

Layla Moran MP
Conservation, Places & People APPG

[submitted via online form]

29 January 2021

Dear Ms Moran,

Re: 21st Century Places: Values and Benefits inquiry

Thank you for the opportunity to provide evidence to this inquiry on behalf of the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (ClfA). There is a staggering amount of evidence which shows that the historic environment is a crucial factor in supporting regeneration and brings economic, social, and environmental benefits.

Our organisational focus is on physical remains of the human past, whether built, buried, on land or underwater, extraordinary or everyday, magnificent or mundane. All of these heritage assets contribute to our historic environment. The resources of the historic environment, like those of the natural environment, are for the benefit of everyone in society, today and in the future, and need to be treated with care and expertise.

We are grateful for the Group's interest in making this evidence more widely known and ensuring that it is applied to our aspirations for better placemaking, health and wellbeing. With this in mind, we have chosen to focus our evidence on the issues of planning reform and cuts to local authorities.

About us

The Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (ClfA) is the leading professional body representing archaeologists working in the UK and overseas. ClfA promotes high professional standards and strong ethics in archaeological practice, to maximise the benefits that archaeologists bring to society, and provides a self-regulatory quality assurance framework for the sector and those it serves.

ClfA has over 3,900 members and over 80 registered practices across the United Kingdom who study and care for the past through its physical remains. Our members work in all branches of the discipline: heritage management, planning advice, excavation, finds and environmental study, buildings recording, underwater and aerial archaeology, museums, conservation, survey, research and development, teaching and liaison with the community, industry and the commercial and financial sectors.

Our evidence

What are the implications of the government’s reforms to the English planning system, proposed in the planning white paper, for the conservation and regeneration of historic areas?

We welcome the Government’s commitment to ensuring economic recovery through an ambitious programme of infrastructure spending and housebuilding. We are also keen to ensure that the planning system is both streamlined *and* effective. There is certainly room for improvement, and we want to work with government to ensure that development-led archaeology contributes to these goals by effective investigation, leading to greater understanding and conservation of heritage assets before and during development.

We are pleased that MHCLG has confirmed¹ that the Government is committed to the protection of the historic environment and that “heritage considerations, including the need for archaeological surveys, will continue to be taken into account in bringing forward any planning reforms”. The Secretary of State, Robert Jenrick, has also personally stated to us that his intention is to not only maintain but strengthen provisions for the historic environment. However, we are concerned that the proposals in the White Paper do not provide any information that confirms this intention.

For example, there is no explanation for how heritage assets with archaeological interest (which can occur in all places) will be protected within areas where streamlined consent processes are to be developed (Growth and Renewal areas).

We have developed proposals for how archaeological research could work within the framework of the white paper and would ensure positive outcomes for the historic environment. These proposals include the development of a rapid assessment methodology to be undertaken at the area allocation and plan-making stage, so that in-principle consideration of impacts on the historic environment (in particular, heritage assets with archaeological interest) can be informed at the stage that ‘automatic consent’ is provided.

This approach would be based on the approach of rapidly triaging/sifting information, estimating the likelihood that unknown heritage assets could be discovered, and building a set of ‘ground rules’ (which would be included in the local plan) for handling archaeological treatment of known, unknown, and unforeseeable heritage assets.

¹ <https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-07-15/74420/>

We believe that there is the potential for a thoughtfully designed system to enable greater levels of certainty for developers, making 'reserved matters' fewer and easier to scope. It could also allow for an area-wide approach to archaeology, rather than site-by-site interventions making archaeological research more structured and thoughtful, less formulaic, and allowing it to deliver better outcomes for placemaking and hence greater public benefit, as well as being more efficient and potentially less costly.

Investing in parallel improvements to Historic Environment Records (HERs) could improve the value of rapid assessment methodologies and contribute to progressive improvements to speed and effectiveness of up-front archaeological assessment. Essentially, providing better, and more accessible, baseline information to reduce uncertainty and the minimise the costs of overcoming it.

We are also pushing for HER services to be made a statutory requirement in the new system (there are formerly proposed English solutions for a statutory duty, as well as a model used in Wales). This would ensure that local services met minimum benchmarks and would help ensure the provision of adequate information and expertise.

We also need to assure the plan-making, advisory and enforcement functions that these services draw on, but are not part of the record itself, are protected or enhanced. There is a need to invest in some under-developed HERs and under-resourced (occasionally non-existent) services. There is thinking about how the new planning system could refine the function of HER services, with models for delivery structures the subject of some sectoral research and debate. We recognise that any changes arising from local government reorganisation will one key determinant of how services may be required to adapt, but their importance under the new planning system will be great and the justification for investment is strong for the placemaking benefits that stronger plan-making and advisory roles can have.

We are also keen to see Government explore seriously the opportunities for land value capture that the Housing and Local Government Committee's 2019 [report](#) investigated, and that we believe would be an appropriate innovation for the new system which could help to resource archaeological investigation which will now be required in advance of a traditional planning application.

In effect, there should be a *quid pro quo* for the certainty that development in growth zones would provide for developers, with likely uplift in value for landowners in these areas. A part of this uplift could be captured to pay for additional evaluative work that will be required at allocation and plan-making stages, when consent will be, in effect, granted. This would not be an additional burden, but a re-timed one. The costs of

providing information that permits decision-making are currently incurred largely at post-application, pre-determination stage: they would shift to a charge for allocation, or taking up an allocation.

We recognise that there is a considerable amount of detail missing from the proposals at this stage, but we would welcome support from the APPG to highlight the need to address these gaps with professionals from the historic environment sector.

If no proactive policy such as the one we are proposing is developed, there is a potential for existing safeguards for the historic environment – particularly the 90+% of heritage assets which are not subject to statutory designation – to be reduced or wiped out. The reforms could also easily end up undermining the existing process for developer contributions to assessing and evaluating impacts on the historic environment prior to determination of a planning application.

There is also a danger that due to the complexity of the process, that the historic environment is pigeon holed, meaning the key areas of policy likely to decide the future conservation of heritage assets and their contribution to places could be decided without input from heritage specialists.

Beyond that Planning for the Future white paper, we are concerned that the Government's commitment to creeping permitted development rights is fatally flawed, and that a serious erosion of planning control and the ability to influence good placemaking. This is undermining many of the potential opportunities that future planning reform could address. We are concerned that the Government's record on this issue could indicate that constructive proposals for the white paper may not be given the consideration that they merit, and that protections for the historic environment – along with sustainable placemaking – could fall through the cracks of a much more permissive and de-regulated system as a result.

What have been the impacts of cuts in local government to the capacity of planning departments to facilitate the conservation and regeneration of sensitive historic areas?

Figures collected over the past decade have shown the stark decline in historic environment specialists employed in local authorities in England over this period. Since 2006 the number of conservation specialists has declined by 35% and the number of archaeological specialists has also fallen by 35%.

Within this overall decline there are many differences across different areas, with some areas down to 1 FTE or less to cover one or more local authority areas. There have been periods where some areas have had no archaeological coverage, and severe decline in overall capacity and range of activities provided by specialist conservation officers and archaeologists.

These historic environment services create public benefit by

- *advancing understanding through community engagement, research, furtherance and dissemination of knowledge, and the creation and maintenance of accessible HERs and archaeological archives*
- *contributing to achievement of Sustainable development through managing change to heritage assets and historic landscapes in a way that as far as possible sustains or enhances their significance and that of their setting*
- *contributing to the realisation of social, economic, and environmental benefits including include promoting local distinctiveness, pride and a sense of place, stimulating inward investment and regeneration, and promoting wellbeing through encouraging physical activity, participation and volunteering, and providing leisure and learning opportunities*

They undertake a huge range of tasks including

- maintaining HERs
- advising on the implementation of national planning guidance to sustain and enhance the significance and setting of local heritage assets
- monitoring compliance with planning requirements including conditions on behalf of planning authorities
- advising on the management of the rural historic environment
- community outreach and education

Due to cuts of the past 10 years, many of these roles have been scaled back or stopped entirely. Investment in HER improvement is limited, even at a time when technological advances are creating huge opportunities for benefit, for instance as a result of improving digital data accessibility and standardisation.

As stated above in relation to the planning reform agenda, specialist historic environment advisors (conservation professionals and archaeologists) are in need of support and investment in order to ensure good quality advice can provide the best value for money.

For examples, these services are most useful when enabled to conduct early engagement with developers as they can help to scope historic environment impacts and advise on approaches to yielding positive impacts of development on heritage significance and placemaking. For example, where archaeological advice is incorporated as part of the masterplanning process, developments can both minimise archaeological risk and deliver better development that enhances the historic environment by design. Poorly resourced local authority services, on the other hand, may be restricted to only providing advice at a later development control stage, where plans are already developed and cannot realistically be influenced as much to deliver positive outcomes for the historic environment.

We are extremely concerned that Government, though its planning agenda, is consistently asking for more from local planning authorities, without providing them additional resources to do it. Local Planning Authorities are blamed for failings in the system, and the approach has been to create disincentives (including financial penalties) for those failures. This has created a perverse incentive for local planning authorities to wave through unsustainable development and for developers to obfuscate in the hopes that proper scrutiny will not take place. This can be seen in the recent 'changes to the current planning system' consultation, or the current 'Supporting housing delivery and public service infrastructure' consultation, both of which we have strongly objected to.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rob Lennox', written in a cursive style.

Rob Lennox

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