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## MANAGEMENT BOARD

### FUTURE OF PARLIAMENTARY ARCHIVES ACCOMMODATION

#### Note by DG of HR & Change

1. Board members are invited to consider the attached paper from Caroline Shenton, formerly Director of the Parliamentary Archives, who has been undertaking a feasibility study into the future accommodation for this bicameral service since April.

#### Purpose of the Archives

2. The study opens up a debate about what the heritage function of the Parliamentary Archives is for – preservation of both Houses' historic records for a traditional audience of academic users; or a much ambitious and effective contribution to our public engagement and reputational objectives through a range of relocation possibilities. At present the benefits and critical success factors outlined in paras 9-11 are not weighted, but there will be an opportunity to do so at a later stage. The Board may wish to express views.

#### Link with R&R

3. There is an obvious link with Restoration & Renewal. The Victoria Tower occupies 10% of the Palace's volume and the future of its contents will be a key dependency in planning whatever changes may occur as a result of the bigger project. By agreement with Richard Ware, this study was established to run in parallel to R&R as its focus is on out-of-Palace solutions. There will be an opportunity to join up formally once the results of the Independent Options Review are known. In the meantime, Caroline is representing the Archives intelligent client work strand within R&R and the two projects are working closely together to determine what Palace-based outcomes for the Archives are possible, if any.

#### Next steps

4. Caroline's plan for the next phase of work on an Outline Business Case and beyond, involving a project team, consultancy and market research, is for £200K in each of the next three years. I have already bid for the HC share of this funding (£80K per year from 14/15).
5. To make this second phase of work useful and efficient, the paper asks for a range of options to be ruled in and out, to allow for an initial costing of options in the Strategic Outline Case by March 2014. Caroline would welcome knowing of any factors

we might wish to be taken into account at this stage as well, and is offering any Board member who wishes it, a (re)familiarisation tour of the Archives to understand the issues in more detail.

**A J Walker**

**Director-General of HR and Change**

*December 2013*

## MANAGEMENT BOARD

### Future of the Parliamentary Archives' Accommodation

*Paper from Caroline Shenton, Archives Accommodation Study Director*

*For the meeting on 12 December 2013*

#### **Purpose**

1. The Archives' Accommodation Study has reached a critical decision point in developing its options. Following a shortlisting exercise, key strategic decisions about the delivery of Parliament's archive services need to be taken by the Clerks, advised by their Management Boards, as outlined here. Both Boards will consider this paper at their December meetings. This will enable the study to move forward to costings of a final Strategic Outline Case.

#### **Action for the Board**

2. The Board is asked to agree the list of options to be considered in the Strategic Outline Case and to confirm the list of those ruled out. They are:

#### **Options to be Considered**

- **Do nothing/Status Quo**
- **A dedicated building in Westminster**
- **Part of a combined Visitor, Education and Heritage Centre in Westminster**
- **A dedicated building in Inner London**
- **A dedicated building outside London**
- **A World Heritage Site Archive Centre**

All the above will include analysis of the cost/benefit of offsite and/or contracted-out storage.

## Options to be Ruled Out

- **Transfer the Parliamentary Archives to the National Archives**

Reason for rejection: primary legislation required; complicated governance structure to assure the role of the Clerks; loss of expertise in, and visibility of, the archives resulting in poorer understanding of Parliament.

- **Contract Out the Whole Service**

Reason for rejection: the Study's work suggests that there is no supplier for a fully contracted service, and no prospect of developing one as a result of going out to tender.

- **Turn the Archives into a Charitable Trust**

Reason for rejection: ownership issues and complex governance required; strategic objective of the Corporate Officers for the Archives to continue to be owned by Parliament.

## Consultation and equality analysis

3. A range of internal and external stakeholders have been consulted throughout the Study, and members of both Management Boards have been talked through the options in this paper individually by the Archives Accommodation Study Director. Public users will be consulted and an equality analysis undertaken at Outline Business Case stage once one or more preferred options have been identified.

## Background

4. The Archives Accommodation Study has been underway since April 2013 and has reached an interim decision point. Its remit was set out in the Restoration and Renewal (R&R) preliminary business case (October 2012) as follows:

***Future location of the Parliamentary Archives***

*This study would review the suitability of the accommodation currently occupied by the Parliamentary Archives and examine whether there is a strategic business case for re-locating the Archives to a permanent site away from the Palace, bearing in mind potential alternative uses of the Victoria Tower.*

5. The Study, which is being undertaken by Caroline Shenton, with significant input from colleagues in PED and other heritage functions as well as the Archives, has come to the conclusion that the current Archives' accommodation in the Palace of

Westminster is unsuitable in almost every area. This stark conclusion is based on a number of factors, but they mainly resolve into four areas:

- Very poor space provision and workflow for a modern archive service trying to operate within an adapted Grade I-listed Victorian building.
- The location and extreme height of the Tower, with no space for a significant increase in lift capacity to mitigate disaster planning and business continuity concerns.
- Audience development and engagement is very difficult while behind a heavy security cordon.

6. By September 2013, research and data-gathering phases of the Study were completed, and a short-listing meeting took place at which 36 choices relating to scope, solution, delivery and implementation were reduced to 16. A further reduction to 6-8 is needed so that the initial Strategic Outline Case (SOC) can be submitted to the Finance Directors in the normal way by the end of the financial year. Both Clerks need to take a strategic view in order to make this reduction, advised by their respective Management Boards. This paper provides the mechanism for them to do that.
7. The current 'long shortlist' of options has been previously discussed with members of the Board individually outside this meeting by the Archives Accommodation Study Director, using a decision tree (*annexed to this paper*). A further annex to this paper sets out seven scenarios for the future of the Parliamentary Archives for illustrative purposes only, showing different permutations and the complexity of decisions involved, to aid thinking.
8. As a result of this consultation process, several options on the 'long shortlist' have been ruled out. For completeness these have been included in this paper so the Boards can verify this approach.

### **Benefits and Critical Success Factors Adopted for the Study**

9. The Archives operates a bicameral records management and archives service for Parliament. It manages the entire lifecycle of Parliament's recorded information – from supporting and developing corporate good practice in relation to Parliament's current business information, through to care, curation and provision of public access to the 2%-5% of historic records which are transferred each year for permanent preservation in the Victoria Tower repository. There are around 4m archives in the Tower, dating from 1497, including original acts, bills, journals, minutes, committee reports and evidence, deposited private bill plans, papers of all kinds laid on the tables of both houses and deposited in the libraries, judicial records from the House of Lords; art, architecture and ceremonial records; as well as photographs, film, modern administrative policy files and most recently, digital files. They are the institutional memory of Parliament dating back to the middle ages: unique, priceless and a

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national treasure, preserved in order that Parliament's decisions are transparent and available for the administrations and any member of the public to access and research over time.

10. Recordkeeping activities of the Archives are, of course, driven by the corporate priorities of both Houses. Furthermore, the Archives is firmly embedded in the wider work of Parliament in terms of public engagement and heritage stewardship – and has more to contribute. The options for its future accommodation therefore need to reflect and support the Archives' current links to a wide range of corporate functions and allow its further potential to be tapped.
11. Overall, the Archives could offer Parliament far more – in terms of public engagement, education and visitor services, and in generating a greater understanding of the work of both Houses today – than it is currently able to in its present accommodation. Nor can its accommodation at present contribute a more holistic solution to the bespoke storage and collection care needs of heritage assets across Parliament more widely (including works of art, historic furnishings, architectural salvage and library special collections). The following benefits are therefore being sought from a new location:<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> These were agreed at a series of internal stakeholder meetings in July 2013.

<b>Archives Accommodation Benefits mapped to Corporate Objectives</b>	Effective	Efficient	Better engagement public	Earn Respect	Restoration, and Stewardship renewal	Partnerships
Better access for more of the public						
Greater understanding of Parliament						
Reduced risk to archive collections						
Benefits for other Parliamentary heritage						
Environmentally friendly						
Value for Money						

12. In addition, four critical success factors for any future Archives accommodation solution are being used to assess options:
- Ease of access for corporate use.
  - Affordability.
  - Low reputational risk (with members and public).
  - Staff management and skills retention.
13. Of all the critical success factors, 'Ease of Access for Corporate Use' is the one which was mentioned most often by Management Board members during individual discussions, particularly among those who had previously held posts in procedural offices. Some 50-60 archival enquiries are made each year from staff seeking historical information for their

current work (compared with 7,000 from the public). The most frequent users are the private bill and committee offices, and also the conservation architect's team. Over time the problem will gradually diminish as recent archives will be increasingly born-digital and accessible through our online repository. For older hard-copy archives, a 'scan-on-demand' service (which is already provided for the public) or other technology will presumably solve this problem if the Parliamentary Archives were relocated some way from Westminster.

14. Another point made by a few Management Board members was the current scope of the collections and whether they were all relevant to Parliament.<sup>2</sup> While there certainly are some politicians' archives and other collections in the Archives which would not be acquired today, they form a small proportion of the holdings yet are of very significant public interest and make a major contribution to our public engagement activities. If required, the impact of de-accessioning them from the Archives' holdings can be considered at a later stage if this is going to help decide between options.

### **Do Nothing/Status Quo**

15. As explained above, the study has come to the conclusion that the current Archives accommodation in the Palace is largely unfit for purpose. The point was made during consultations that one outcome for the Palace under R&R would be "a People's Palace" which would be much more accessible and solve the difficulties with audience development. Another outcome might be one where archive storage was relocated within the Palace but outside the Tower. Both would go some way towards mitigating the current difficulties the Archives faces, and have been included in the relevant workstrand submissions to R&R; but whether or not either of these outcomes is feasible or affordable will be explored in the independent options review due to start in January 2014. In the meantime, the SOC is considering out-of-Palace options. Unless a solution can be found elsewhere inside a significantly rearranged Palace of Westminster post R&R, staying in the current location is unacceptable, and the reasons for this will be explained in more detail in the SOC.

### **Options Ruled In for Consideration by the Boards**

16. The following have been ruled in for consideration. Depending on the options shortlisted there will be need to be separate consideration of the location – physical and organisational – of the Records Management team, which has to remain geographically close to the centre of Parliamentary operations to support the administrations.
17. All of them assume:

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<sup>2</sup> An outline of collections held is available at <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/parliamentary-archives/archives-overview-holdings/>



- ‘Walk-in-off-the-street’ access and improved facilities to release the Archives’ potential for public engagement.
- Much greater disaster resilience and improved workflow.
- Use of offsite (split-location) storage and studios for cost-effectiveness, with the possibility of contracting out some or all storage.
- Tiered storage capacity which could be utilised by other heritage functions across Parliament for their low-use collections not needed on the Estate.
- Alternative uses for the Victoria Tower (being explored in more detail in the R&R Independent Options Review).

### ***A Dedicated Archive Building***

18. There are four sub-options here:

- Located in Westminster
- Located in Westminster as part of a Parliamentary Visitor, Education and Heritage Centre
- Located in Inner London but not Westminster
- Located outside London (the salutary experience of the Royal Armouries’ move to Leeds, and nervousness revealed during management board consultations around the experience of the Welsh Assembly and its un-used Colwyn Bay Visitor Centre, suggest that very considerable and robust market research would need to be done before pursuing this option, but it is worth including in the final shortlist).

### ***Joint Venture/Shared Building with another archive service***

19. While attractive financially, this would be hard to achieve unless a suitable partner of sufficient standing, or with an identity and mission which would fit sensibly with Parliament, could be found.

### **Options Ruled Out**

20. In preliminary discussions with Management Board members, the following have been ruled out:

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### ***Transfer the Parliamentary Archives to the National Archives***

21. Managing the long-term corporate memory and recorded heritage of Parliament – which is what the Archives are – is part of the Chief Executives’ role. Both Clerks, on taking office, make declarations which personally bind them to make “true entries” of “the things done and passed” and as such both are the official custodians of all records and documents in their respective Houses. This has a bearing on the decisions to be taken below.<sup>3</sup>
22. There are, of course, plenty of moral, constitutional and historical reasons why Parliament should continue to maintain its own archives, not least the fact that the split from the royal secretariat in 1497, when the Westminster collections begin, was one of the earliest and most striking statements of separation of powers in this country. Plenty of major private sector organisations maintain their own archives as a corporate asset and source of institutional pride (for example Marks & Spencer, HSBC, Unilever and Diageo), and the Private Archives Team of The National Archives (TNA) has commented that:  
  
“We believe that the separate identity of the Parliamentary Archives is important and that it has a crucial role to play in fostering and promoting the historic role of the legislature as the guardian of British liberties and democracy and ensuring the accountability of Parliament and its administration to the nation over time. It is particularly important that the collective memory of Parliament is maintained during a period of rapid constitutional change. This should inform any future planning for its accommodation and facilities”.<sup>4</sup>
23. But there is also the question of ownership of the archives, which the Clerk of the House has expressed as a key principle in relation to the holdings of the House of Commons. Since “send it all to Kew” has been raised as a possibility by a number of Management Board members, Scenario 7 outlines some of the issues (including Privilege) which would arise if the Parliamentary records were transferred to TNA. TNA is not a ‘collecting archive’ like a local authority Record Office; it receives its archives as the result of its role as the government’s records manager. Therefore, primary legislation would be needed to ensure this solution did not impact current records management decisions at Westminster, and so run into problems with exclusive cognisance. It may be able avoid some of these problems by establishing a separate entity with the National Archives, following the model used by the US Congress, but this would still require legislation and risk reductions in service levels.

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<sup>3</sup> Erskine May, *Parliamentary Practice*, (24<sup>th</sup> edn, 2011), pp. 105, 115.

<sup>4</sup> The National Archives’ National Advisory Service conducted an audit of the Parliamentary Archives in July 2013 to inform the accommodation study. A copy of the full report is available on request and will be included in the SOC.

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**A fully contracted-out service**

24. Could another organisation, public or private, do this more cheaply, and provide a better service for the public, than the current arrangements? At present the figures and statistics available indicate that the current set-up is likely to be as cheap as and certainly much more effective than another archive service would be at increasing public understanding of Parliament.
25. Of course, there is a mature commercial market for archival storage and digitisation (which the Parliamentary Archives has used in the past and continues to do for specific projects). But there is not yet such a market for completely contracted-out archival services, including all the other heritage functions undertaken (onsite and remote public enquiries, education, outreach, and engagement; cataloguing; collection care; internal and external exhibition activities; film, TV and radio requests). Some local authorities – for example Glasgow City Council and the Highlands Council – have taken the step of contracting out their entire culture and leisure services (into which local authority archive services fall) to charitable companies but the equivalent for Parliament would be to contract out all its public engagement, visitor services, education and heritage activities, in order for it to be commercially attractive or worthwhile.
26. It is also worth pointing out here what Parliament would lose if its archival (that is, non-records management) functions were contracted out. The ‘historic’ teams of the Archives do not work in isolation from the rest of Parliament, and could not somehow be cut off from it without considerable organisational and financial impact. Their expertise and skills play a significant role leading, working with, contributing to, or supporting the work of other heritage functions and public engagement, education and visitor services. A conservative estimate of the input of Archives staff to these areas to be in the region of £100K a year, which would need to be replaced if archivists, conservators and others were no longer on the staff.
27. The experience of trying to re-let a collection care contract in the Archives in 2010 indicated that these sorts of activities are a very niche area, with none of the few suppliers who bid meeting the requirement.<sup>5</sup> The Lords Head of Procurement, involved in the 2010 failed procurement, is of the view that, even if there were a mature market for these services, it is highly likely that in the end it would cost Parliament more. Existing staff would need to be TUPE-transferred to the service; bespoke offices, search-room and studios acquired in addition to storage space; the contract managed from within Parliament by several intelligent clients for different specialist areas; the general heritage expertise which the Archives provides to other Parliamentary offices (£100K pa as above) either additionally bought in, or built into the contract, both at extra expense; and some equipment, such as industrial digital cameras and printers, also used by other teams across Parliament, replaced. There would almost certainly be no benefit for the taxpayer as a whole.

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<sup>5</sup> In addition, by bringing the service in-house, the Archives saved around £10K a year and had the added advantage of being able to deploy its collection care staff to help other heritage offices in Parliament, not possible without added expense under the previous contract.

28. During the short-listing meeting in September parallels were made between the Offsite Consolidation Centre (OSCC) competitive dialogue and a possible approach to an archival service procurement. However, in Management Board consultations, this was thought to be a red herring. The OSCC combines services from markets which are already large and competitive; the complexity was around joining them together satisfactorily through competitive dialogue, not in creating a brand new market for an uncommercial service currently without any suppliers.

### ***Turn the Archives into a Charitable Trust***

29. Views on this were mixed. Points in favour included the resilience this would bring to a public-facing Parliamentary service in an age of austerity (a view also taken by a number of other public sector archives). Charitable status is also very attractive as it has the potential to release funds otherwise not available to non-charities. Set against this is the complexity of governance arrangements required, and the fact that ownership of the archive collections would pass out of the hands of Parliament to the trustees, which for the Clerk of the House is unacceptable. The Clerk of the Parliaments is not in favour, either.

### **Financial and procurement implications**

30. These will be considered in more detail in the relevant sections of the SOC.

### **Risk management**

31. This will be considered in more detail in the relevant section of the SOC.

### **House of Lords implications**

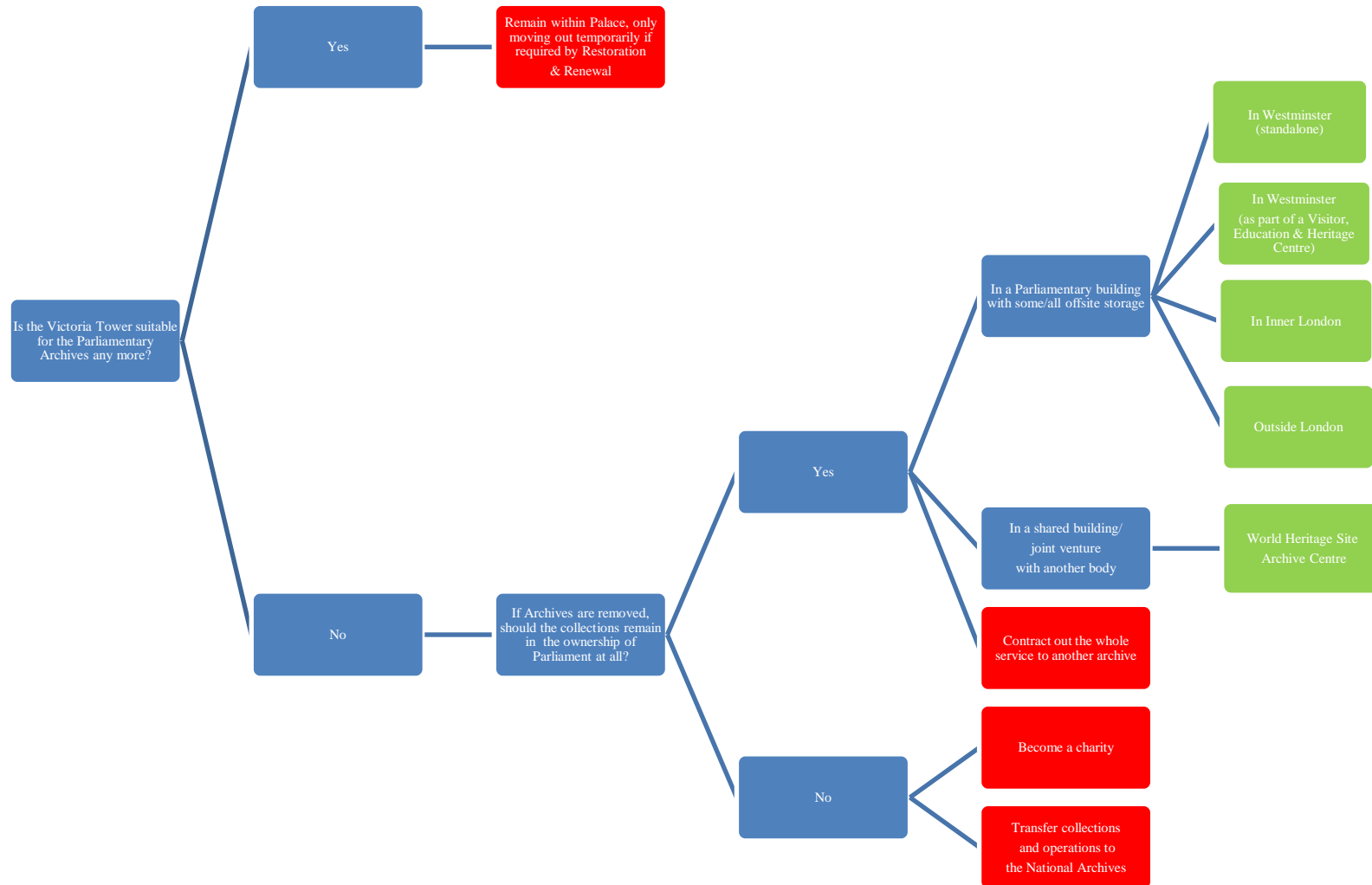
32. The Archives is a bicameral service. A similar paper is being considered by the Lords at its December meeting.

### **Legal Issues**

33. Legal advice from counsel in both Houses on privilege and charitable aspects has been incorporated into this paper and informs the annexed scenarios.

**Caroline Shenton, Archives Accommodation Study Director**  
**27 November 2013**

**Annex A: Decision Tree showing Options Ruled In and Out for Consideration**



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## Annex B: Archives 2030 Scenarios

These seven scenarios are *not* options. Like the *Parliament 2030* scenarios of a few years ago, they are a fictional way of visioning the future which illustrates various strategic permutations for the service and its collections, illustrating the benefits and issues of each. Each scenario envisages a different future for the Archives' collections and services as it might appear in 2030.

It should be noted that the future location of the records management team (both organisationally and physically) will be the subject of a separate piece of work; however, some indication of possibilities are given below and it is assumed in all scenarios that records management is a function which is core to the operational effectiveness of Parliament and needs to be on or very close to the Parliamentary estate.

In particular, the scenarios are intended to clarify thoughts about fundamental questions of location and management models which is where much of the complexity in finalising a shortlist of options lie. Specific financial figures are not included, because the purpose of this exercise is to shake out favoured strategic directions, and risk appetite, before moving towards an understanding of financial aspects; having said that, some comments about relative costs are included below.

The scenarios are:

1. Marooned in the Victoria Tower
2. Orbiting Around Westminster
3. The Centre for the Study of Parliamentary History, London
4. People, Parliament and Politics: Reaching Out Beyond London
5. Archives @ The Wall: An Eco-Friendly Joint Venture
6. The Parliamentary Visitor, Education and Heritage Centre
7. The Legislative Archives Unit, Kew

## Scenario 1 – Marooned in the Victoria Tower

In 2030 the Parliamentary Archives is marking 170 years of recordkeeping in the Palace of Westminster. Staff working on the historic collections remain based in the south west corner of the Palace, while the Records Management team moved to the Digital Resource Centre based in Fielden House ten years ago, which provides them with the interactive consultation pods and holographic virtual training spaces they use to support onsite staff and homeworkers across Parliament in managing information. This has been a great success.

The picture is not so positive however on the heritage side of the function. Public usage of the historic collections has continued to fall, being a third what it was twenty years ago. This is due to a number of factors. Firstly the Archives' traditional users from the academic and legal community now get most of the information they need about the collections online, via digitised resources rather than coming to visit onsite. The Archives itself has had little opportunity to input into the creation of those resources because of the lack of space to undertake digitisation onsite. There has been a reluctance to send unique and valuable Parliamentary records offsite to a third party contractor for digitisation but the unsuitable studios adapted from within the Grade I listed Victorian spaces do not allow for contractors to be housed in 'pop-up' facilities to undertake project work like this. The Archives has been bypassed and as a result there is a sense that existing users are turning to sources held elsewhere and worse, actively seeking topics for research which do not require interaction with the Parliamentary collections at all.

The decision, taken fifteen years ago, not to transform the Houses of Parliament into a 'People's Palace' under Restoration & Renewal meant that the historic collections and archival services remained marooned inside a tightly-locked and largely inaccessible building, and are unable to attract the footfall in the now-pedestrianised Parliament Square World Heritage Site, from which other visitor and educational services benefit. The Archives has also become a professional backwater, unable to attract a new generation of archivists focussed on interactive engagement with non-traditional and marginal user communities, and with the latest digital technologies. Current staff struggle to keep up with technological developments, and user satisfaction with the overall services both onsite and remotely continues to decline. The only area which remains buoyant is the programme of external loans of treasure items to institutions across the UK and abroad. Iconic crowd-pulling items are always popular with the public but staff are frustrated that it remains very challenging to tell the story of Parliament and people over time using everything else in the collections due lack of suitable facilities for larger audiences.

The damage caused to the Tower by the great storm of 2022 caused staff morale to drop further. With windows blown out on floor 9, and the small lift out of action, around 200 metres of stormwater-damaged records were trapped for over a week inside the Victoria Tower, and it took another ten days for the records to be evacuated from the building due to the difficulties of access via three small lifts. By the time they reached the emergency freezers at Harwell Drying Services in Oxfordshire, significant growths of mould had appeared on the seventeenth and eighteenth century papers and parchments, added to the dirt of the rainwater. Since

that year, Parliament has been paying for ongoing cleaning and stabilisation of those items by an outside contractor (there is not space in the current conservation studios to take on more conservators to do the work on site more cheaply). This cost is in addition to the £8m spent in 2025 on replacing the air-conditioning and environmental control in the repository which had come to the end of its life.

Overall the heritage side of the Archives is unable to contribute Parliament's public engagement and stewardship agendas, and is increasingly seen as a financial burden.

<b>Benefits</b>	<b>Issues</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No expenditure on better facilities for the Archives, other than routine maintenance.</li> <li>• Hardcopy records remain close to offices where they may be needed at short notice by the private bill and committee offices (around 50 times a year).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of investment in better accommodation in turn has knock-on effects on business continuity and resilience, as well as on providing value for money in terms of Parliament's engagement with the public and the costs of maintaining the heritage. Ultimately, costs of a different kind are incurred anyway, including reputational ones, and the Tower still needs to be maintained as archive repository, for which is it highly unsuitable.</li> <li>• Locked away in the Tower, behind a heavy security perimeter, audience development beyond academics and lawyers is severely hindered; and as time goes on there are major disadvantages in areas such as safeguarding the collections, and providing a greater understanding of Parliament through joining up with education and visitor services more effectively.</li> <li>• Impact on staff morale, and ability to recruit able staff to maintain and develop the service even within these constraints.</li> </ul>



In 2030, the Parliamentary Archives operates out of 14 Tothill Street.

Security and business continuity risks from being in the Victoria Tower have been mitigated, but the Archives stays close to the Palace, contributing much more to the 'visitor offer' for Parliament, and benefiting from some tourist footfall to the attractions around Parliament Square.

The records management team in the Archives spends much of its time travelling between its base at Tothill Street and the rest of the Parliamentary Estate. However, with digital glass technology, interactive seminar rooms and one-to-one consultation pods available for use in Tothill Street; the behavioural changes wrought by Restoration & Renewal; and the distinctive presence of the nearby Visitor and Education Centre, staff are more used to regarding the Square as the centre of the Parliamentary estate rather than the Palace, which is now on its eastern edge.

Archive customers are greeted at reception with minimal security (an occasional random bag search) and can browse the adjacent exhibition space which offers a mixture of displays about all the heritage collections (not just the archives) and the history of Parliament. They can then take the lifts to the public search room on the top floor. The building is often open in the evenings for public events such as lectures, book and film clubs, and receptions held in the events room on the ground floor. All of these are simultaneously broadcast via Parliamentary web channels. The room can accommodate 70 people in lecture-style layout, with fully interactive seating, but contains dividers which turn it into two smaller rooms as required for school events and small group meetings.

Curious passers-by often wander in encouraged by a visitor assistant on the street outside, as well as those directed by the distinctive signage around the square and by staff of the nearby Education and Visitor Centre. In the process, the curious discover more about Parliament in general through the materials and displays immediately by the entrance. Some, as a result, make return visits to the building to do research or go online to find out more about the collections. Others become more interested in Parliament in general and are redirected to the Education and Visitor Centre or to the Palace itself.

Beside the reception and events rooms, the rest of the ground floor is almost entirely occupied with records storage, and there is also a further repository on the first floor, which had to be significantly reinforced to cope with the floor loading required. The mobile racking installed allows far more efficient storage of the archival collections in a considerably smaller footprint. Around 40% of the records – the most frequently used - are stored here, with the remaining 60% being stored in a separate repository contracted out to the Thameside Record Office in Bermondsey. Thameside provides a daily delivery service (24 hours notice required) and this storage is also utilised by both Libraries. Library special collections of rare books and manuscripts are now also made available to the public via the Archives searchroom in Tothill Street.

Studios and specialist workrooms are on the first floor, and above there are separate floors of meeting rooms for public and Parliamentary use, plus office space not just for the Archives but for other cognate heritage functions from other departments. The Works of Art Curators and PED collections staff are also based here and make use of the studios and workrooms too (though they also have similar spaces in the Palace), co-curating exhibitions and running joint events for the public. Both staff and public make use of the local restaurants and cafes, though there is a vending machine and casual seating for the public in reception. In addition, the generous supply of meeting rooms in a prime location in SW1 means that they can be hired out to local businesses and for events. These, plus the income from onsite storage, help to offset the costs of the Thameside contract and is starting to generate a profit. The Victoria Tower, meanwhile, has been converted into an M&E substation.

Staff time which was previously spent managing the storage of records is redeployed in managing the contract with the Thameside Record Office and more public engagement activities. As digitisation of collections stored at Tothill Street increases, this gradually allows more hardcopy originals to be transferred to the low-use storage in Bermondsey. The space released at Tothill Street is available for hire by neighbouring archive services,

**Benefits**

- The working assumption of this and all the remaining scenarios is that there is freeflow access for the curious passerby as well as traditional researchers. There is also an assumption that security in public areas will be minimal as in other public archives and libraries, and that there will still be a public appetite for access to some hardcopy records.
- The archive collections and public services become more integrated into the overall visitor experience of Parliament and makes use of the latest technology to capture a worldwide audience. Benefits from the nearby footfall to Parliament Square.
- Close enough to other Parliamentary operations to allow for records management and heritage colleagues to be co-located; minimal disruption to current working arrangements with other departments, and allows easy access for internal corporate use.
- Revenue raising opportunities enhanced.
- Some benefits for other heritage functions (eg searchroom facilities, workshops and studios onsite)

**Issues**

- This is essentially a 'vanilla-flavoured' scenario for the future of the Archives – a safe if rather unimaginative future which assumes the service will operate along much the same lines as currently but in expanded accommodation with better access for the public.
- SW1 rents are very high, and conversions of existing buildings for archival use are challenging and more expensive than building from scratch.
- Workflow not ideal.
- Can we do more than this to meet the strategic objectives of both Houses?

### Scenario 3 – People, Parliament and Politics: Reaching Out beyond London

*People, Parliament and Politics* (P3 or P-Cubed) has now been based in Birmingham for three years – it opened in 2027. Its award-winning new building on the Eastside Park development<sup>6</sup> was created with the aid of significant grants from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), Advantage West Midlands, and the European Regional Development Fund. Overall Parliament contributed 30% of the capital costs. Given the significant part Birmingham activists played in the passing of the Great Reform Act of 1832 (one of P-Cubed's treasures, at present on display in the state-of-the-art exhibition area), its central location in the country (Scotland having been independent since 2018), and its large and diverse population, it was an obvious out-of-London destination for the new service. Extensive market research confirmed that use of the service would significantly exceed usage of the former archives in the Palace of Westminster.

With its open and welcoming atrium, cafe, shop, and events rooms, the building has provided a social as well as a heritage focus for the Eastside community as well as drawing in researchers from across the country, helped by the excellent connections provided to London and the North by the nearby HS2 terminal, opened in 2026. Onsite researcher use has trebled, thanks to the three-year audience development programme which formed part of the HLF-funding package for the new building. This is despite the fact that P-Cubed's research services are now delivered online to most of its customers. Around 25% of the most popular historic collections have now been digitised, thanks to grants from national funding councils and collaborative projects with other political archives. The ability to host contactors and short-term project staff in P-Cubed's generous imaging studio has allowed it to respond effectively and speedily to digitisation opportunities as they arise. The Parliamentary Public Engagement Directorate has two staff stationed in the building and P-Cubed has become a major venue for Parliamentary outreach activities in the Midlands; the management boards meet there once a year, as do certain select committees. P-Cubed also provides a degree of business continuity backup for certain services at Westminster, as its meeting rooms and other spaces could be used by some Westminster staff in the event of an emergency.

Staff of P-Cubed are part of the Heritage Services Directorate within Parliament, a single service set up in 2020 to lead and manage all historic collection activity in the context of Restoration & Renewal. A procurement exercise to contract out the whole archive service apart from records management (public services, outreach, preservation, cataloguing, digitisation etc) ended in failure when, despite an attempt at competitive dialogue it was shown that only storage and some aspects of low-risk imaging were likely to prove commercially appealing to the existing market, and the tender process failed to create a new market for complete archival servicing.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/eastsidepark>

Among their colleagues back at Westminster, P-Cubed staff count curators and collection care specialists in art, furnishings, metalwork, architectural fabric, textiles, and library special collections. Offsite storage is provided at the P-Cubed for less-frequently used items in those collections but the exhibition space provides many opportunities to display items from all the heritage collections to new audiences. Records management is part of another joint Directorate of Parliament, Information Management, but works closely with the P-Cubed on areas of digital preservation and long-term information management. Most meetings with those still at Westminster are held via digital glass wall technology, but for certain staff trips to and from London still occur several times a week. A few staff live in London and commute on the HS2 line whose journey time from Euston to Birmingham Eastside (Curzon Street) is 49 minutes.

At Westminster there is a new visitor attraction: the paying public can reach the viewing platform on the roof of the Victoria Tower with ease via a 120m glass lift in Chancellor's Court, where they can take photographs of the 360° panoramas across London from the top. They then descend down the original spiral staircase to an interpretative exhibition inside the Tower on the history of the building, of Parliament, and of the archives that were once stored there - before exiting via the great glass elevator once again.

<b>Benefits</b>	<b>Issues</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parliament makes a radical and tangible statement about its wish to engage more widely with the nation's public.</li> <li>• Provides a permanent alternative venue for Parliamentary public engagement activity outside London, and adds an alternative base for administrative activity to improve business continuity resilience (compare the BBC's Salford office).</li> <li>• State-of-the-art facilities for key national collections with an opportunity to release regional development and other capital funding to match Parliament's financing.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Significant risk of isolation of the operation from HQ in Westminster; reluctance of HQ staff to visit or engage with the new service unless fully embedded as a new site for Parliamentary operations.</li> <li>• High reputational and financial risk if the market research turns out to be wrong. What would happen if visitor numbers did not reach the levels predicted? (compare the Royal Armouries in Leeds; Welsh Assembly Visitor Centre at Colwyn Bay).</li> <li>• Separation of archival expertise from other information, heritage and educational activities– would need to work hard to keep connections going, and many staff would still spend much time in London as result. Technology would no doubt help to mitigate some of this, but benefits to other heritage departments very limited.</li> <li>• Lack of speedy access for corporate use of the archives – physical and/or digital solutions would be required to mitigate this.</li> </ul>

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## Scenario 4 – Embedded in the Parliamentary Visitor, Education & Heritage Centre

In 2030, the Parliamentary Visitor, Education & Heritage Centre in the former Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre opens.

The Visitor, Education and Heritage Directorate is a single department, operating out of the Centre. It provides a wide range of facilities which allow the public to engage with all aspects of Parliament in 2030 – and how its past informs that present. There are multiple lecture rooms and classrooms of different sizes; a cinema; several restaurants and cafes; a large shop; a separate bookshop; and a foyer with a performance space and interactives. One floor of the Centre is devoted to interpretation, with state-of-the-art temporary exhibition space for a range of art, sculpture, archives, furniture, books, architectural collections and an award-winning installation ‘Your Vote, Your Parliament, Your Heritage’ telling the story of Parliament over the centuries and today. This builds on the fact that three-quarters of people visiting exhibitions on Parliament’s history then want to find out more about Parliament today as a result.

The Centre’s decoration draws on and is inspired by the riches of the heritage collections – key texts and designs from them are painted on the walls, modern art is built into the fabric, and a stunning new feature of the Centre is the glass ‘Tower of Acts’ which stretches vertically from the ground to upper floors inside the building. Within the Centre there is a heritage searchroom seating 20 people plus a reference room, where researchers can come into the Centre to inspect and consult Parliament’s heritage collections which are not available online.

Most heritage services have collection care studios, workshops, and workrooms in the basement of the Palace of Westminster. Completed refurbished and refitted by Restoration & Renewal, this provides a state-of-the-art heritage collection care centre for art, furnishings, and architecture. For the archival collections, however, which do not need to be housed in the Palace, ‘backroom’ activities (storage, studios, offices) are undertaken offsite in the dedicated new block in Old Oak Commons which provides storage for all the archival collections and Library special collections, and any low-use art, historic furnishings, architectural salvage or other heritage objects which are not needed at short notice (less than 24 hours) on the Parliamentary Estate. Increasing numbers of items which will be little used are stored in contracted-out storage in Cheshire salt mines (for example, original records which have been digitised).

Tours of the gothic interior of the Victoria Tower, restored to its pre-1958 state, are now offered as one of the ten specialist art and architectural tours of the Palace of Westminster which collectively won a Gold Visit England Award for Excellence in 2029.

**Benefits**

- Enables full exploitation of synergies with visitor and educational services to public, as well as capturing the footfall from visitors and tourists to Westminster.
- Top class facilities for interpretation of history and historical collections to the public which otherwise would not be possible in a smaller operation.
- Provides a holistic offsite storage and delivery solution for other heritage collections if required, with a hierarchy of cheaper storage options.
- Close enough to Westminster to provide for corporate access (though digital technologies such as scan-on-demand can also provide solutions).

**Issues**

- The main archives base is detached from Westminster though still in London with staff coming to Westminster only to provide a public service or to work with other colleagues. Risk of isolation.
- Costs of delivery service to and from Westminster with associated handling risks for documents.
- Likely to require very major investment in digitisation to keep delivery and handling to a minimum.