



Save Our Record Office campaign to keep a site in Lowestoft.

Campaigners left angry as records office moves to Bury St Edmunds

'This decision has to be the final insult for Lowestoft and Waveney – now bereft of original archives'

Western Way in Bury St Edmunds will house West Suffolk's archives, in a development that has reignited anger among Lowestoft's local historians as their records were moved more than 40 miles away.

Suffolk County Council's cabinet decided on Tuesday to spend £4m to keep West Suffolk's archives in the planned Western Way hub in Bury St Edmunds.

This is due to the old and rundown condition of 77 Raingate Street in Bury St Edmunds, the current home of the archives.

According to the county council, this could cause damage to the collections and makes disabled access difficult.

In April 2021, Suffolk County Council moved 1,539 collections of documents from Lowestoft Record Office to The Hold in Ipswich again due to the poor condition of the Lowestoft building.

Bob Collis, chair of the Save



Cllr Bobby Bennett

Our Record Office campaign group, said: "This decision has to be the final insult for Lowestoft and Waveney, now bereft of original archives and with little hope of anything being digitised.

"The council can't afford £152,000 a year to run a full service at Lowestoft yet to date they have spent over £16 million of public funds on The Hold in Ipswich and now committed to spending another £4 million on a new facility at Bury?"

"The council told the Heritage Lottery Fund when they applied for funding to build The Hold in 2017 that it would 'change the way people

in Suffolk engage with their archival heritage'.

"That is certainly true in north Suffolk many simply won't bother now.

"You only have to look at the latest Suffolk Archives events guide to see the sheer contempt they have for this area.

"Out of 80 events organised by the record office service, 64 are in Ipswich, 12 in Bury St Edmunds while Lowestoft has only four."

A petition against the decision to move the archives from Lowestoft gained 7,300 signatures in four months in 2018.

Lowestoft Record Office is



Cllr Beccy Hopfensperger

now open just one day a week, though there are plans for it to open on four days from next month.

Cllr Bobby Bennett, cabinet member for equality and communities at Suffolk County Council, said at Tuesday's meeting: "Of course, I understand that comparisons might be made between today's recommendation and the actions to change the service at Lowestoft.

"In 2018, Suffolk County Council considered several alternative sites suggested by key stakeholders but this were not deemed viable.

"The only viable option was

to move the records almost at risk of loss or damage to the strongroom at The Hold.

"Retrofitting the Lowestoft building and other associated works to meet regulations and avoid the constant threat of flooding would likely not have been easy or even possible not to mention the prohibitive costs involved."

In response to a question by Cllr Caroline Topping, Cllr Bennett explained Suffolk County Council has no plans to revisit the decision or return the archives to Lowestoft.

According to the report brought to cabinet, the estimated capital cost of essential works at 77 Raingate Street would be £3.1 million and "enhanced works" would cost £5.4 million compared with the expected £4 million cost of a Western Way facility.

Disabled access to the Raingate Street building is restricted because the public facilities are spread over two floors with no passenger lift to the first floor.

Cllr Beccy Hopfensperger said: "I have fond memories of searching through the documents at Raingate Street, but it seems this location is not gaining the audience it has the potential to.

"I believe the move to Western Way will provide the best value for money and a better service for residents."