

HIGHLAND ARCHIVE CENTRE OPENS NEW STORAGE SPACE

The Highland Archive Centre in Inverness, one of the most significant developments of its type in the last 12 months, is now fully up and running and benefiting significantly from the use of Link 51 shelving systems throughout. The £10.5 million investment, which brings together the history and heritage of a region extending across the whole of the country north of Loch Ness, has been designed to provide both long term storage and regular access facilities which, in turn, have called for the storage system used to meet a combination of key requirements.

“Approximately two thirds of the shelving facility in the new three-storey repository block has been installed in a mobile configuration,” explains **Rob Dakin, Link 51’s Projects Manager**, *“with the rest a combination of static shelving and special storage facilities such as plan chests and map tanks.*

“Because mobile storage requires only one access aisle to be open at a time, the majority of the installation can be kept in a closed configuration thereby dramatically improving the capacity of the ‘storage cube’,” he continues. *“At the same time, access to any part of the archive can be readily achieved through the simple operation of ergonomically-designed hand wheels which open the appropriate aisle when needed. This is providing the optimum storage conditions for a wide range of items from boxes to documents and manuscripts while the use of our specialist designs, such as the map tanks meet separate and very specific needs.”*

The installation has been centred on the company’s versatile ‘Stormor’ system. Easily assembled and reconfigured, the design is highly flexible and can thus reflect the variety of items that need to be stored at the site – from local authority, estate and family records to business and legal information, shipping registers and the ‘Tartan Archive’. Importantly, the archive staff can easily re-configure the layout if future storage requirements change.

Because of the irreplaceable nature of the material stored, Link 51 has also incorporated a highly innovative element to the installation of the mobile storage facility.

“The floor slab has been laid with a slight gradient which will permit water to escape in the event of a fire on site,” continues **Rob Dakin**. *“This has then been offset by a raised access floor to meet the finished level of the tracks.”*

“We approached a total of four companies with our shelving and storage requirements and selected Link 51 on its ability to meet key objectives,” comments **Susan Beckley, Highland Council Archivist**. *“Whilst it was, of course, important that budgetary considerations were met, the company was also appointed on the versatility of its design and layout proposals and the sheer volume that the mobile concept would hold.”*

“The proposal to use a manually-operated system rather than electrical was also important,” she continues, *“as this clearly eradicates another potential risk at the site.”* She points out that the repository already holds 2,500 linear metres of records with capacity to expand to almost four times that amount available within the same storage layout. *“We have even been able to colour-code the shelving installations over the three floors of the facility – blue, red and green to reflect the status of the material held.”*

The Highland Archive Centre is now widely seen as one of the most important developments in the field in recent years. With the Highland Council benefiting from significant Heritage Lottery Funds support, the Centre now provides a major facility in itself while also providing a ‘hub’ service support for smaller archive centres across the region. With a range of search room facilities on site and specialist services such as a dedicated Family History Centre, the development not only meets the archive requirements today, but will also form the basis of an invaluable regional repository for generations to come.

“By every measure, this is a major archive installation both in terms of its significance and the scale of the storage requirement,” concludes **Rob Dakin**. *“We are delighted that we have been able to work closely with the Highland Council to deliver a shelving and storage design that not only reflects the needs of the installation, but also the standing and importance of the facility.”*

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Note to Editors

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