

HER CONSULTATION PAPER

Ministerial Foreword

In December 2000 the Government published 'The Historic Environment: A Force for Our Future', a wide-ranging policy statement setting out the Government's approach to managing the heritage of the UK with over 50 recommendations for action. One of these was to undertake a review of heritage protection. Another was to publish a consultation paper on the future of Sites and Monuments Records. This paper fulfils that commitment. The results of this consultation will feed into the wider review of heritage protection on which we shall be launching a public consultation in July.

This country has a uniquely rich and varied historic landscape. It includes archaeological sites, historic buildings, monuments and landscapes, parks and gardens, battlefields, towns and cities. It is a living record of the development of communities, the societies they create and reflects the values they hold and the technologies they devise.

The Government's approach to the historic environment is driven by three key principles. We need to protect our historic buildings, archaeology and landscape in the best way possible. We need to manage the future development of that national resource, in order to ensure sustainability, foster regeneration, serve the needs of local populations and support the tourism, agricultural and development industries that contribute so much to the economy of this country. And we need to widen access for everyone to the historic environment and develop the resources everybody needs to enjoy and learn about our heritage.

The Government is currently legislating to deliver an improved and streamlined land-use planning system. It is vital that consideration of the historic environment is fully embedded in the new system both locally and nationally. A key factor in achieving that is the quality, availability and comprehensiveness of the records

which planners and archaeologists need to protect and manage the historic environment.

At the same time the growing interest in the historic environment means that records originally developed for planners and archaeologists may be in a form which discourages their wider social, land management or educational use. This paper invites views on how best to ensure that the riches currently held in Sites and Monuments Records across the country can be developed and made available to professionals, schools and colleges and the wider public alike.

The Government aims to work with all parts of the sector to develop workable solutions that are flexible and responsive to demand, and I am extremely pleased that this consultation is a joint initiative with ALGAO and English Heritage. Our aim is to listen to those who use and maintain Sites and Monuments Records in order to learn from their expertise and to reach out to potential new audiences and find out what services they would like.

The historic environment is one of our greatest resources. It brings social, economic and environmental benefits and affects every one of us. It educates us about our past and informs our future. This consultation is an opportunity to make a real difference to the way in which we manage access for everyone to information about our heritage. I look forward to receiving your views.

ANDREW McINTOSH

Introduction

Sites and Monument Records contain information on a wide range of archaeological sites, monuments and landscapes of all periods. Many also contain information on historic buildings and settlements. Sites and Monuments Records are maintained and managed by local authorities as the essential core of wider historic environment services. While they were initially developed to provide advice through the planning system, they are now used extensively for sustainable management of the landscape, in education and outreach and play a key role in social, economic and environmental development, for example, through regeneration initiatives.

'*A Force for Our Future*' welcomed the enhancement of Sites and Monuments Records to make their scope more comprehensive and to facilitate access through the use of electronic media. Such expansion and improvement could include historic buildings, conservation areas, historic battlefields and historic parks and gardens. This expansion of remit brings with it an expansion of the role of the services managing those records.

However, the picture is much wider than this, and the historic environment needs to be considered in its entirety. Sites protected by statutory designation make up only some 10% of the historic landscape resource. Even this is a constantly evolving record where buildings and monuments will be added and removed from the various lists and schedules. Designation regimes and criteria may change in the future and new management strategies may be developed to manage individual sites and the wider area in which they are situated. As the body of knowledge grows and values change, features currently unrecognised may be deemed historically or archaeologically significant.

This approach to the historic environment as an integrated whole rather than a collection of individual features protected by law has stimulated the development of Historic Environment Records or Services from the Sites and Monuments Records of the past.

The historic environment includes all aspects of our surroundings that have been built, formed or influenced by human activities from earliest to most recent times. An Historic Environment Record stores and provides access to systematically organised information about these surroundings in a given area. It is maintained and updated for public benefit in accordance with national and international standards and guidance.

An Historic Environment Record makes information accessible to all in order to:

- advance knowledge and understanding of the historic environment;
- inform its care and conservation;
- inform public policies and decision-making on land-use planning and management;
- contribute to environmental improvement and economic regeneration;
- contribute to education and social inclusion;
- encourage participation in the exploration, appreciation and enjoyment of the historic environment.

The sheer volume of records currently held at local and national level demonstrates the richness of the resource and the challenges we face in making this publicly available in a form that meets the needs of a range of users. In 1995, it was estimated that Sites and Monuments Records in England would hold over one million retrievable records by the year 2005.¹ In fact this has proved to be a conservative estimate – it is estimated that we have reached that figure already.

We recognise that the pattern of Historic Environment Records varies enormously across the country. Some records are still used in the main by archaeologists, local authority planners and conservation officers, and for agri-environment schemes and the like, and have remained very much a professional tool. Others have been able to widen access further to schools and colleges, interested local groups and other members of the general public, and have given thought to developing outreach strategies to attract and inform new users. Some have also produced focused materials to encourage teachers to make use of the historic environment as a valuable teaching resource. While the level of resource available to individual Sites

and Monuments Records has historically been a factor limiting some, there is a wealth of good practice and expertise to draw upon.

This consultation builds on the work of the Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers (ALGAO) and English Heritage in determining benchmarks for good practice for historic environment records, and considers how we might move to achieving this across the country. It seeks views on the statutory status of these records, where they should be located and how they could be accessed as well as the crucial role of technology in developing interoperability and sustainability.

Identifying the needs of existing and potential users of Historic Environment Records is essential to developing a responsive and flexible service. These will of course vary in scale and subject from area to area. The Government will draw on the experience of those who manage Historic Environment Records to underpin the development of strategy in this area.

The paper also focuses on outreach and education. We would welcome the views of the education community on the ways in which Historic Environment Records can be used to raise the profile of the historic environment as a teaching resource for schools, colleges and lifelong learning.

¹ Darvill and Fulton 1998

QUESTIONS FOR CONSULTATION

Use and Awareness

A Force for Our Future recognised Sites and Monuments Records as an extremely valuable resource with many potential uses.

'The Government welcomes the recommendation in *Power of Place* that the service offered by Historic Environment Records should be enhanced, that their scope should be more comprehensive, and that access to the information held should be facilitated through use of the electronic media.'

This consultation aims to identify which services existing users find currently useful and how these could be developed in the future to be even better. We aim to raise the profile of Historic Environment Records as a resource, identify new target groups and understand what services would attract them to make use of Historic Environment Records.

The Government believes that Historic Environment Records will not only have the scope to widen access and develop further meaningful content, but in doing so will be able to create effective partnerships within the sector. Maximising the benefits of partnership working, sharing skills and expertise and creating synergies echoes the *A Force For Our Future* commitment and can contribute to developing the future role and profile of Historic Environment Records.

1. Are you aware of the national network of Historic Environment Records?
2. If you have used them now or in the past, why do you use Historic Environment Records?
3. How do you use them – for example, do you visit the Historic Environment Records office or do you access the Historic Environment Records via the Internet?
4. If you do not use them yourself, what is your interest in Historic Environment Records?

Scope

The current Government approach is to move towards consideration of the historic landscape as a whole, rather than as a collection of individual features. In addition, there is an increasing emphasis on the integrated management of natural and historic features and landscape through mechanisms such as agri-environment schemes. In future, Historic Environment Records will need to reflect this.

In considering how future Historic Environment Records might best serve their varied users it is important to identify the scope and content of the future record as well as considering how best services might be extended. This might include an extension of chronology, geographical coverage and boundaries – for example – cutting across local authority boundaries. Historically, there may have been arbitrary dividing lines which have developed as a result of geo-political or funding boundaries, but which may not be appropriate in the future and may actively discourage people from using Historic Environment Records. For instance, a teacher researching regional industrial history will not wish to visit a number of individual Historic Environment Records to collate useful information.

- 5. In what ways have you found the content currently available in Historic Environment Records to be useful?**
- 6. If you think the content of Historic Environment Records could be improved in any way, please could you suggest how?**
- 7. What developments need to take place to Historic Environment Records to enable them to contribute most effectively to integrated land management?**

User services and Access

Access is a key consideration for those planning effective service delivery. Although in some cases this may mean physical access to view the record, it increasingly includes making use of new media, digital TV and interactive technologies. Local authorities have a presence on the web, and the Government's National Grid for Learning Initiative has led to all schools, colleges, universities, libraries and as many community centres as possible having internet access by the end of 2002.

Ensuring that current and potential users are not discouraged or excluded from accessing Historic Environment Records is crucial to their future success. There is additional scope for partnership at regional level (or beyond) for groups of Historic Environment Records to join together in developing innovative ICT solutions.

- 8. How do you currently access the information in Historic Environment Records?**
- 9. How would you like this information to be delivered, and where?**
- 10. How could the service be improved?**

Education

Historic Environment Records represent an enormous and untapped resource for teachers, schools and colleges across many disciplines.

The potential benefits to students of all ages of developing effective partnerships between local authorities, schools and teachers are clear. Only by including those delivering the curriculum will the aims of a course of study be realised; effective and valuable teaching materials be developed; the richness of the resource be tapped and the visibility of the Historic Environment Records as an educational resource be acknowledged within authorities. The added value that the Historic Environment records brings to education within an authority could then be fully taken into account when priority planning is undertaken.

- 11. How could Historic Environment Record information best be developed to be most useful in education at all levels?**

Outreach

Some Historic Environment Records have already undertaken a great deal of thinking about the way in which they market themselves to their local communities and make various groups aware of the services they offer. Others have not yet had the opportunity to do this.

Where this is most successful Historic Environment Records have been able to identify previously excluded groups and have developed programmes or materials designed to be accessible and relevant to the groups' interests. This could include a 'friends of' group of a specific local feature or the history of particular community groups – perhaps those who feel they have seen little evidence of their own group's contribution in their previous experience of being taught history.

Successful outreach may mean raising awareness of the contents of the Historic Environment Record and how to gain access to it. It may mean correcting previously held misapprehensions. It may mean demonstrating to people that the resources are available and easy to access; and that enquiries are welcome.

- 12. How should Historic Environment Records publicise themselves?**
- 13. What programmes should Historic Environment Records develop to reach previously excluded groups?**
- 14. What should Historic Environment Records do to reach out to socially excluded/special interest groups?**

Information Management

In *A Force for Our Future*, the Government endorsed Sites and Monuments Records as useful tools and paved the way for widening their services and audiences.

Benchmark proposals for Historic Environment Records are attached to this document. The proposals have been drawn up by English Heritage and ALGAO. They were arrived at on the basis of a survey of existing records, consultation with Historic Environment Records and a partnership seminar.

These proposals represent national standards for Historic Environment Records, both in terms of the information they hold and the service they provide. The standards have been agreed in consultation with the sector. However, they are entirely voluntary at present and remain aspirational for some Historic Environment Records.

- 15. Do you consider that the enclosed standards represent an appropriate and sustainable way forward for Historic Environment Records?**
- 16. Do you consider that there are there additional ways in which Government can help support the sustainable development of Historic Environment Records?**

Organisational Management

Location

With the development of regional government, new opportunities arise – for example, enabling Historic Environment Records within a region (and beyond) to operate as a unit through a single portal. Such an arrangement would provide an opportunity for continued access to historic environment information at a local level, while also enabling the development of regional and pan-regional overviews.

- 17. How might Historic Environment Records provide information in a form which can be collated at regional level while retaining responsiveness and accommodating change at local level?**

Status

At present, county, unitary and other local authorities provide Sites and Monuments Records as part of a wider historic environment service. Historically this has been because local authorities see and value the historic environment across the country. Nonetheless Historic Environment Records remain vulnerable when other spending priorities arise.

18. Should local authorities be required to maintain Historic Environment Records and to a particular standard?

Funding

The current funding of Sites and Monuments Records comes largely from local authorities. There are a number of other streams available, but these tend to be focused on specific initiatives (e.g. Heritage Lottery Fund).

We recognise that the information in Historic Environment Records is essential for managing land and the environment, planning development, tourism and education but that at present the funding does not fully reflect all those interests. Unless we are able to channel appropriate funding to Historic Environment Records, then progress towards the higher level services will be on a slower track. This means consideration not only of the appropriate levels of funding to achieve these goals, but additionally of the forms that these funding streams might take. There may be opportunities presented by the development of regional government to tackle some of these problems.

English Heritage and ALGAO are currently undertaking work to quantify the funding required to enable Historic Environment Records to fulfil their wider remit. The results of this consultation will help to inform that work and will also be fed into wider Government thinking on the review of the heritage protection framework.

19. What sources of funding would be most suitable to help maintain and develop Historic Environment Records and why?

Conclusion

Next steps

We hope to consult as widely as possible and to prompt views from a representative cross-section of interested parties. The consultation paper will be available on the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and English Heritage websites and circulated widely amongst local authorities, those with an interest in land management, regional development agencies, heritage bodies, the education sector, local interest groups and amenity societies, academics and archaeologists and those who have experience of developing national and regional databases in other fields. It will be made available free of charge to all other interested parties on request.

Responses to the consultation will be carefully read and evaluated. A summary of the responses will be made available on the Department for Culture, Media and Sport website. The Government will consider the views and proposals received and develop and take forward an action plan. The action plan is likely to be published early in 2004.

Consultation arrangements

Unless stated otherwise, we will assume that all contributions can be made available to public scrutiny.

Please send all responses by 31 October 2003 to the following address:

Eve Trueman
Architecture and Historic Environment Division
Department for Culture, Media and Sport
2-4 Cockspur St
London SW1Y 5DH

Or e-mail, quoting 'HER consultation response' in the title box to:

HERecords@culture.gsi.gov.uk

We aim to respond to all contributions acknowledging receipt. If you do not receive a response within 15 working days, please call us on 020 7211 2349 to check that your contribution has been received.

10. How could the service be improved?

11. How could Historic Environment Record information best be developed to be most useful in education at all levels?

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13. What programmes should Historic Environment Records develop to reach previously excluded groups?

- 14. What should Historic Environment Records do to reach out to socially excluded/special interest groups?**
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