



Open meeting on Kew 2008 held at The National Archives, Kew on 11 January 2007

LO = Lee Oliver: Head of Public Service Development
CC = Chris Cooper: Head Of Reader Information Services
JS = James Strachan: Director of Public Services and Marketing
TNA = The National Archives
FRC = Family Records Centre

Lee Oliver gave a presentation on TNA's current plans regarding the relocation of the Family Records Centre to the Kew site.

Concerns were raised that the security bag check area for the Map and Large Document Room will be located in the stairwell area outside the room. LO reassured the meeting that this will not be the case – the bag check area will be within the current confines of the MLDR.

It was asked if the areas in the four corners of the building, behind the concrete pillars can be opened up and used as part of the reading room space, rather than being used as talks rooms or staff areas as indicated on the plans. LO explained that these areas can not be used in this way due to the poor sight lines from other areas, which result in difficulties in invigilation.

It was asked if it is planned that there will still be an area in the reading room for film crews. LO explained that a 'bubble area' – a glassed walled area for this purpose, which stops noise but allows one to see clearly into other parts of the room, will remain.

It was asked if the record copying area will be invigilated by Record Copying staff. LO and CC explained that it is planned that there will be a number of self service scanning machines available, as there are currently, in an area that will not be directly invigilated by Record Copying staff, but will be invigilated by other staff. It was also noted that recent and continuing developments in the provision of self service scanning facilities has resulted in a reduction in the amount of separate space required for record copying services in the reading rooms. This will continue to be reviewed as part of the planning for Kew 2008.

A Reader asked if there is sufficient space available on the Kew site for both FRC staff areas and the reading room area required for the additional 'FRC service'. LO stated that TNA believes that there will be sufficient space

available, although this will require reorganisation of the existing space both in the reading room areas and the 'behind the scenes' staff areas. LO also noted that the additional space requirements are not equal in size to that of the current FRC site. Recent changes in the nature of Family History research have resulted in the majority of the FRC service being confined to 150 computer terminal seats, considerably less space than that required previously for the storage and viewing of microfilm records.

Concerns were raised regarding the perceived differences in 'research styles' between the 2 sites, the FRC traditionally having a more 'social' and 'cooperative' atmosphere, and the Kew site a more 'silent' and 'solitary' environment. It was explained that it is planned for the new reading room area at Kew to provide for both of these research requirements by zoning the areas.

It was asked if TNA planned to continue sending large documents to the second floor (Map and Large Document Room). LO answered that yes, TNA does plan to continue doing this.

A Reader asked if there are any changes planned regarding the self service locker procedures. LO stated that there are no changes planned in this area other than a possible increase in the number of lockers in line with any increase in the number of seats.

It was asked if it will be possible to split the planned Talks Room (capacity approx 75) into smaller units so that they can be used for smaller groups. JS replied that TNA intend to do this, adding that flexibility in these areas will be a key consideration in their design.

LO noted that access to computer terminals and power sockets in the MLDR will be spread across the room, reducing existing problems in the lack of access in certain areas. WIFI will also be available throughout.

A reader noted a problem he had experienced in needing to simultaneously view aerial photographs (standard size and automatically produced downstairs) and maps (large size and automatically produced upstairs) stating that it could become more frequent due to the increasing popularity of these records. LO noted this, explaining that document services are happy to produce records in the MLDR if they need to be viewed along side maps or large documents.

It was suggested by a Reader that TNA look into obtaining some specialist flat screens for the MLDR which can be placed flat on a desk, making it easier to view electronic images of maps and plans. JS noted this and it was agreed that this request will be taken into consideration.

It was asked if TNA will continue to maintain the duplicate catalogue that is currently held in the MLDR. LO noted that this version of the catalogue is not currently updated (the up to date version being the red set in the Research Enquiries Room) and that this would continue to be the case after the

redesign of the reading rooms. He also stated that it might be necessary to further limit the set available in the MLDR, based on the use of records in that room.

It was asked if TNA plan to provide any form of orientation for new visitors. LO answered that one of the main functions of the talk rooms will be to provide induction talks for new visitors on how to get the best out of their first visit to The National Archives.

A Reader asked generally about the future of the Microfilm Reading Room. LO stated that there will continue to be facilities for viewing and printing from microfilm, but the number of records held on microfilm will continue to diminish as more records become available electronically.

A Reader enquired what the exact date of the relocation of the FRC will be. JS explained that TNA plans to formally quit the premises at Myddelton Street on 31st March 2008, but that facilities would begin to move across to Kew prior to that date.

It was asked if TNA plan to shut the Kew site entirely at any point during the relocation. LO explained that TNA will avoid shutting down if possible, but that it might be necessary to do so. He added that if it does become necessary to close the site, prior notice of the dates of any closure periods will be provided.

A Reader asked if the red up to date version of the paper catalogue will remain. LO stated that this version of the catalogue will remain and will continue to be updated.

It was suggested by a Reader that regular users of TNA are consulted regarding TNA's plans for improving way finding in the form of signage, layout and the use of graphics etc within the reading rooms. JS and LO stated that they will be happy for any suggestions or feedback regarding these matters, adding that an opportunity for Readers to provide their thoughts regarding these issues will be built into future consultation meetings.

A Reader asked if TNA plan to continue producing 'The Family Record' magazine after the relocation of the FRC. JS replied that this has not been considered yet as an individual issue, but that there are plans to consult Readers on which forms of communications they value.

It was noted by a Reader that the section of TNA's website relating to TNA's plans for the relocation of the FRC is not very prominent and hard to find as a result. JS stated that TNA will remedy this by adding a link to the relevant page on the front page of the site.

A Reader requested that TNA supply clearer 3 dimensional plans of the planned layout of the reading rooms. JS and LO noted that it would be costly to have such plans created especially, but that TNA will endeavour to make available any informative plans that are created in the course of the design process.

It was asked if TNA have any plans to increase the size of the car park due to the likely increase in visitors. JS stated that this is a difficult area due to the government's policy of discouraging people from using cars. However he reassured the meeting that issues of parking (as well as related issues regarding alternatives such as improvements to public transport) will be considered thoroughly.

A Reader expressed concern over the plans to reduce security measures in those areas of the building where original documents are not consulted. LO reassured the meeting that the security measures in place in those areas where original documents are consulted will continue to be high security, and that the boundary of this area will be very clear. Concern was also expressed by a Reader regarding the evacuation procedures when the layout of the building changes. LO reassured the meeting that the building surveyor will be consulted to ensure that TNA comply with the necessary rules regarding evacuation.