

The Response by English Heritage to the DCMS Future of Local Government Archaeology Services Review in England.

Background.

English Heritage (EH) is the government's statutory adviser on the historic environment in England. EH has invested heavily in the current system of local authority (LA) historic environment advisers since at least the mid-1980s. The current arrangements therefore represent a major investment of public resources over three decades. We are greatly concerned that due to unprecedented pressures on public spending, this long-term investment is at risk.

EH has the capacity to deal with casework relating to scheduled monuments and the most highly-graded listed buildings, yet these represent only a small proportion of the historic environment. We therefore remain committed to the provision of historic environment advice which is local, and evidence-based by a Historic Environment Record (HER).

1. Do you consider the present system of advice provided from and to local authorities of different types to be working satisfactorily and to acceptable professional standards?

The established model has proved broadly successful in supplying high quality, professional advice. However, there is a wide variation in LA archaeological services which have been built up to different levels and standards across the country over the last few decades. EH is working in partnership to deliver a programme of continuous improvement, focussing on building capacity in existing weak spots; building the capacity of services to respond to the rural development (as well as the land-use-planning) agenda; and improving data standards and the interoperability of records. However, since 2003 these services have seen a continuing reduction in terms of numbers, seniority and critical mass.

The table in Annex A sets out the national picture since 2003. Numbers of archaeological officers have fallen consistently over the period, though that fall (4%) is less than the reduction in all local authority staff over the same period (11% - source: Office of National Statistics). This 4% fall hides a mixed picture – some authorities and areas have lost many more staff than others. It should also be noted that these numbers do not tell the whole story, as they include fixed-term, project-related contracts. What is of real concern is the situation developing in parts of the country where there is now little or no access to expert archaeological advice.

The decline in specialist historic environment advice is greater within building conservation services, with levels of advice falling by 18% since 2003, and we would urge your Report to government to consider this wider context. EH fully supports the wider historic environment service provision, but the slowly improving picture of integration and shared expertise seen in the past few years seems to have mostly halted. Recent figures for the whole sector can be found here:

<http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/publications/fifth-report-la-staff-resources/>

a. Do you have evidence of local authorities acting without archaeological advice, or with clearly inadequate provision? Which are they?

Yes. As referenced above, there is significant concern that some LAs are acting without adequate archaeological advice. For example, the Merseyside Archaeological Advisory Service incorporating the HER ceased operations in 2011, and while a project is being supported by EH to establish a sustainable HER service within the Merseyside Environmental Advisory Service, EH does not have the resources to plug similar emerging gaps in the system. Additionally, Historic England (HE) will not have the resources to make this kind of intervention routinely either.

Elsewhere, there are a number of LAs where there is a single or part-time post, where post-holders are very stretched.

Many LAs are being reduced to the level where they find it difficult to meaningfully advise on planning applications or maintain and update the HER. Small and temporary gaps in service are now becoming larger and more permanent, including in areas that are nationally renowned for heritage (e.g. Chester).

We are aware from the 2012 Content and Computing Survey that 3% of HERs have no staff and 34% have less than 1 FTE. We believe there is no HER officer in post in South Yorkshire, and the operational arrangements for the Merseyside HER have been compromised in recent years.

b. Do you have evidence of local authorities planning or considering acting without archaeological advice, or with clearly inadequate provision? Which are they?

Yes (see also above). An increasing number of LAs are reviewing their archaeological advisory services due to the pressures of reduced resources.

Initial indications suggest that in many of the current reviews, the recommendations will be to severely reduce the service, although one recent review (Tyne and Wear) concluded that the Shared Service Model was the most cost effective way of providing archaeological advice to the area. Contrary to this conclusion, we are also aware of ongoing reviews where some smaller LAs are likely to stop paying the host authority for a shared service, risking both the agreement, and sometimes the viability of the host service.

c. What trends have you identified?

Currently, some LA archaeology teams appear to be at or near crisis point. Maintaining the HER is also a problem for many, where cuts mean that there is not enough time to put new data onto the HER, nor adequately respond to enquiries for data (e.g. from contractors employed by developers).

Archaeological and related services have been part of the recent trend towards services being shared between LAs e.g. Camden and Islington sharing senior management functions; West Devon and South Hams sharing conservation services.

We are aware that archaeological advice is now being targeted for review and possible reductions. That said, there is some indication that some LAs recognise that they cannot do without archaeological advice altogether. A variety of models are emerging (see Annex B) but there is a need to better understand the impact of these different models on the quality of services.

2. What are the consequences of inadequate provision of archaeological advice to local authorities? The inquiry is particularly interested in the real or potential

- loss of archaeological sites without intervention*
- loss of public benefits from participation opportunities, dissemination of the results of archaeological work, archives of the products of that work and interpretation via museums*
- increased uncertainty and cost for developers*
- failure to target advice and grants in rural areas*
- loss of essential archaeological skills*

Without adequate provision of archaeological advice, the consequences could include:

- the likelihood that significant archaeological remains will be lost, and this loss not being recognised (much of England's archaeological resource is below-ground, largely invisible and largely unrecorded).
- delays and uncertainty if archaeological remains are unexpectedly discovered during construction, resulting in potential for additional costs and delays for developers.
- Lack of/ inappropriate/ lack of monitoring of planning conditions leading to a loss of archaeology directly or indirectly through inadequate post-excavation and publication.

- Lack of appropriate archaeological advice leading to additional costs e.g. for non-determination, or leading to legal challenges.

Additionally, without continued investment and succession planning in archaeological services, knowledge and best practices will be hard to replace.

HERs not being appropriately resourced and managed leads to a reduction in their quality and accuracy. This can lead to inaccurate assessments of archaeological significance, potential and sensitivity. The following groups could be affected:

- communities, researchers and the public (in understanding and appreciating their historic environment).
- developers/decision makers (in meeting legal requirements for e.g. planning, NSIPs, SEA, EIAs).
- Natural England (agri-environment schemes; enhancing rural historic environments)
- HLF and other grant-funded projects (when considering priorities)

Opportunities to be proactive for the historic environment, including working with local communities; educational opportunities; opportunities for positive management at H@R sites <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/caring/heritage-at-risk/> will be reduced with the decline in archaeological cover in LAs.

3. What other models in England, elsewhere in the UK, or further afield would you like to draw to the inquiry's attention?

Other parts of the country operate differently, with Wales and Scotland taking a different approach to England.

Wales operates a system whereby it funds its HERs through regional archaeological trusts. However, Cadw is significantly better funded than EH in terms of the respective populations of England and Wales, and we calculate that the pro-rata cost

of government directly funding HERs in England (based on the respective numbers of local authority HERs) could be in the region of £20M/ year and therefore unsustainable. We also have concerns about the potential of a system that conflates the roles of advisory services and contractors.

The more centralised approach adopted in Scotland also benefits from the significantly higher levels of funding for Historic Scotland (on a population per capita basis) than EH, and is therefore unlikely to be possible in England.

Given these differences in national funding - and assuming this is unlikely to change in England - we consider that a system that continues to be based on LA funding is critically important. The emphasis should be on a LA-funded system that is cost effective and sustainable in the long term. There are a number of models which might be effective in England, set out in Annex B. We recognise that a 'one size fits all' model may not be appropriate to meet the needs of all areas – however, the pooling and sharing of resources is a model which experience shows to have great potential. It is suggested that archaeological advice services should be provided so that they meet the following principles:

- *Maintains a critical mass of expertise and includes appropriate skills managing the HER, giving archaeological planning advice, rural archaeological advice, and with seniority to enable professional leadership and managerial engagement on strategic issues.*
- *Provides certainty for developers and decision-makers, by advising on archaeological significance and potential.*
- *Provides geographical coverage, high quality advice, local knowledge, and reflects local circumstances.*
- *Complies with legal requirements, professional standards and best practices.*

- *Delivers in a manner that is cost effective, timely, appropriate and accessible to all.*
- *Allows for flexibility in generating income/charging .*
- *A public-facing service, where information gained is disseminated and used to inform future management of the historic environment.*
- *It should bring together historic building conservation services and archaeological services (a) to achieve further economies of scale and (b) to match current understanding of best practice in historic environment advice.*

More work is needed on better understanding the strengths and weaknesses of different models of service, and in which scenarios they work best. That would allow EH and the archaeological sector more widely, to better advise local government should it seek to reform services.

a. What are their advantages and disadvantages?

See Annex B and above.

4. What role could the proposed Historic England play with local authorities and other partners to create a national framework of heritage protection?

Section 4.13 of the DCMS EH New Model Consultation, Dec 2013,

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/263943/1291-B_English_Heritage_Accessible_1_.pdf

sets out that Government and the Commission believe there is a role for HE, working in partnership with others, to review local heritage services and to develop recommendations to ensure that the best possible use of the resources available can

be made, so that England's heritage can continue to make an important contribution to our quality of life.

HE should make clear to Government that the adequate protection of England's historic environment depends on the identification of sustainable ways of maintaining the provision of LA archaeological services. HE should seek to achieve that end by:

- a) Ensuring that there continues to be an activity focusing on enhancing the capabilities of HERs and local government services more widely in National Heritage Protection Plan 2.
- b) Continuing to assist in the development of benchmarks for HERs, and continue to support the HER audit programme, open to all 87 English HERs. (It is worth noting that recent consultation shows that HERs are increasingly finding it difficult to meet the staff time and resources required to undertake an audit).
- c) Continuing to assess where there are capacity and skills issues within local government and work in partnership with authorities in responding to issues as they arise.
- d) Continuing to support the Heritage Gateway website as a portal to data held by local HERs.

<http://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/gateway/>

- e) Continuing the Information Access Strategy, which is an initiative to secure an improved and more cost effective approach to handling digital heritage data by EH and its partners, to create a single digital and shared national heritage record with the potential to deliver economies of scale for LAs and HE.
- f) Continuing to provide guidance on all aspects of the historic environment, including the production of planning guidance.

- g) Many museum archives, including those run by LAs, are at or near capacity and some are currently unable to accept any more archaeological material due to a lack of storage space/ resources. EH and the proposed HE can play a role with LA archaeologists in formulating retention and sampling policies for archaeological material, and influencing museum archiving issues.
- h) Finally, guidance and training should continue to be part of the capacity-building activities of HE, including that of the wider sector.

5. How well do/ could alternative models cope with the maritime archaeological heritage out to the 12NM limit?

There are legal limitations on the role of LAs in relation to the 12 NM limit:

- LAs do not have seabed planning responsibilities out to 12NM limit of the English area of the UK Territorial Sea.
- The MMO is the Marine Planning Authority within and beyond 12NM.
- All designation within the marine environment is under national legislation primarily the Protection of Wrecks Act 1973 (access subject to licence granted by the DCMS).

Terrestrial LAs have no statutory basis for maintaining a HER outwith of land planning boundaries, which by convention are spatially limited to Mean Low Water mark on the open coast and within tidal estuaries. We recommend that the MMO should support the maintenance and development, by EH, of the national record for the historic environment for the entire English marine planning area (inshore and offshore – beyond 12NM).

6. Do you believe that sector-produced standards are sufficient to underpin diverse models of service provision? Please elaborate on any suggested improvements

We have worked closely with the sector to develop national standards and guidance that support consistent approaches to the management of, and access to, historic environment data and information, e.g. MIDAS Heritage.

<http://fishforum.weebly.com/midas-heritage-standard.html>

We recommend that national data standards are implemented to ensure good practice and consistency in the management of data and information, irrespective of the model of service provision.

Current best practice and professional standards commit archaeologists to working in certain ways. For example, the IFA code of conduct, other by-laws, standards and guidance are binding on all accredited corporate members, and emphasize the duty to adhere to high professional and ethical standards. Archaeologists, both in both curatorial and contracting roles, need to adhere to appropriately high professional standards.

7. What would be your preferred model for the provision of archaeological advice?

LA historic environment services are discretionary, rather than statutory. The economic downturn has put pressure on all discretionary services. The Local Government Association has suggested that by 2019, as a result of necessary savings and the rising cost of social care, many LAs will find it difficult/ impossible to support discretionary services:

http://www.local.gov.uk/publications/-/journal_content/56/10180/3626323/PUBLICATION

A key question, therefore, is what is likely to happen to such services going forward?

a. Is your preference for continuation of the status quo?

Given the future projections for LA funding in the short to medium term, we do not consider the current situation can or will continue unchanged. In terms of what replaces it, we are not convinced that a single national model is deliverable or appropriate, given the local differences which exist at present. Instead, we consider that the most sustainable solutions will be devised locally, and there will be a diversity of approach. We have suggested some general principals which need to be met – see Question 3 above, and would welcome the opportunity to work with LAs as they seek to identify new and sustainable models of service.

b. If not, which model or models for alternative provision would you recommend, and why?

See Question 3 above for general principals. Locally-appropriate models should be chosen, although the review might consider what incentives could encourage such new arrangements so that they happen more quickly, before services and skilled people are lost.

8. In what ways could the knowledge and enthusiasm of third-sector organisations be harnessed to support the work of the present or future mix of public and private organisations in delivering your preferred model of heritage protection?

It is not inconceivable that a Shared Service Model could be delivered through private or third sector providers, funded by LAs. There is, however, some evidence that recent market testing of LA services has demonstrated that they are more cost-effective than private provision, and some early adoption of private provision in the 1990's was not deemed to have been successful. Recent work undertaken by EH also suggested that local stakeholders preferred LA-sourced advice (<http://www.helm.org.uk/managing-and-protecting/delivering-heritage-advice/helac/>).

More generally, the most imaginative archaeological services have been harnessing the third-sector organisations and volunteers for many years. For example, in the early 1980s, the Buckinghamshire Archaeological Service was using volunteers to enhance its SMR (these days HER) which added approximately 2.0 FTE to the staffing complement. Current examples of current community/volunteer projects include the *Bristol Historic Web Map (Know Your Place)* which succeeded in encouraging greater community interaction with archives and records, particularly in terms of informing neighbourhood planning exercises. The *Historic Buildings of Worcestershire Project* provided a comprehensive and consistent record of all surviving historic buildings in Worcestershire and involved Worcestershire County Council staff and volunteers. The *Heritage Asset Information Management in Kent Project* led to the establishment of a system whereby errors or omissions in designated data were passed to the HER for reporting to EH. In Boston, Lincolnshire County Council funded a community dig in the Market Place in partnership with the HLF, in advance of implementing a public realm scheme which produced significant archaeological and public benefits.

Not all tasks will be appropriate for third-sector organisations or volunteers. For example, it would be unlikely that they could give formal planning advice. In general, we support third party involvement in archaeology, although evidence shows that supporting third sector involvement is not a cost-free exercise and does not negate the need for qualified archaeologists.

Annex A: Local Authority Staff working on Archaeology in England.

Key

Green: Highest figures

Blue: Lowest figures

Local Authority Staff working on Archaeology								
	2003	2006	2008	2010	2011	2012	2013	% change since 2003
North East	19.5	15.5	18.2	17.8	15.3	18.0	15.4	21% down
North West	24.0	31.0	34.0	33.0	19.0	21.1	20.5	15% down
Yorkshire and the Humber	29.0	41.3	33.5	31.5	30.5	31.2	34.2	17% up
West Midlands	43.3	50.1	49.3	47.9	46.4	45.1	41.5	4% down
East Midlands	44.5	47.1	48.0	47.7	40.1	40.2	38.8	13% down
East of England	46.7	66.0	63.4	60.1	57.6	63.0	62.6	34% up
London	10.0	15.0	12.0	11.0	11.0	8.8	9.5	5% down
South East	60.3	62.2	58.1	67.6	65.1	53.5	52.6	13% down
South West	69.2	79.0	84.6	68.8	66.2	61.0	57.1	17% down
England	346.4	407.2	401.1	385.3	351.1	341.8	332.01	4% down

Annex B: Emerging Models

<i>Model types</i>	<i>Advantages</i>	<i>Disadvantages</i>
Reduced Local Authority Archaeology Service	Provides some form of service; subject to the practitioners experience and knowledge of the area covered.	Effectiveness reduced, particularly if seniority reduced as well as numbers below critical mass.
Singleton post	Provides some form of service; subject to the practitioners experience and knowledge of the area covered.	Unlikely to effectively deliver on all aspects of a good archaeological service e.g. manage HER, give advice, and undertake proactive work. Isolation, lack of colleagues to consult
Shared/Service Level Agreement Local Authority service	Preserves a level of service and may be economical. Provides a well-defined and authoritative locus for advice	Hard to meet all needs unless adequately staffed.
Local Authority service merged with other disciplines/ professions	Survives as more than isolated post. Some cross-benefits from e.g. natural environment or museum colleagues. Positive benefits to merging with Building Conservation.	Advice may be lost within the range of other expert advice.
GLAAS model	Impartial advice; critical mass; transcends local political boundaries.	EH inherited this responsibility from previous administrative arrangements, which it did not elsewhere in England.
Income generation/ charging	Potential for (guaranteed) income e.g. agreements with key developers; FEPs. Opportunity for further re-investment in the service.	Influence work priorities; need to ensure objectivity in advice.
Externalised Trust	Subject to its funding arrangements – relationship with local authority retained, yet opportunity to seek/develop business elsewhere.	Hard to meet all needs unless adequately staffed. At risk of partners ceasing to fund.
Consultant contracted	Subject to contract details - can be sound.	May lack local knowledge; driven by cost pressures/targets which could undermine quality. May increase costs.

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