



Culture Media and Sport Committee

**Inquiry into
*Caring for Our Collections***

**Summary Evidence of
The Institute of Historic Building Conservation**

2006

Submitted by
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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 This is the evidence of The Institute of Historic Building Conservation (IHBC) to the Culture Media and Sport Committee Inquiry on *Caring for our Collections*. It supplements the IHBC's evidence on *Protecting, Preserving and Making Accessible Our Nation's Heritage*, 2006. It has been prepared specifically for the Committee.
- 1.1.2 The IHBC welcomes the opportunity to address matters not covered in its previous evidence, but which are of increasing concern to its members.
- 1.1.3 We would welcome the opportunity to appear before the Committee, and to explain the issues noted and exemplified briefly below in more detail.

1.2 Content and Key Issues

- 1.2.1 In this evidence we respond to the questions in *Caring for Our Collections*, and also provide an IHBC response to points raised in paragraphs 139–141 of the Committee's Report on *Protecting, Preserving and Making Accessible Our Nation's Heritage*, 2006. Notably, we point to:
- a) major funding issues which go beyond the "one-off" task identified by the Committee in para 141;
 - b) major concerns, linked to threats of loss, in relation to accession, management and curation of hard copy and digital archives;
 - c) the need for linked management and record systems at local and sub-regional level; and
 - d) failures on the part of DCMS to take a holistic approach to the cultural heritage, to promote the historic environment within arts and culture strategies, and to integrate record-keeping for the heritage into government priorities and resourcing.

2 EVIDENCE

2.1 Funding

- 2.1.1 Issues of particular concern to IHBC in this context are:
- b) The lack of funding for existing hard copy archives which are under threat of disposal (Planning records, Building Plan and Notice Drawings, etc)
[e.g. Cambridge City Council Building Plan and Notice Drawings dating back to 1890, under threat of disposal due to lack of storage space; Peterborough City Council significant loss of conservation records ditto]
 - c) The lack of recognition and resourcing, by DCLG in succession to ODPM, of archiving and records management within and supporting planning and historic environment functions
[e.g. consequent failures at Cambridge City to get support for bids (successive years) for staff and project funding for urgently-needed digital data capture and management]
 - d) The needed for these archiving activities to be funded as core activities, essential to support the Heritage Protection Review (HPR), and not dependent on the Heritage Lottery Fund.
[these activities have to be ongoing, rather than project-based]

2.2 Acquisition / disposal

2.2.1 Information, in both hard copy and digital forms, is essential to support both the Heritage Protection Review and good conservation practice. In this context, the IHBC is concerned at:

- a) the lack of government guidance on retention / disposal
[resulting in
 - a) *a bare minimum of information being retained: e.g. listed building application forms and consents retained on microfiche, but not the plans which are essential to enable assessment of whether lawful works have been carried out;*
 - b) *retention / disposal decisions not being made by informed professionals – see f) below]*
- b) the implications of this lack of guidance for information systems to support HPR;
[e.g. loss of hard copy records, plans needed to inform proposals and allow assessment, etc]
- c) the HPR focus on digital media, rather than a holistic approach founded on the management and archiving of primary records;
[a holistic approach would involve integrated management of data, with key primary records held in archive form, property records held by owners (essential for Heritage Partnership Agreements, and Conservation and Management Plans) and local planning authorities, and the HER serving as the digital index to, and interpretation of, this spectrum of records. Archived primary records will need to continue to be held in non-digital form. Digital media do not enable the comparison, essential for assessment of building projects, of multiple plans at full size.]
- d) the lack of permanence of digital media and access to them;
 - a) *uncertain durability of CDs / DVDs;*
 - b) *systems vulnerability to changes in hardware / software;*
 - c) *systems failing: e.g. the ORION system, presented to the IHBC Annual School in 1998 as an ideal way of recording and managing work on historic buildings, no longer exists]*
- e) server and other hardware capacity issues, and costs, arising from large volumes of data (including photos, plans etc) contained in records relating to historic sites
 - a) *insufficient capacity on Cambridge City Council Planning server for current photo and plan storage needs;*
 - b) *increased information storage needs to support Conservation Area appraisals, management and review as required by Best Value Indicator BV 219]*
- f) risks of loss of archived records (hard copy or digital) through destruction by unaware hands
[Cambridge City: loss of data relating to still-extant listed building consents, and unauthorised works, through microfiching by admin staff;
Fenland: loss of digitally-held data relating to Article 4 Directions, due to wiping by IT staff]
- g) the resource costs involved in ensuring appropriate professional input into archive management and disposal
 - a) *informed professional input is needed for sifting and assessing what information should be retained as primary archive, what to be digitised, and what to be discarded;*
 - b) *ongoing professional input is need to ensure management and updating of records, replacement of deteriorating media, adaptation to new hardware etc;*
 - c) *Cambridge City: expectation that Conservation team takes charge of its own data sets, including the above additional activities, and training, but with no extra resources]*

2.3 The role of DCMS

2.3.1 The IHBC is concerned at the extent to which DCMS has not achieved an effective lead in relation to holistic management of the Heritage, and notably (for IHBC and its

members) in the failure to achieve effective links and synergies with DCLG. This “silo” approach on the part of government has potentially major implications for archiving, records and information management in general, and particularly to support the Heritage Protection Review. Particular issues of concern to IHBC include:

- a) the failure to develop or promote coherent and holistic data standards for the cultural heritage as a whole, including the curation and dissemination of information relating to its stewardship, as an integral part of arts and culture strategies;

[The data standards which have been developed by English Heritage, DCMS, and ALGAO relate to archaeology, not to the wider historic environment. The IHBC queried this approach in its response to the DCMS Consultation on Historic Environment Records, arguing for a radical holistic review of data standards to match the radical (and concurrent) Heritage Protection Review consultation. At the time of making that response, the IHBC was unaware of the 1998 Council of Europe publication “Documenting the Cultural Heritage” (ISBN 0-89236-543-9) which contains standards relating to archaeological sites, cultural objects, and historic buildings. These standards appear well suited to an integrated approach to the cultural heritage; they have been in existence throughout the lifetime of DCMS and the development of its Heritage Protection Review]

- b) the failure to get DCLG recognition and resourcing of archiving and records management functions within local planning authorities;

[noted under 2.1.b) above]

- c) the lack of engagement with or influence on the ODPM (and now DCLG)’s development and promotion of e-government data management and standards, which give rise to incompatible systems and standards, and militate against dialogue and exchange of information between HERs and planning and historic building record systems;

[Electronic systems promoted by ODPM and DCLG, including PARSOL for planning applications, CAPS Uniform and other systems for process management, and NLIS (National Land Information System) to support electronic property transactions, have all been developed without reference to or compatibility with Exegesis, MIDAS, OASIS and other systems developed by and for the archaeological community to support Sites and Monument Records now Historic Environment Records.

a) CAPS Uniform and equivalent systems are the key to managing proposals affecting the historic environment, and the interactions involved (e.g. with Building Control) within the e-government environment;

b) CAPS has a module for Listed Buildings (as yet not fully functional), but none for Archaeology or Conservation Areas.

c) CAPS has no scope for direct data exchange with an HER, therefore requiring entry twice, on different systems, of all record notes made.

d) NLIS depends on accurate electronic provision of property data, including designations; however not all authorities have spatially captured their listed buildings, and very few have captured listed building curtilages (vital for accurate provision of information on legal constraints affecting properties). The need for, and costs of, such capture appear to have been entirely unanticipated by either DCMS or ODPM / DCLG]

- d) while recognising the efforts by DCMS and EH to explore the potential synergies arising from core DCLG and e-government initiatives (including Best Value Indicator BV 157 for putting information on the web; the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act; Customer Access Strategies), IHBC registers our concern at the major strategic and operational hurdles still to be addressed if we are to build successfully on these wider government initiatives;

[IHBC welcomes these efforts to respond to and deal with issues which the Institute has been raising for several years – notably in the 2005 Conference “Managing the Historic Environment in the Digital Age” which it organised in conjunction with the IFA – but there is still a very long way to go]

- e) the consequent missed opportunity to embed the management and dissemination of historic environment information and records into e-government and other general government activities, with the associated threat of creating a marginal, potentially high-cost and inefficient mechanism;
[the IHBC has suggested that this potential opportunity should be investigated as part of the HPR Strand B investigations]
- f) the focus, in the Heritage Protection Review, on the post-2010 digital environment without considering migration costs (as noted in the Committee's report), or (not noted in the Report) the costs of the associated archiving, and records management needs and costs within local planning authorities;
[the HPR Strand B investigations have not explored the costs of archiving material to be retained, or of managed disposal; the investigations have focused on improving existing HERs, not the full scope of records management including by local planning authorities]
- h) the failure to explore, within the Heritage Protection Review pilots, records management to support Heritage Partnership Agreements;
[Records kept by owners are vital (as noted by Lord Hankey, Chair of the 1999 Conference which introduced the Conservation Plan approach among Cambridge Colleges) to their awareness of the significance of heritage assets under their care, and hence to successful conservation. The HPR Pilots for Heritage Partnership Agreements could have provided an ideal opportunity for exploring issues and Possibilities relating to the management of records, in both public and private hands, to support conservation works. This key opportunity does not appear to have been taken.]
- i) the delays in liaising with DCLG to ensure integrated archiving policies and standards for records generated through the planning system.
[There has been no coherent support, or standards, covering the generation of non-archaeological building records generated by conditions on planning permissions or listed building consents. English Heritage's recently-published Recording guidance could provide the required basis, but as yet it remains little-publicised and without support from DCMS or DCLG]

3. Conclusion

- 3.1 The IHBC has been, and is keen to continue, working with the DCMS, DCLG, English Heritage, its fellow professional bodies the IFA and ALGAO, and others to try to address the issues noted above, in a holistic approach. It hopes that all involved will be able to work together to shared and integrated standards for the cultural heritage, developed to support HPR through a combination of hard copy archives and digital media, and with effective interchange between different record systems. This can only happen if sufficient resources, as well as appropriate standards, are made available.

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