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Historic England Strategy for Developing Research Resources

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Historic England Strategy for Developing Research Resources

1 The Role of Historic England

The historic environment is “All aspects of the environment resulting from the interaction between people and places through time, including all surviving physical remains of past human activity, whether visible, buried or submerged, and landscaped and planted or managed flora”¹ (National Planning Policy Framework 2012).

Historic England is the government's expert advisory service for England's historic environment. We give constructive advice on the historic environment to local authorities, owners and the public. We champion historic places helping people to understand, value and care for them, now and for the future.

2 The Case for Change

The Research Framework model (described further in section 6) is nearly 20 years old and in this time the sector has seen significant changes in how it manages the historic environment, specifically within the planning process, and in relation to how research is generated and coordinated. In addition, while there have been significant successes, there is some evidence of a lack of utility of Research Resources in terms of planning-led investigations.

The most significant issues that need to be addressed and which have an impact on the development of Research Resources are:

2.1 Changes in planning legislation, principally the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2012), and also the Marine and Coastal Access Act (2009).

In the NPPF, there is a requirement on “developers to record and advance understanding of the significance of any heritage assets to be lost (wholly or in part) in a manner proportionate to their importance and the impact”. (NPPF, Para. 141).

In order to assist in the assessment of significance “local planning authorities should have up-to-date evidence about the historic environment in their area and use it to assess the significance of heritage assets and the contribution they make to their

¹ National Planning Policy Framework, 2012. Annex 2, p. 52.

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6077/2116950.pdf

environment. They should also use it to predict the likelihood that currently unidentified heritage assets, particularly sites of historic and archaeological interest, will be discovered in the future.” (NPPF, Para. 169).

Effective operation of the planning system as set out above relies on up-to-date syntheses of our current understanding and by extension the gaps in our knowledge. This will assist local authorities, national agencies and developers in making a proportionate response to planning applications.

2.2 Issues associated with the current model of Research Frameworks.

Recent reports, including [Southport](#)²(2011), have highlighted issues and inconsistencies in Research Frameworks in terms of focus, coverage and scale. In particular they tend to give less recognition to the built environment and therefore do not provide an holistic view of the historic environment. There are also issues in their currency in terms of reflecting new understanding and may be too high level at individual project level. These issues are reflected in their take up, which in some regions is patchy. It could be argued that in their traditional format as defined in *Frameworks for our Past* (Olivier, 1996) they are not longer fit for purpose.

2.3 The need for integration to maximise public benefit of scarce resources in the context of [capacity loss](#)³in Historic Environment service provision in local authorities.

2.4 The desire to bring academic and community research into closer integration with commercially funded work.

2.5 The need to engage with advances in information and communications technology and how the sector now consumes, produces and disseminates information and understanding.

2.6 The need to respond to changes in the funding model and criteria for university departments and associated research, in particular the introduction of the [Research Excellence Framework](#)⁴ (REF) 2014.

² Southport Group Report. Realising the Benefits of Planning-led Investigations in the Historic Environment: A Framework for Delivery, p 14-16. <http://www.archaeologists.net/sites/default/files/node-files/SouthportreportA4.pdf>

³ A fourth Report on Local Authority Staff Resources. <http://www.historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/sixth-report-la-staff-resources/>

⁴ REF2014 Research Excellence Framework. <http://www.ref.ac.uk/>

3 Historic England's Role in Developing Research Resources

Historic England has a role in assisting the sector in developing a research culture. This is set out in the National Heritage Act 1983 (Revised 2002) as one of the duties of the Commission to “promote the public’s enjoyment of, **and advance their knowledge of**, ancient monuments and historic buildings situated in England and their preservation”⁵.

This Strategy sets out how we will contribute to the delivery of this duty.

4 Aim of the Strategy

In the context of the [Historic England Action Plan](#)⁶ (2015-18), this Strategy contributes to Corporate Plan Objective 2.4: Encourage others to research and articulate the significance of heritage. Historic England will help by setting out our research priorities and assisting the sector to do the same; by developing guidance for assessing significance to support better protection outcomes; and by supporting work to ensure the full value of developer-led investigation is realised.

This Strategy aims to ensure that historic environment investigation is undertaken within a positive and progressive research culture, so that public benefit and value for money are maximised.

5 Objectives

- 5.1 In response to the Southport Group report (2011) to promote a better-coordinated research culture and better informed heritage protection outcomes from commercial investigations.
- 5.2 To develop key research tools required to ensure the efficient functioning of the NPPF.
- 5.3 To set out the criteria for Historic England funding of Research Resources (Research Frameworks and Reference Resources) within the context of the NHPP and the essential Supporting Actions that underpin the Plan.

⁵ National Heritage Act, 1983. <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1983/47/crossheading/historic-buildings-and-monuments-commission-for-england>

⁶ Historic England Action Plan, 2015-18. <https://www.historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/he-action-plan-2015-18/>

6 Historic England, Research Frameworks and Reference Resources

6.1 Research Frameworks

The current model of Research Frameworks was established in 1996 with the publication of *Frameworks for our Past* (Olivier, 1996). The development of these frameworks was in response to the extensive increase in archaeological investigations as a result of the introduction of Planning Policy Guidance 16 (PPG-16). The aim of Research Frameworks was to provide a research focus to this development-led work and to aid local government curators in making decisions. Primarily with an archaeological focus, the model is based on a three-stage process:

Resource Assessment – “a statement of the current state of knowledge and a description of the archaeological resource”.

Agenda – “a list of the gaps in that knowledge, of work which could be done, and of the potential for the resource to answer questions”.

Strategy – “a statement setting out priorities and method” (Olivier, 1996).

A variety of Research Frameworks have been produced, including:

- Geographical (e.g. [regional](#)⁷, county, Urban Archaeological Databases).
- Thematic (e.g. historical mining, [Research Agenda for Historic Buildings in West Yorkshire](#)⁸).
- Chronological (e.g. period based – [Palaeolithic](#)⁹).
- Site specific (e.g. World Heritage Sites – [Hadrian’s Wall](#)¹⁰).

⁷ East Midlands Updated Research Agenda and Strategy. <https://www.historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/east-midlands-heritage/>

⁸ Research Agenda for Historic Buildings in West Yorkshire. <http://www.archaeology.wyjs.org.uk/documents/archaeology/Published%20Version%20Historic%20Buildings%20Research%20Agenda.pdf>

⁹ Research and Conservation Framework for the British Palaeolithic. <https://www.historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/research-and-conservation-framework-for-british-palaeolithic/>

¹⁰ Hadrian's Wall Research Framework. <http://www.dur.ac.uk/archaeology/research/projects/?mode=project&id=485>

Research Frameworks are intended to be used within the historic environment sector:

- As an important evidence base alongside Historic Environment Records (HER)/ Urban Archaeological Databases (UAD) datasets, Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) and National Mapping Programme (NMP).
- To assist with the assessment of significance of heritage assets.
- To inform the scale of investigation required as part of mitigation and provide a research focus to development-led investigations.
- To coordinate research by engaging with, feeding from and influencing research priorities of academic and local society research and investigations.
- In conjunction with existing [Historic England National Thematic Strategies](#)¹⁰ to prioritise research work, bring together different areas of the sector and to unlock funding streams.
- For academic institutions undertaking commercially funded work, to inform Quality Reviews in research output.

6.2 Reference Resources

These works of specialist synthesis have for many years been the essential building blocks of historic environment research. They help researchers to identify and understand all aspects of past human life including the natural and historic environment. They are used to inform all areas of basic and applied research, including identification, classification, chronological sequencing and site comparison. Reference Resources are closely associated with Research Frameworks – generating new understanding to inform and update Frameworks as well as being the product of gaps identified by research agendas.

¹¹ Historic England National Thematic Strategies.
<http://historicengland.org.uk/research/approaches/research-principles/research-strategies/>

They can include all immovable and movable heritage - object, building, site, landscape and material type syntheses, for example:

- Typologies (e.g. Anglo Saxon button brooches).
- Reference Collections (e.g. EH Botanical Reference Collection).
- Corpora (e.g. [Corpus of Romanesque Sculpture](#)¹²).
- Syntheses (e.g. [Introduction to Heritage Assets - Mills](#)¹³).
- Thesauri, Word lists & Classification Schemes (e.g. HE Building Materials Thesaurus).
- Glossaries (e.g. EH Timber Structures Glossary).

7 What will Success of this Strategy Look Like?

The strategy will succeed if we put in place a revised way of producing Research Frameworks and Reference Resources that:

- 7.1 Are firmly linked to the planning process, terrestrial and marine, to provide up-to-date evidence bases, to aid in the assessment of significance, inform planning decision making and provide a research focus to historic environment investigations.
- 7.2 Support assessment of national importance and significance.
- 7.3 Meet the practical requirements of the historic environment sector.
- 7.4 Are widely available, well supported and comprehensive (incorporating all aspects of the historic environment) – providing an integrated network of Research Frameworks.
- 7.5 Encourages partnerships and collaborative working within the sector.
- 7.6 Are kept up to date and engage with new discoveries, approaches and technologies.
- 7.7 Can identify and prioritise the funding of new Research Resources.

¹² The Corpus of Romanesque Sculpture in Britain and Ireland. <http://www.crsbi.ac.uk/>

¹³ Introductions to Heritage Assets – Mills. <http://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/iha-mills/>

8 Strategy

The strategy will guide the development of a new generation of Research Frameworks and provide a prioritisation process for Reference Resources, which is based on need, timeliness and value for money.

The first stage of this strategy is set out in the following Action Plan.

9 Action Plan

The Action Plan sets out the work required to deliver this Strategy. It is to be delivered in three main phases outlined below, which are underpinned by core knowledge transfer tasks.

The first two phases are high priority for the first period of the strategy. The third is dependent on the outcomes of the first two phases and on interfaces with other Supporting Actions' strategies, in particular the Information Access Strategy, and on progress of other relevant NHPP measures. The details of this Action Plan are to be developed as part of the implementation of the strategy.

Three main phases of work to be delivered as part of this Strategy are:

9.1 Evaluation.

9.2 Identification and Prioritisation of Gaps.

9.3 Scoping and Testing of New Options and Methods.

Underpinning these work streams are the core activities of the HE Research Resources Officer post in the Capacity Building Team.

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