

ARANZ

ARCHIVES & RECORDS
ASSOCIATION OF NZ
TE HUINGA MAHARA

Otago/Southland Branch

C/- 289 York Place
Dunedin 9016

18 April 2023

Ms Sandy Graham
Chief Executive
Dunedin City Council
P O Box 5045
Dunedin 9058

Dear Ms Graham

Annual Plan 2023/2024 – Submission re the Council’s Archives Accommodation

The Archives and Records Association (ARANZ) was formed in 1976 and promotes the understanding and importance of records and archives in this country. One of our Aims is “To foster the care, preservation and use of archives and records, both public and private, and their effective administration.”

Our Branch Committee has, for the previous six years, made Plan submissions on the highly unsatisfactory storage of the Council’s archives in the basement of the Civic Centre and pointed out:-

- The risk of loss or damage from potential major leaks from the water and sewerage pipes which pass through the storage area, and/or from an ingress of floodwater from Moray Place
- There is also the risk from flood events on floors above, not a negligible possibility – basements are almost always unsafe for this reason
- We again emphasise, as we have done in previous written submissions, that the area does not meet the Chief Archivist’s mandatory requirements in sections 2.0, 3.2, 3.3 (and also probably 3.6) of the current “Physical Storage and Preservation of Protected Information and Records – Instruction to Local Authorities” (February 2020)
- Councillors and Council staff have long been well aware of the above, and also of the critical nature of the archives to the ongoing business of the Council eg researching HAIL sites and issuing of LIMs

- The archives are also national cultural treasures, dating from 1854, and are of incalculable value to the research community of Dunedin and beyond. The Council is the kaitiaki of them
- The Council has primary statutory responsibility for the careful stewardship of its permanently valuable records and providing access to them. Given their irreplaceable nature, its responsible exercise of this stewardship makes them an essential part of Council's strategic risk management framework. At present, this falls well short of what is required

We were greatly encouraged by a development, publicly revealed at a meeting on 21 September 2021 of the Council's Planning and Environment Committee. This development was a proposal to relocate the archival facility to the Upper Basement of the Public Library. We had been advised by staff when we were preparing our Submission to the current 10 Year Plan that a potential move to somewhere in the Library was being considered, but no details were available.

Since then, our Committee has been approached by and engaged with Council staff in further investigation of this matter, and really appreciates this involvement. It has met with staff several times for updates and provided feedback on the Archival Relocation Requirements document drafted by staff. Our Committee was reassured by the view of staff that to date no major problems had been encountered - and also that there was sufficient space there for the whole facility, including current holdings with some expansion, and researchers, and that the relocation could be funded within existing budgets. However, there was an important proviso on our part. A requested site visit had still to be arranged, before we could endorse unconditionally the suitability of the new location.

However, before the long-requested site visit could occur, at a project update meeting with Council staff on 24 February 2023, came bombshell news for us. We were informed that because the budget for the Upper Basement relocation project had now blown out to \$1m - \$2m dollars, that site was no longer a possibility. Worse still, was the dismaying news that a decision had been made to see if the existing location in the Civic Centre basement could be made compliant with the Chief Archivist's requirements - by walling off overhead pipes, relocating some archives from one area with pipes to another, reshelving the strongroom, and investigating temperature and humidity controls.

We have to say that at present we have strong reservations about this decision to continue to house the archives in the basement, for the following reasons:-

- We understand that staff are still awaiting all the information to come in from the engineers and other investigations. The bottom line is that the upgraded area should unequivocally meet the required mandatory Instruction. However, we cannot yet be certain that what is proposed at this stage will or will not make the storage space comply. The two critical areas are the possibility of overhead pipes breaching in an earthquake, and water accumulation from upper level flooding. On the first, it would be worth seeing if use would be made of flexible earthquake resistant pipe jointing as used in Japan (Kubota), much better than casing in, unless that is also earthquake resistant; and at floor level whether it is proposed to have sumps that in an emergency would be cleared by stand by generators, and also that the area is protected by raised sills against flooding from adjacent spaces. In any case, it would be advisable that the bottom shelves not be utilised.

- We are sceptical that the temperature and especially humidity requirements can be met year-round in this location
- Public access to the area and facilities for researchers in the basement are very poor and are not in keeping with standards enjoyed at other Dunedin institutions
- The Archivists deserve far better working conditions than the basement provides

We should also record that on 29 March 2023 we made a site visit to the Library's Upper Basement, where staff explained how it had been proposed to be utilised. It too is not ideal and has some issues eg floor loading for shelving, security with fire egress and the hazard of the adjoining public car park. We believe all these issues are capable of being resolved.

In our Submission last year, we said "Assuming all goes well, it is our keen desire to see that by the end of the 2022/23 financial year this long overdue upgrade to the Council's archives accommodation is brought to fruition, and the Council can finally say it has a good facility, one which meets the Chief Archivist's requirements for the storage of its archives – and is also appropriate for staff and researchers. And our Committee, after six years of Submissions, will have achieved its goal!"

Sadly, this goal has not been achieved and our Committee feels now that, after seven years of endeavour, the Council has made little progress. We believe that Councillors on the previous Triennial were convinced of the need to do better for the Archives - and we trust that current Councillors will feel similarly.

Finally, we wish to speak at the Annual Plan hearings on 1-3 May please, to elaborate on our Submission. Please email Peter Miller at opoho16@gmail.com or contact him by phone (Tel 021 1344 369) to advise the hearing time.

Yours sincerely

pp


Tom Riley
Chair

 Claire Dowling branch treasurer and co-secretary

