns:** when a Listed Building Consent or Scheduled Monument Consent requires archaeological archive deposition who is responsible or liable if that cannot take place?
 - **Heritage planning concerns:** If archaeological archives are not being deposited with museums and therefore cannot be accessed



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by the public or researchers – as required by the NPPF, who is at fault and what are the implications and for whom?

- **Local authority planning and policy departments:** the key question for LPA planning authorities is, going forward, if museums are not accepting archives, the enforceability of archaeological planning conditions as currently drafted?
- **Consider reputational risk:** Given the potential issues outlined above, the appointed consultant must consider and highlight potential reputational risks (if identified) to Gloucestershire museums and the future local authority or authorities.

Research the creation of a new archive store

4.8. This must include:

- Seeking examples of recently constructed or adapted archive storage facilities in the UK, researching cost and funding models where available.
- Consulting with Gloucestershire Archives to understand their recent experience creating a new archive store.
- Consulting with Gloucestershire County Estates Team as to potential reuse of existing buildings/structures and an idea of the issues and costs involved
- Consider any other local museum initiatives that may be relevant.

Research the use of a deepstore facility

4.9. This must include:

- Consultation with Cambridgeshire County Council;
- Consultation with Deepstore;
- Consultation with Restore/National Conservation Service (NCS)
- Consultation with commercial archaeological units currently using a deepstore facility

Research funding sources and future organisation

4.10. This should include:

- Funding sources for a potential project options for example:
 - National Lottery Heritage Fund;
 - Arts Council; and



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- Historic England
 - Include consideration of ongoing and sustainable future funding - for example:
 - How the museums could coordinate resources in future following LGR;
 - The size and type of grant funding needed to provide a sustainable future for archaeological archive storage in Gloucestershire;
 - Consideration of the viability of a charitable endowment to support archive curation going forward;
 - Grant funding sources;
 - The potential for the establishment of a community interest company or a charitable trust to co-ordinate and administer funds.
 - Any other potential approaches – including examples from other museums or local authorities.
- 4.11. It is not expected that the appointed consultants will provide detailed costings. This should be a high-level document considering approaches in general terms.

Report production

- 4.12. A high-level options appraisal report addressing the above issues should be submitted in draft format for comment to the Gloucestershire Museum’s working group. This should be supported by a presentation of the results (via an online meeting).
- 4.13. All options considered should be costed – it is expected that those costs will be high level and indicative.



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5. Project deliverables

Report production

5.1. The appointed consultant must produce a high-level options appraisal report which provides ball-park indications of cost for the different options and is informed by all appropriate standards and guidance. The report must include:

- A summary outline of the current situation with regard to archaeological archive curation in Gloucestershire;
- Consideration of key actions to be undertaken for any collective museum response to this issue regardless of the approach taken.
- Ball-park indications of cost for the three options considered in section three:
 - Do nothing;
 - Creation of a new archive store; and
 - Use of the ‘deep store’ facility.
- Consideration of project funding options for example:
 - National Lottery Heritage Fund;
 - Arts Council; and
 - Historic England
- Consideration of how to make any solution sustainable in the long term. Given the one-off funding available for archive deposition and the ‘perpetual’ nature of the curatorial commitment a separate source of long-term income is required to cover the cost of either a new archive store or use of a deepstore facility combined with a local front-end. Options for future funding models (for example a charitable trust responsible for managing an endowment) should be outlined.
- The options appraisal is not intended to make recommendations but to outline clearly the relative merits, indicative costs and risk of each approach.