Decommissioning and deleting old SharePoint sites

What does this guide cover?	This guide covers the process of identifying existing SharePoint on-premise sites that are not being used and then how to decommission or delete them.
Who is it aimed at?	All current Site Collection Administrators (SCAs).

Introduction

As part of moving to SharePoint Online it is important to identify those sites that are not in use and can be decommissioned or preferably deleted. Only content that is still in use should be moved to SharePoint Online, and redundant content should be deleted or stored elsewhere as appropriate. If the SP site is no longer needed, it should be deleted. Alternatively, if the SCA wanted to the site could be 'decommissioned' instead. As part of the SharePoint Online project we have analysed existing SharePoint on premise sites, and about half have not been modified since 2018 so there is a lot of content that is not being used out there!

Identifying sites that can be deleted

We recommend that all Site Collection Administrators (SCA) should investigate the sites in their collection and look at those that have not been recently modified. They should then consider deleting the sites.

What sites are in my Site Collection?

In order to get a list of all sites in your site hierarchy navigate to: *Site Settings > Site Collection Administration > Site Hierarchy.*
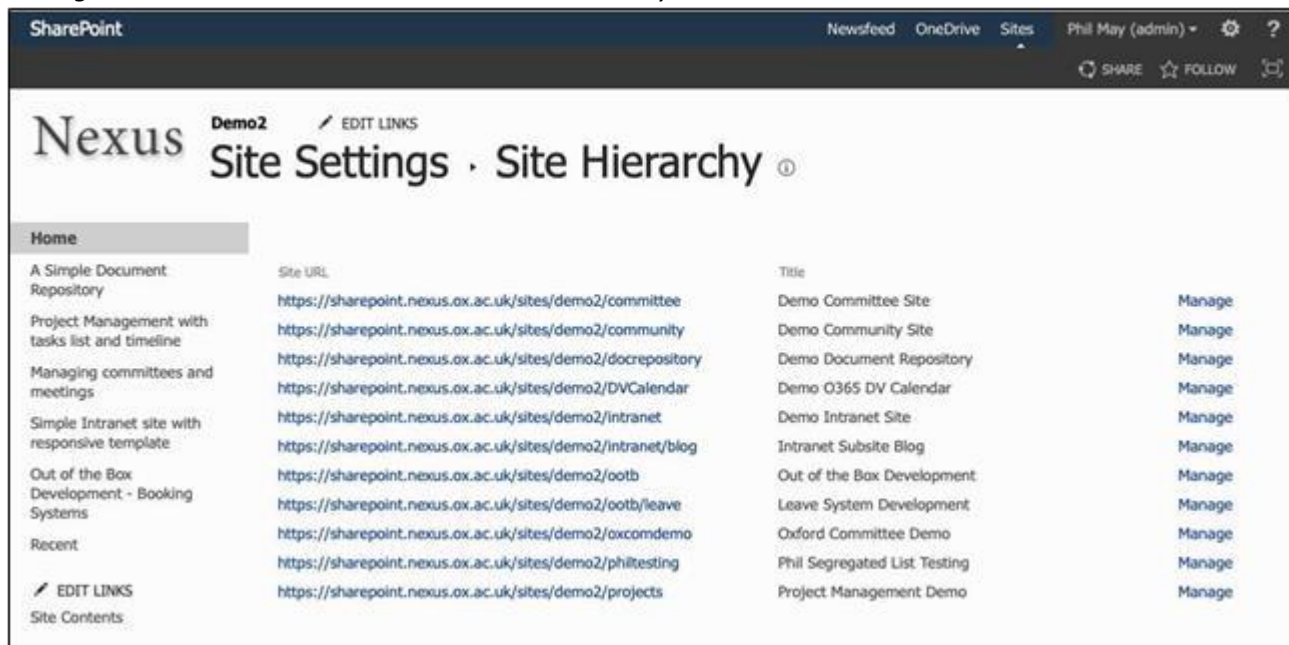

Figure 1. Screenshot showing the Site Hierarchy screen in SharePoint on-premise

You can also find a list of sub-sites at the bottom of your "Site Contents" page:

Figure 2. Screenshot showing the Subsites screen in SharePoint on-premise

When were my sites were last modified?

You can generate reports from SharePoint to investigate, amongst other things, when your sites were last accessed. This will help you decide whether a site can be decommissioned.

The reports can be accessed from:
Site Settings > Site Collection Administration > Audit Log Reports.

There are multiple reports available but those in the first section 'Content Activity' will provide data on access. There are several reports in this section but the first two, 'Content Viewing' and 'Content Modifications' should be most useful in assessing recent use of your sites.
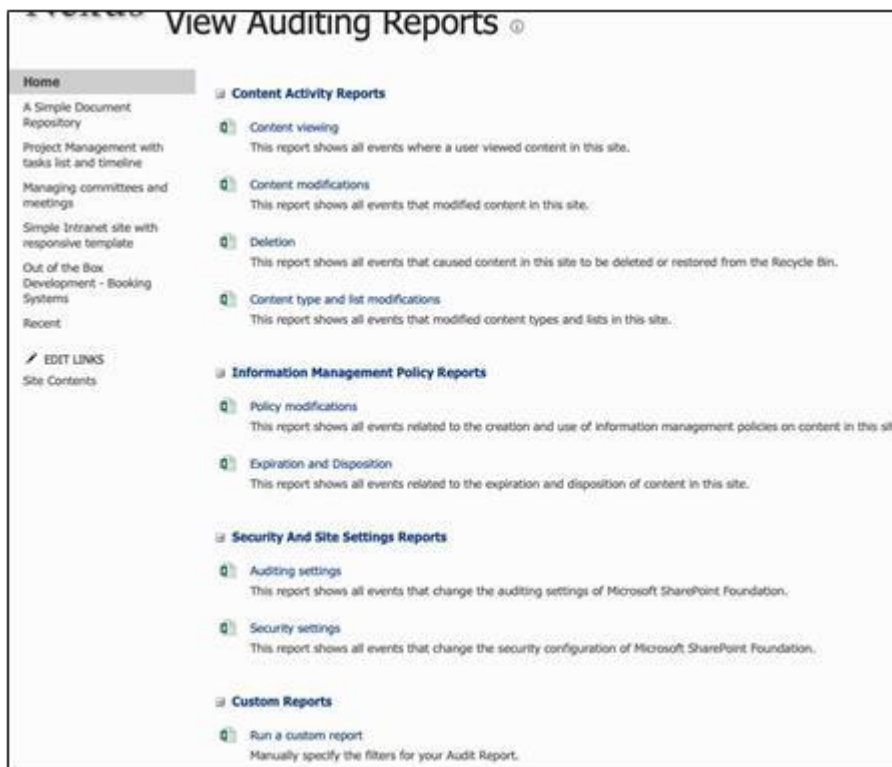
Figure 3. Screenshot showing the list of Auditing Reports available in SharePoint on-premise

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The 'Content Viewing' will show you all your sites and how many times those sites / workspaces have been accessed / clicked on / visited etc. An example of this report can be seen below.

Figure 4. Screenshot showing example of the Content Viewing report in SharePoint on-premise

The 'Content Modifications' report goes into more granular detail. This time showing date / time last accessed and what type of access it was (editing, viewing etc.)

Figure 5. Screenshot showing an example of the Content Modifications report in SharePoint on-premise

Decommissioning SharePoint On-Premise Sites

Once you have migrated your content, then Site Collection Administrators (SCA's) can choose to keep the existing documents in the on-premise environment until SharePoint On-premise is closed in 2023.

If users are unsure if they still require some of their content, they can either migrate it across to their new site or, depending on local policies for SharePoint use, SCA's could decommission a site instead of deleting it. These contents can be left in the On-premise site with one of the following options:

1) Update all users' permissions to read only. Nobody, including the original owners will be able to change the content from that point onwards. This can be done under site permissions and update all the group's permissions to Read only
2) Hide the site from user access, even read, from all the users. You can do so by removing all groups from site permissions.

Deleting SharePoint On-Premise Sites

Once you have identified sites that you wish to remove then Site Collection Administrators (SCA's) and site owners are able to delete these sites. If you are the SCA, this article on deleting SharePoint sites *[link to external blog]* has some useful instructions about how to delete sites in SharePoint.

When sites are deleted, they move to the recycle bin where they remain for 14 days. If the situation arises where it must be recovered, it can be restored from here during the 14-day period by the SCA.

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Developing a strategy for moving to SharePoint Online