

Collections Care and Conservation Policy

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North East Lincolnshire Archives

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1. Introduction

The principal duty of North East Lincolnshire Archives (hereafter abbreviated to NELA) is to preserve the documentary heritage of the region for future generations whilst enabling public access. To this end we undertake action to preserve the collections in our care and seek to extend the life of collection materials to ensure their future accessibility.

2. Principles and responsibilities

NELA stores the archival material in its care in secure premises. Subject to the constraints imposed by the existing buildings, the records are housed in suitable accommodation. These storage facilities are environmentally monitored, but full compliance with BS 4971:2017 cannot be guaranteed.

NELA follows relevant best practice, national standards and a professional code of ethics in all aspects of collections care and conservation.

NELA undertakes remedial and cleaning work on its collections in accordance with nationally recognised standards. This work is undertaken in-house in a fully equipped conservation workshop by a qualified conservator.

The conservator at NELA monitors the environmental conditions of the collections and keeps a detailed record of the readings obtained.

NELA provides public access to its collections, whilst ensuring their protection and minimising the risk from handling.

NELA considers collections care to be the responsibility of every member of staff.

3. Site and buildings

NELA maintains appropriate levels of care for the building fabric and both buildings and contents are covered by appropriate levels of insurance.

Key systems, including water detection, fire and security are regularly tested, inspected and serviced in accordance with written procedures.

4. Security

NELA maintains a high level of security for its collections. Security alarms and sensors are fitted throughout its buildings. The security alarm is monitored by NELC's Security Control Room 24 hours a day (the Control Room is only a 5-minute walk from NELA).

Members of the public who use the search room are closely, but discreetly supervised at all times.

5. Archival storage

The Public Records in our collections and the bulk of our most important holdings, such as school and manorial records, are kept in a controlled environment behind steel fire doors. Unfortunately, some of our collections are stored in the former police cells, which though secure have environmental conditions that fall some way short of the standards set down in BS 4971:2017.

NELA aims to maintain a suitable storage environment for the range of archival material in its custody. At the present time NELA does not have specialist storage for photographic, audio visual or electronic media.

Appropriate professional advice is taken with regard to fire control and prevention, protection against water ingress, security, lighting and shelving.

Most of the items in our custody are boxed to optimize the use of the repository shelving, to provide the documents with greater protection and to facilitate document handling and retrieval. All new boxes purchased by NELA are archival quality, low-acid boxes (pH 6.5-8) made with pure brass staples. Within the boxes, most of our documents are kept in folders made from low-acid manila card. Photographs are kept in either silver safe paper or melinex pockets. The rolled plans in our collections are wrapped in Tyvek fabric.

Boxes and folders are labelled using archival standard Pigma pens containing a permanent ink, which is waterproof and will not fade or discolour.

6. Access

The staff at NELA ensure that all items in the collection are subject to careful and appropriate handling to minimise the risk of physical damage.

When necessary NELA staff undergo training in the handling of archival collections.

Written handling guidelines are available for all staff and users of the archives. A copy of these guidelines is displayed prominently in the public search room and all new readers are given verbal instructions concerning document care.

7. Conservation and preservation

NELA undertakes remedial and cleaning work on its collections in accordance with nationally recognised standards. This work is undertaken in-house in a fully equipped conservation workshop by a qualified conservator with over 15 years of experience in a county record office. In addition to undertaking remedial treatments on documents, the conservator routinely provides other members of staff with advice on collections care and conservation issues.

All conservation treatments undertaken at NELA are carefully documented. The records of the work carried out by successive conservators employed at NELA date back to 1985.

8. Housekeeping

The search room and working areas at NELA are cleaned on every weekday by contracted cleaners.

The record repositories and shelves are cleaned periodically by the archival staff using products that will not have a detrimental effect on collections.

9. Environmental monitoring

The temperature and relative humidity in the repositories are monitored by Tinytag data loggers. The data from the loggers is periodically downloaded, printed out and filed as a hard copy. The loggers are replaced when necessary. The Tinytag loggers are serviced annually.

Periodic condition checks on items are carried out by staff to identify any issues of concern, such as pest activity and mould growth.

10. Environmental control

The main record repository has an air handling system, but there is no integrated environmental control system. Two mobile dehumidifiers are used in the cell area to reduce the level of relative humidity.

The air handling system is regularly serviced and the dehumidifiers PAT tested.

Most items are boxed to provide a degree of environmental protection.

All new accessions are packaged in materials of conservation standard to ensure that the documents are exposed to minimal levels of pollutants that could have a detrimental effect on their condition.

11. Disaster planning and service continuity

NELA maintains an up-to-date emergency manual, which is modelled on the one recommended by REDS (The Regional Emergencies & Disaster Support Service). This organisation, of which the archivist was a member for many years, is now the Risk and Emergency Preparedness Network of Museum Development East Midlands.

Lincs Inspire has a Business Continuity Plan to ensure organisational resilience in the event of a major incident.

Review

North East Lincolnshire Archives, March 2025.

The policy will be reviewed in March 2026 or earlier if required.