

Cheshire's archives:
a story shared



Development Phase
Executive Summary

July 2022

- FOR SUBMISSION V4 -



Bright White
DESIGN, INNOVATION, INTERPRETATION, EXHIBITION

Contents

Executive Summary	3
Key Dates	3
Key Documents	3
Informed by the RIBA 1 Interpretation Planning Work	3
RIBA 2 Concept Design	3
RIBA 3 Developed Design (or Spatial Coordination)	7

Executive Summary

Key Dates

- RIBA 1 Work to support the round 1 application took place from October 2017 to April 2018 with the round 1 submission in May 2018.
- The Development Phase of *Cheshire's Archives: A Story Shared* commenced just after the start of lockdown, in May 2020.
- The mid-stage review (RIBA2) took place in December 2021.
- Submission for round 2 (RIBA3) takes place in August 2022.

Key Documents

This executive summary will refer to three interpretive planning and design documents created for this project by Bright White Ltd for Cheshire Joint Services. They are included in this submission, and they are:

- **May 2018 Interpretation Plan**, by CALS and Bright White Ltd, part of the round one submission to the NLHF, 9th May 2018: 'IP - Round 1 - Full.pdf'
- **December 2021 Interpretation Plan Update and Concept Design**, CALS and Bright White Ltd, put forward at mid-stage review, December 2021: 'Interpretive Concept Design - CALS - Bright White Ltd - For Submission - V8 - SFS.pdf'
- **July 2022 RIBA3 Update**, by CALS and Bright White Ltd, part of this submission, 11th July 2022: 'Interpretation - Developed Design - CALS - Bright White Ltd - For Submission - V3 - Small File Size - Forced A3.pdf'

Due to an elongation of the RIBA2 phase because of the pandemic and the detailed review of the design for the Chester centre, interpretive design progress put forward at mid-stage review (December 2021 Interpretation Plan Update and Concept Design) went further than normal for a RIBA2 stage, including some RIBA3 level work. This is the reason that the last document in the sequence (RIBA3 Update) is provided as an update, bringing everything to RIBA3. Apologies that it is not a clean split between RIBA2 and 3 in those last two documents - during the pandemic, we did what we could do.

Informed by the RIBA 1 Interpretation Planning Work

We feel it's important to mention what we did prior to the development stage as it has direct bearing on the approach at RIBA 2 and 3, especially considering the pandemic.

Fortunately for the later pandemic stages of development, the RIBA 1 approach taken was to consult heavily, wide and early, encouraging the communities to whom the community memory belongs to drive both the content and the form of experience both at the physical locations and online - all the themes, topics, media types and forms of exploration / interaction came directly from that first large-scale consultation. Details of that public consultation start on pg 61 of the May 2018 Interpretation Plan, but it is important to know that they were in-depth face-to-face consultations (57 questions with 72 respondents) collected by standing in public places all over Cheshire, capturing a very healthy number of non-users of the archive.

Other activities at RIBA 1 included:

- One-to-one candid consultations with all CALS staff across the spectrum of seniority. 16 questions were asked, including a conceptual image exercise to truly understand how the service saw themselves interacting with the public going forwards, and how their aims and objectives might become manifest.
- A review was undertaken of current practice at the Duke Street Record Office, and current practice online, looking at range and quality of provision and quantities of interactions with the public.
- The Activity Plan was reviewed, as the Activity Planners had specifically consulted with users on what did and what didn't work online. This, in conjunction with the public consultation and much desk-based research and competitor study drove the early stage proposals for improvements to the web offering to provide better access and inclusivity.

- Precedent projects and case studies were created, including CALS staff and Bright White visiting three venues at Manchester, Glasgow and York, talking to the teams there.
- From the public consultations, clear trends started to form about which topics, styles of interaction, presentation and media the public would like to see. From this the themes, topics and modes of interpretation were directly derived, and the desires and wishes of the public have held right through the process.
- Strategies were created to define the relationship between the two physical sites (Crewe and Chester) and the online offering. The relationship also included three sets of complementary overarching themes and topics - one for each physical site and one for online content.
- Those strategies included Touring Pods - a form of outreach that could be placed in public spaces outside of the immediate reach of Crewe and Chester, but still within Cheshire.
- The core and target audiences were defined by the Activity Planners, and adopted into the interpretation plan.

During the RIBA 1 work, it became very clear through consultation that inclusivity and access to the online archive offering was severely limited. With no obvious off-the-shelf way to rectify this, the report identified the need to explore ways to correct this through prototyping and piloting of new online ideas with the direct aim of creating far wider and greater engagement. These pilot concepts became known as **GEMS** and **OPUS**, which feature heavily in later documentation.

RIBA 2 Concept Design

Working through lockdown was not easy, not least because it made public consultation extremely hard, but the CALS team and Bright White were confident that the large scale consultation in the previous stage meant that we already had a clear view of what the audience wanted and we did our best to connect with audiences over Zoom to test out ideas and gain feedback. At every opportunity possible, the scheme was presented to groups and feedback gathered.

Page numbers in this section below refer to the *Interpretation Plan Update and Concept Design* document, December 2021.

Key activities during the RIBA 2 phase included:

- Unpacking of the revised core and target audience definitions from the new Activity Planners, creating clear approaches for interpretation to respond to those audiences (pg 7-9).
- Audience modelling (pg 12-15). Building on the broader audience definitions inherited from the Activity Plan. Bright White includes audience modelling on all projects, but we took this further than normal due to the difficulties of reaching our audience during lockdown. Pen Portraits were created and assessed with CALS to ensure that they fitted our experience of the public consultations at RIBA 1 and CALS' experience of visitors to the Record Office. Each persona was given a Culture Segments profile by MHM, and we used the MHM design bible to check that the results of our public consultation fitted the preferences attached to each culture segment, which they did. This audience model has been adopted by CALS for all their operations, not just interpretation.
- Journey Maps were created for each persona, which is an excellent design tool for flushing out barriers and making each visit inclusive and accessible (pg 16-18).
- A Stakeholder Map was created to accurately record the inter-organisational relationships, and prompt the design team to always be thinking about delivering in ways that work with the agendas of all stakeholders. (pg 19).
- An accessibility strategy was created, looking at regional data in comparison with national data, and creating a clear target for accessible and inclusive design that responds to regional needs. The target was coordinated with the architect such that the accessibility strategies for buildings and interpretation are aligned (pg 10).
- Work was undertaken to align the NLHF objectives and CALS objectives in the context of the Project Logic Model supplied by the Activity Planners (pg 21-22).

- Interpretive objectives, interpretive outcomes and management outcomes were developed (pg 23-27).
- Development of a hybrid approach to interpretation - on site and online, working together in harmony (pg 6).
- Creation of an abstracted relationship model, illustrating the strategic thinking behind the hub and dandelion model that defines the relationship between the two sites, the online interpretation and the touring pods (pg 5).
- Review and agreement with CALS on the themes and topics featured at each of the two sites plus the online interpretation. These themes and topics were driven directly by the large-scale RIBA 1 public consultations. The summary table is included below, but the section of the document is at (pg 28), and it is important not to miss the *cross-cutting* storylines and topics that weave stories like Cheshire's role in the continuing story of the climate emergency and minority communities into the main themes and topics below.

Online (Cheshire, The Hub)	
Overarching Theme	Cheshire is a county with a long and varied history. Many communities have seen major changes due to industry, whilst some communities have hardly changed in centuries.
Topic 1	Communities of Extraction, mining, refining and manufacture
Topic 2	Communities of Agriculture, Food and Textiles
Topic 3	Communities of Communication and Trade
Topic 4	Communities and Authority
Topic 5	Communicating Archives
Chester	
Overarching Theme	Chester: A Centre for Power and Trade for 2,000 years
Topic 1	Communities of Production (Agricultural, mining and extraction, industrial revolution)
Topic 2	Communities of Trade (Ports, Rivers, Canals, Railways, Goods)
Topic 3	Communities of Power (Church, Authority, Law, Administration, Archives)
Topic 4	Communicating Archives
Crewe	
Overarching Theme	From a small farming settlement Crewe became a pioneering centre of invention and the centre of the British railway industry.
Topic 1	Communities Pre-1843 (Industrial revolution, textiles, canals, cottage industry and agriculture)
Topic 2	A Burgeoning Community - The Railway Colony at Crewe
Topic 3	Boomtown Crewe (with rail connections to many outlying local towns)
Topic 4	Post-industrial Communities
Topic 5	Communicating Archives

- Development of long-form narratives for the hub and dandelions (pg 29-36). We worked with the CALS team to mesh the narratives with the collections, ensuring that the story is amply supported by archive objects and content.

- Research and familiarisation with the emerging Records in Context standard for digital archive collections.
- Consultation with access group CDAF (Corporate Disability Access Forum), BME group CHAWREC (Cheshire, Halton and Warrington Race & Equality Centre) and non-users with a stall at Chester Market for two days (pg 66-67).
- Definitions of the aims, objectives, concept and principles behind the GEMS and OPUS proposed online feature pilots, with a focus on inclusivity and access, and adherence to gold standards for accessibility (pg 38 & 68-72).
- Planning, development, execution and formative evaluation of the GEMS online prototype (pg 73-74).
- Planning of the OPUS prototype (development and evaluation took place at RIBA 3).
- Coordination with the operations team and architectural design team to create a unified strategy for the proposed and long-term use of public space in both history centres. The focus was on long-term flexibility, seeing beyond the life of the interpretation scheme.
- Coordination with the architectural design team on principles to ensure complementary working, and agreeing an interface of responsibilities and scope.
- Developed a Coronavirus Recovery Strategy that ensured that, except for the harshest of lockdown conditions, the centres could be reconfigured without too much fuss to give safe access for staff and the public. This was created at the same time as the visitor flow strategy for both sites. (Pg 39-42).
- Developed onsite display concepts and online features based on the clear desires that came through the public consultation at RIBA 1, the audience modelling process, and all other strategies and principles developed up to this point. The key interpretive display concepts are shown below (the latest from RIBA 3), but the relevant pages of the RIBA 2 concept design document are (pg 43-51).



Big Story Wall



Evolving Places



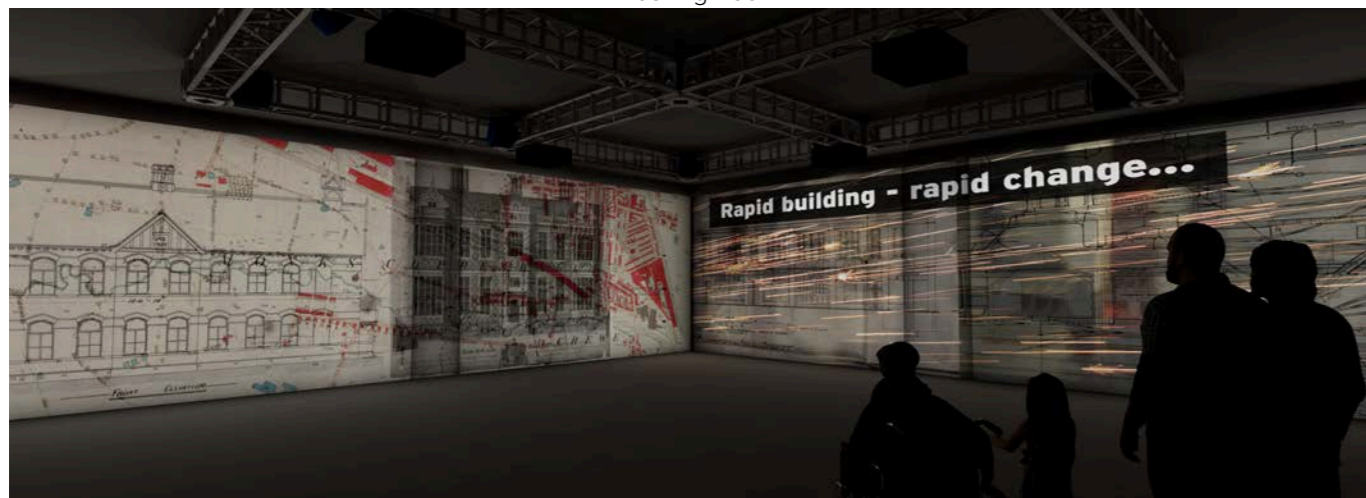
Evolving Archive



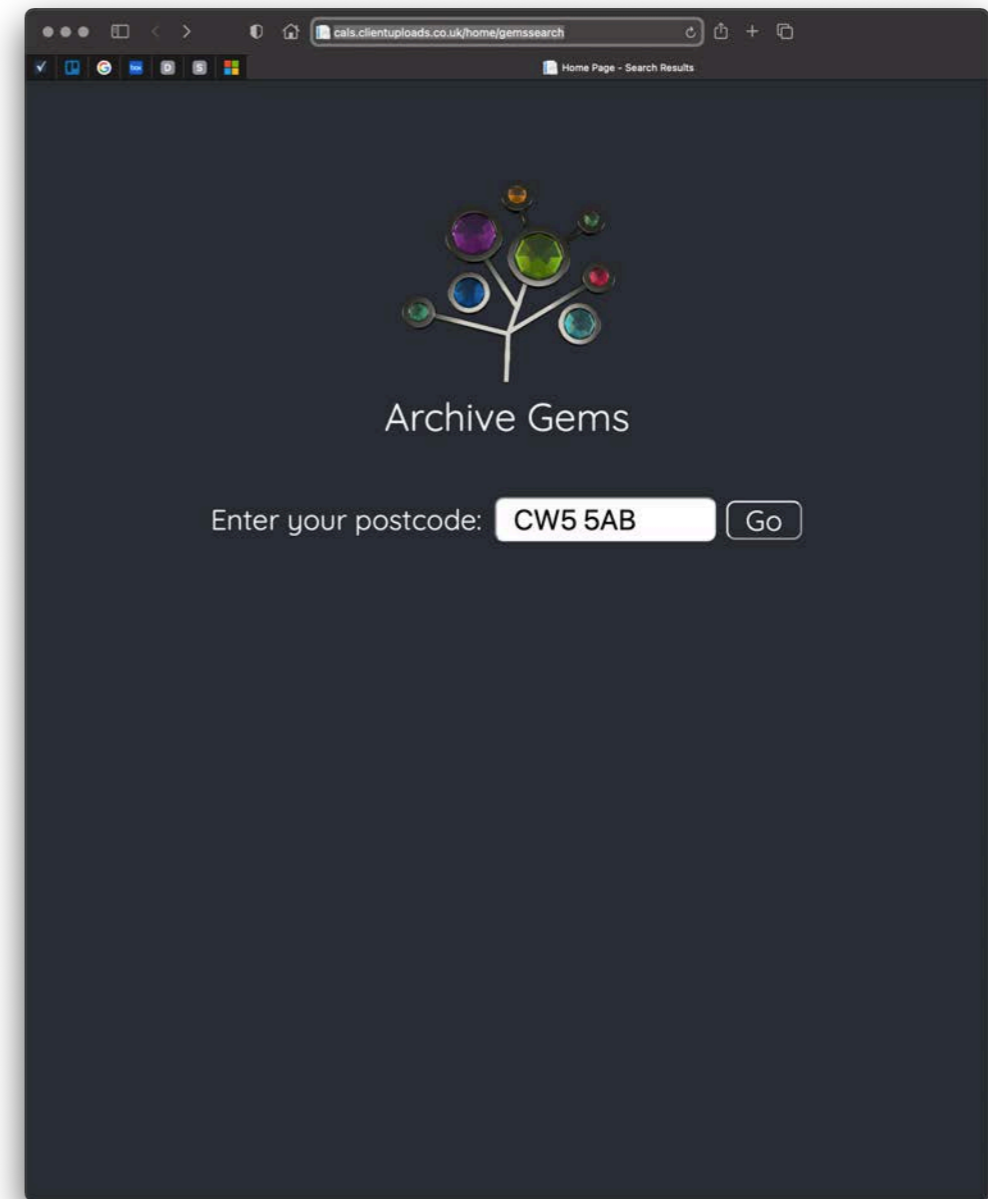
Behind The Scenes



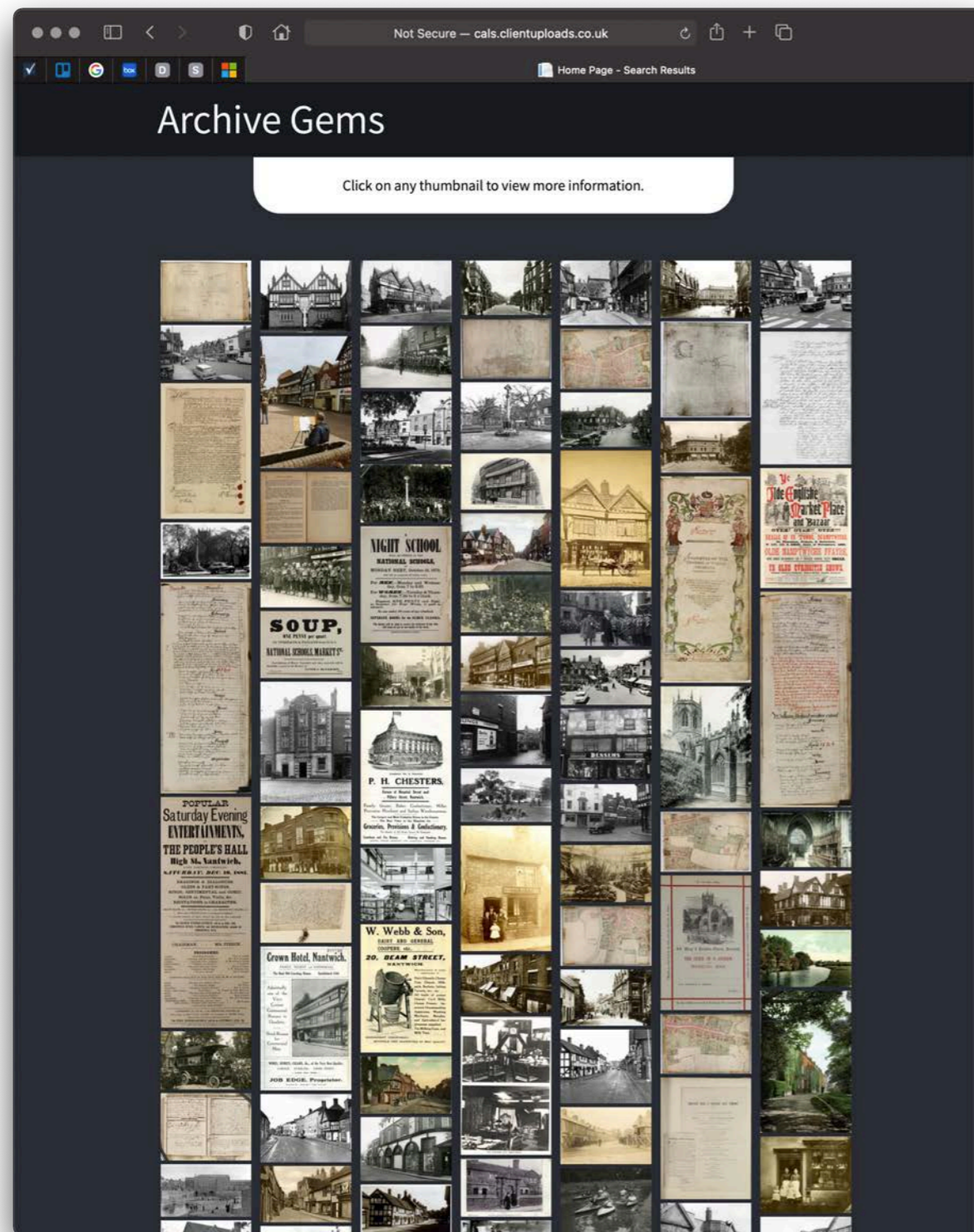
Touring Pod



Big Story Immersive



GEMS Landing page



GEMS Results page

RIBA 3 Developed Design (or Spatial Coordination)

Although Coronavirus restrictions ended in February 2022, much of the approach to risk of staff, clients and the public meant that the effects of the pandemic lasted longer than the legal restrictions. Much of the focus of the RIBA 3 activity was to repeat the success of the GEMS pilot with OPUS. The development of OPUS was hard and complex, partly due to the willing adoption of Records in Context as a standard. Our test audience for OPUS was always going to be online, and securing the online test participants required was much easier than for GEMS because OPUS was being tested on current users of the online archive search function.

Page numbers in this section below refer to the *July 2022 RIBA3 Update* document, July 2022.

Key activities during the RIBA 3 phase included:

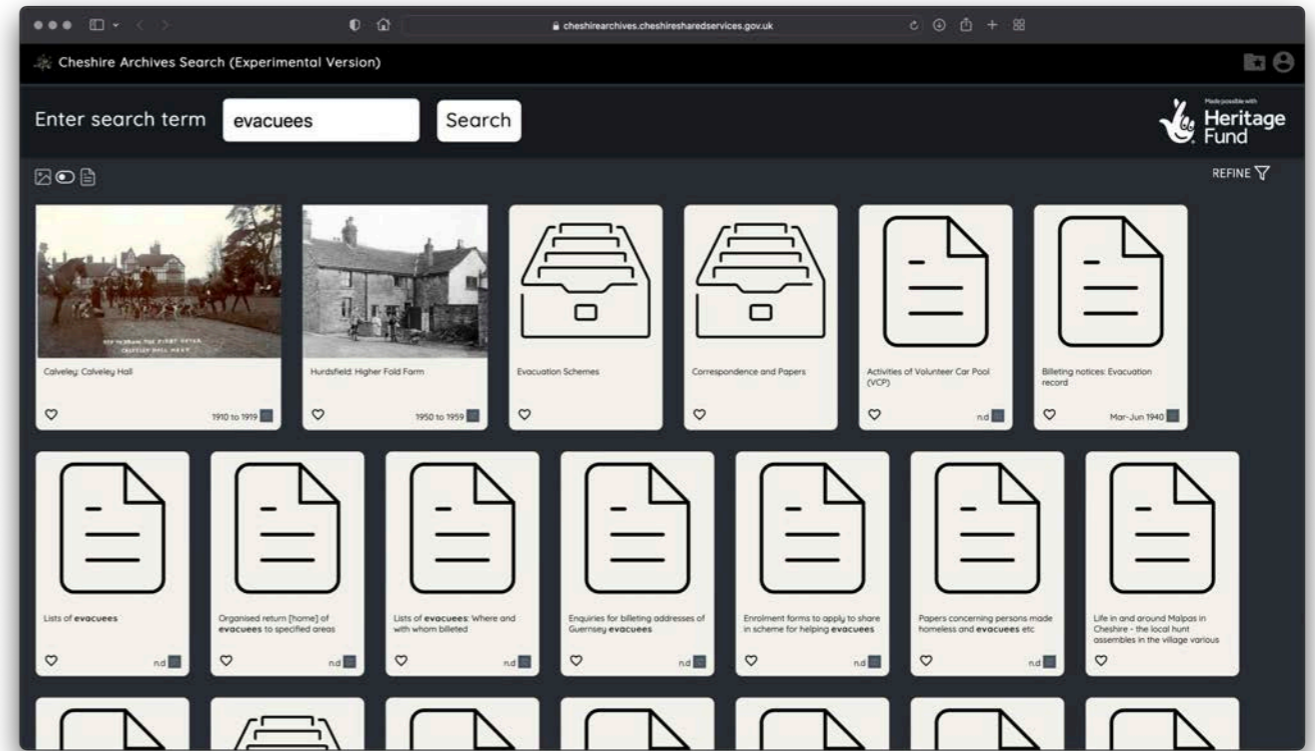
- Post mid-stage review, there was significant activity across the consultant and client teams to go into fine detail regarding the alignment of the cost plans and understand the true full life costs of ownership and maintenance. Extraordinarily, this included meetings between CALS, the quantity surveyor, business planner, Bright White Ltd and Christie - the manufacturers of projectors. Christie were very transparent and open about historical data for maintenance requirements for their projectors. Bright White's view of ongoing maintenance requirements and costs turned out to be pessimistic, as the maintenance requirements for Christie's laser projectors is remarkably small, even when run 24/7. All other aspects of the proposed schemes including online features were scrutinised and ongoing costs developed. CALS made the decision to include the projections based on the intelligence gathered at this stage.
- Bright White worked very closely with the Cheshire Shared Services IT (ICTSS) to explore and action temporary provision of a cloud server operated by ICTSS, but running code developed as part of the pilot / prototype programme at RIBA 3 (OPUS). This was a very helpful process for CALS to understand the realities of hosting such cloud services going forward, and provided much-needed calculations for ongoing costs.
- Development of an approach to layering interpretation including a relevance map for all interpretation, including online (pg 4). How the layers relate to the online interpretation is defined on (pg 7-8), and architecturally on (pg 18-19).
- Developed a detailed map of how all the parts of the online interpretation and access and inclusivity functions work together, including what external drivers CALS should anticipate needing to create, and how the visitor journey through the online system can result in visits to the centre (pg 6-9).
- The hybrid interpretive scheme was presented to the following groups:
 - Cheshire East Council Differently Abled Staff Network
 - Cheshire Local History Association
 - Family History Society of Cheshire
 - Councillors in both authorities
 - Crewe Town Council's heritage group
 - Cheshire West and Chester's Corporate Disability Access Forum
 - Liverpool University students on the Masters in Archives and Records Management course
 - Cheshire West and Chester and Cheshire East Library Services

Feedback has been uniformly positive, and any comments have been adopted.

- Development of storyline headings, meshed with collections and with worked-up treatments for the immersive spaces at both history centres (pg 14-16).
- Based on the planning at RIBA2, development, execution and formative evaluation of the OPUS online prototype [pg 9-13]. Two example images are across the page:
- Decided against the HARVEST prototype as enough evidence had emerged from elsewhere to mean the question over popularity and public engagement had been answered in the meantime.
- Adjusted the proposed displays to suit feedback, and developed RIBA 3 drawings and visualisations including how the interpretation sits inside the architectural spaces (pg 17-45).

- In collaboration with CALS and the architectural design team, placed the displays within the emerging architectural frameworks. (pg 52-65).
- Developed the RIBA 2 cost plan, risk register and next steps.

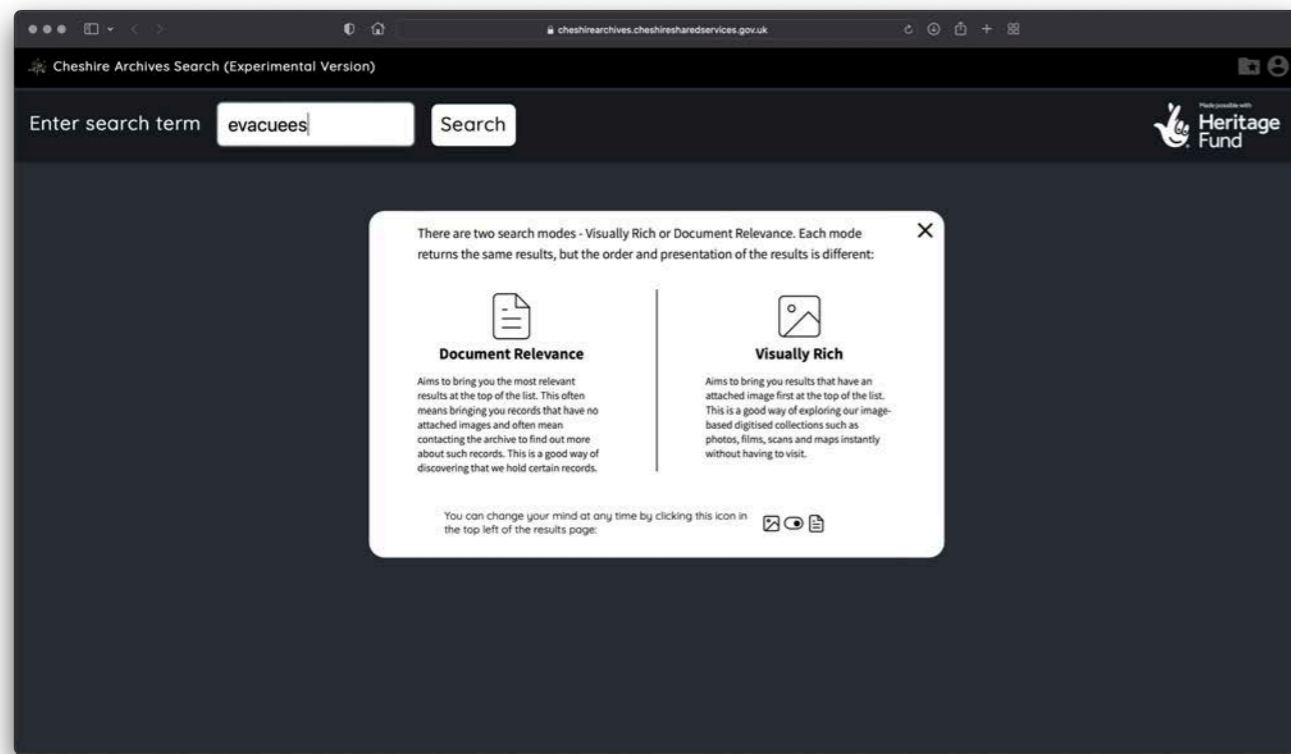
- Develop a top-level communicative style guide to inform RIBA4. This sits alongside the place brand for Crewe, and the brand personality and voice study by others for Chester (pg 46-56).
- In collaboration with the NLHF monitor and the client's QS, created a clear strategy to approach and mitigate inflationary pressures.
- Updated the procurement strategy, programme, cost document, project management and risk schedule.
- Monday 25th of July we held our final consultation with current users of the archive on the overall plans (having consulted non-users at Chester Market and with GEMS). This is a final cross-check to make 100% certain that our proposals met after considerable consultation at RIBA 1, audience modelling and all other more focussed consultations results, with the same positive reaction as discovered when the scheme was presented to groups (see previous bullet point in this RIBA 3 section relating to group presentations).



In visually rich mode, archive records are shown alongside images and other multimedia

- Updated the drawings and visualisations to reflect the flipping of the architectural base plan for Chester - a late change to the architecture.

—END—



On entering a search term, the user is invited to choose the style of return