Addingham Parish Council

Meeting on 20 November – Scoping Proposal for Development of Archive Project

1. **Introduction**

This paper sets out initial proposals for the development of a Parish Council (PC) Archive project, designed to take place contemporaneously with the Civic Society’s work on developing the village (photographic) archive. It is based on exploratory research carried out by the Clerk and Cllr Naylor, using contacts provided through Bradford City offices and other public services. It details the results of the preparatory and research work carried out to date, and is presented for the purpose of enabling the Council to determine whether to support the project into the next stages.

The paper provides an indication of the work to be done as these next stages progress by means of identifying, in the later sections of the paper, the detailed tasks, research, analyses and other documents which will be needed to develop and control the project through to completion.

1. **Project vision**

The aims of the project are to establish a PC Archive to preserve/safeguard historic records for future generations and to enhance/improve methods of storage and retrieval for access and research purposes.

1. **Project purpose**

The purpose of the project is to allow wider access to historic documents whilst enabling the Council to meet its legal and formal obligations regarding the safeguarding and storage of historic material.

1. **Background**

Following the recent refurbishment of the Old School, which had entailed the temporary relocation and repackaging of archived records previously stored in fireproof safes in the building, the Council now has the opportunity to overhaul existing arrangements for both storing and using this stock of material. We have, potentially, a valuable public resource, comprising legal documents, ledgers, books of accounts, and minute books dating from the 19th century, and it is important that the Council, as a public body, should aim to make this material more readily available for public use.

The Council is fortunate in retaining some reserves (and a limited amount of grant) funding from the Old School capital project which is available for expenditure on archiving work, including the archiving of parish council records, as part of the development of the Old School as a heritage centre. The volunteers working on the village (photographic) archive are keen to see that our archive material is made available alongside theirs, as they continue to make progress with preparing the Civic Society records for online cataloguing.

With the capital works on the Old School now largely at an end, the Council is well-placed to use the experience and track record it has developed, in successfully managing a grant-funded project to completion, by progressing these plans to the next stage, and setting up a new PC Archive Project.

1. **Project Rationale**

It is also an opportune time for the Council to bring forward the project for these reasons:

* The dual purposes of the project, to ensure proper preservation of records whilst facilitating ease of access to them for users, may previously have been difficult to reconcile, as sending the records away for specialist conservation and storage would have removed the instant availability of the originals for local researchers. However, we are now at a stage where the technology available for archiving and accessing historic material online should enable us to achieve both purposes at the same time. With full advice and with the backing of professional archivists, we will aim to use the most up to date methods both for digitising and cataloguing the material and for establishing online capabilities for search and access.
* With the improvements in technology has come a growth in private organisations which provide services to support the development of local online archives, offering professional results in digitising paper records on a cost-effective basis.
* In consultations with professional archivists, we are advised that local councils should deposit records of historic value (eg minutes) on a regular basis with county record services. This has not been done for some years with the Addingham records, presumably so as to ensure ease of access for local users. This project, enabling us to reconcile the conflicting aims of preserving the records whilst retaining access to them, will bring us into line with proper practices.
* Practices brought in by the new data protection regulations (GDPR) in 2018 require us to keep our records storage and retention policies under review. Best practice advice on this is maturing, and we are keeping up to date with this by means of staff training and development. The processes we will need to follow in progressing the project will help us follow best practices and ensure comprehensive compliance with our statutory responsibilities.
* The new accessibility regulations, governing improved access to website content, will require us to perform an audit of documents already uploaded to our website. This will include some of the records ultimately likely to form part of the PC Archive.
* Our work to apply for voluntary registration of all the land sites owned by the Council is nearing completion. This will provide us with a fresh stock of new title deeds and associated documentation in paper form, all of which will need careful and permanent storage.
* Our research even at initial stages indicates that there may be a wealth of historic material relating to Addingham held by other organisations and individuals. The project will enable us to establish links between material derived from such different sources and work towards the creation of a complete and accessible records depository.

*Old School on Main St, c1970*

1. **Development of Project to date**

The project has developed as the direct result of early work with volunteers on establishing the Civic Society’s photographic archive. This can be accessed via the addingham.info website, maintained by the volunteers, and is available to browsers and researchers in the Hub using the public computers.

As part of facilitating the volunteers’ work on this archive, exploratory visits were arranged to Bradford’s Industrial Museum and to the National Media Museum in order to take advice from the curators on the best means of setting up and accessing photographic records. Although much of the advice provided was specific to establishing an archive of images, the curators’ general guidance is useful for developing the PC Archive. The following points of advice are noted in particular:

* The requirements of the potential audience base, or users of the archive, should be fully assessed at the outset of the project, ideally by means of consultation exercises and display of original records to gauge user interests. An early public engagement process should enable online cataloguing and search facilities to be set up to match demand for access to records, enquiries or themes.
* The cataloguing of material needs to be consistent over time, so current records need to be fully researched, understood and documented as they are currently held, before any work begins to establish a computerised database.
* The database should also be sufficiently flexible to accommodate the addition of later material which can be tagged using the same system.
* The format of digital files (eg pdfs, jpegs etc) needs to be established at the outset.
* All records should be preserved individually, rather than filtered selectively during the cataloguing process, as later generations of researchers may have different ideas of value and even seeming-duplicate records may have value in offering scope for comparative studies over time.
* Computerised access programs and equipment need not be overly sophisticated, as current gadgetry and add-ons may quickly become out of date and may be more susceptible to failure, requiring regular and expensive upgrade, support and repair.

Since identifying the reasons to develop the PC Archive, we have consulted archivists at the West Yorkshire Archive Service (WYAS) and are shortly to see the National Archives based in Kew. With advice available to date, we have constructed a basic schematic to help us understand the extent of the project (Appendix 1 “Mind Map”).

The WYAS have also offered to support the project with ongoing advice, regular meetings to monitor progress and use of facilities. They are in a position to provide guidance to us on funding sources, staff and volunteer resources and training, professional support services and other reference networks. Their Accreditation Scheme is available to us to structure and guide project development, providing objective confirmation of its progress.

1. **Brief Description of Proposal**

In brief, the project will bring together records held by:

* Addingham Parish Council (Appendix 2)
* WYAS (township records and maps, as previously deposited – Appendix 3)
* private individuals eg members of Civic Society\*
* local organisations eg churches, primary school, mill companies
* others (to be identified as part of the project)

into one online searchable catalogue, with records digitised where possible, and with the originals held for safe-keeping on deposit at the WYAS.

*\*This would include providing ongoing support for development of the village photographic archive. As already suggested to the volunteer group, we could do this by providing access to the photo archive via the Hub computers and by offering data storage facilities on the Hub server (subject to further technical and legal advice).*

1. **Analysis of Project Need**

Preliminary analysis would suggest that the development of a PC Archive, as a public service, is needed for these reasons:

* The Council has legal duties to hold and retain records in compliance with regulations and best practice procedures in order to provide public access for accountability purposes. Ready access to a comprehensive and easily searchable set of archived records, both those it has generated itself and those held by other organisations and individuals, is important to enable the Council to comply with legal duties in interacting with members of the public and other agencies, eg in response to freedom of information requests and audit investigations. Responding to matters of public interest raised in these ways involves checking and referencing archived records in compliance with statutory timescales.
* The Council also has powers to provide public information and advisory services. As a focal body in the local community, and the only one which has statutory existence and permanence, the Council is best placed to fulfil these public services. To do so, it needs to draw on and have access to comprehensive historic records for the whole community area (the township and parished area and surrounding communities, as linked historically to the development of Addingham).
* Members of the public want improved access to historic records. There is evidence of a growing local appetite to develop a better understanding of the history of the area, as indicated by the level of interest in the village photographic record and the popularity of history-based features in the village newsletter. The Council also receives requests from visitors to the area and family members of previous residents who want to research their own connections in the village. It is likely that public interest in accessing archived records will be increased as the photographic archive becomes more widely available. The public interest will be best satisfied by providing a fully linked record base, in place of the existing system of disparate record holdings in different locations.
* WYAS itself wants to achieve a more comprehensive record set for district areas. By working with us to produce a single catalogue of items, they would be able to offer an improved service for researchers worldwide.
* WYAS has objectives to ensure the proper preservation of historic records in the district. It has every interest in helping other organisations move towards better means of storing their own records, whether by placing them on deposit (WYAS’ preferred option) or by developing a more localised approach which can be linked to the centralised holdings.

*Council Minute Books from mid-19th century*

1. **Means of progressing Project**

Research, consultations and advice received to date indicates that, if it is to go ahead, the project will need to include the following actions (many of which will need to take place simultaneously):

* **Resource identification** – this will include research in-house, as well as with support from WYAS, as necessary, and from contacts with existing funding bodies for the Old School, to identify funding and staffing resources for the project.
* **Records identification** – involving a full analysis and comprehensive listing of records held, many of them at present held in different locations, which will form the basis of originals for the PC archive. Links between different elements of the record base may also be established at this stage, possibly by means of using oral history research.
* **Community engagement** - this part of the project will be informed by a community engagement exercise, involving displays of original material, consultation events and questionnaires/surveys to establish the sources and location of records and to gauge public interest in, and preferences for, different means of accessing historic village records.
* **Retention policies review –** once the records base has been identified, the best means of holding and storing records will need to be determined ie which can be digitised, which need to be held in paper form.
* **Establishment of storage processes –** subject to the identification of records, this stage of the project may involve the establishment of a computerised database for which the records will need to be properly and consistently catalogued and tagged for online access. Processes will involve digitisation of the paper records judged suitable for storage by this means and can include use of OCR techniques if necessary.

It may be thought useful to test the viability of this part of the project by starting with the digitisation of a discrete set of records from within the overall holdings, eg minute books from 1851-1951 (5 handwritten bound ledgers). This could be set up and funded initially using “seed” money provided by the Council, subject to approval of detailed requirements and quotations.

NB – if it is subsequently decided to proceed with digitisation of a significant quantity of the paper records, not only support from WYAS, and possibly volunteers, but also external support services will probably be required.

* **Website development –** the Council website will need to be upgraded, if required, to hold the archive catalogue and provide links to WYAS and other holders of material eg the photographic archive.
* **Records deposit** – once the records are made available online, or are easily identifiable and accessible by means of the online catalogue, all of the historic and most sensitive paper records, including maps, can be placed on deposit at WYAS for long term and appropriate preservation and safe-keeping.
* **Establishment of revised retention policies –** policies for the retention of remaining records and ongoing requirements for archiving of current and future material, including deposits made locally with the Council, will need to be drawn up, agreed with WYAS and kept under review.
* **Staff development -** training of staff (and volunteers) in the upkeep and retention of records still held by the Council and in the maintenance of the online catalogue will be required.
* **Further and ongoing community engagement –** throughout the development of the project, the Council will need to work with the Civic Society and with individuals and other organisations, as necessary, to link the PC archive to the village photographic archive and to other sources of material.
* **WYAS support –** also throughout development of project, regular meetings will be held with WYAS to assess record holdings, take advice at each stage and monitor project progress.

1. **Financial Analysis**

***This section of the paper is for later development as research into funding sources progresses.***

**Costs**

Project costs will include the following:

* Professional archivist
* Consultancy advice
* Catalogue fees
* Digitisation fees

NB there will be savings for the Council in placing records on deposit at WYAS, rather than storing and preserving them in-house.

**Funding**

Funding sources may include:

* Grant funders eg Heritage Lottery Fund, Arts Council
* Precept monies or use of “earmarked” reserves

**Risk Analysis**

* Possible loss of easy access to records in order to ensure optimum storage for preserving/safeguarding them – how to mitigate for users
* Loss of records
* Costs control

**Project Management**

* Summary of Schedules/Milestones (inc. minutes of decisions)
* Timeline/Plan

1. **Conclusions**

The virtual completion of the capital project to refurbish the Old School and create the new community Hub has created the opportunity to establish a new community resource, the PC Archive, which will greatly improve the Council’s public service offering in establishing the Hub as a local heritage centre. Council is asked to provide support for the project to enable it to move forward into the next stages of development.

1. **Recommendations**

It is recommended:

* that the development of the PC Archive project be supported;
* that the Clerk, in consultation with Cllr Naylor, be authorised to continue work on researching and planning next steps;
* that plans be made for preliminary community engagement with the project, including the organisation of displays and consultation events as appropriate;
* and that initial funding £5000 be allocated with immediate effect in the current financial year from reserves or remaining capital project grant funds, if available and as appropriate, for the purpose of running community engagement exercises, and for providing “seed money” to test proposed archiving systems by digitising a section of the Council minute books.

*Extracts from Council Terrier 1959*