

Questions for consultation

1. Are you aware of the national network of Historic Environment Records?

The Institute is aware of the national network of Sites and Monument Records, and of the recent change of name to Historic Environment Records. The Institute considers that this change of name is premature in the absence of a review, with full stakeholder involvement, of what a true "Historic Environment Record" should be. The Institute is very conscious that the current (largely County-based) records are focused on archaeology and have limited coverage of the wider historic environment; any truly national network of records needs to be both broader in scope and more widely accessible.

Awareness by the population in general is fairly limited. It would be useful to promote awareness of the resource and its usefulness for education, fact finding, research, etc.

2. If you have used them now or in the past, why do you use Historic Environment Records?

IHBC members use the record for numerous purposes including research and as an aid to professional planning duties. SMR ("HER") Records provide important historical and archaeological source material for underpinning conservation area appraisals and other policy work, and sometimes for individual buildings. For the latter, however, planning records (including past applications and photographs) and other records such as Building Plan and Notice Drawings held by Building Control may be of far more use; their significance as records is inadequately recognised.

3. How do you use them – for example, do you visit the Historic Environment Record office or do you access the Historic Environment Record via the Internet?

For IHBC members in local authorities, direct access in person is highly desirable. While records in electronic form can be helpful, they are not always a substitute for the real thing. In general, records need to be held as close as possible to where they are most needed. The internet offers a potentially convenient means of accessing remotely held records.

4. If you do not use them yourself, what is your interest in Historic Environment Records?

n/a

5. In what ways have you found the content currently available in Historic Environment Records to be useful?

The records are helpful in showing the nature and proximity of archaeology in relation to other sites. However this is only a very limited part of a coherent approach to managing the historic environment.

6. If you think the content of Historic Environment Records could be improved in any way, please could you suggest how?

The IHBC is very disappointed at this Review's narrow focus and lack of cross reference to the bigger picture, especially the parallel DCMS Review issued on the same day. A holistic approach is essential: consideration (see question 1 above) should have been given to the scope of what a true Historic Environment Record should be, before SMRs were renamed. This should now be undertaken as a matter of urgency. This consideration should be just as radical as, and fully integrated with, the suggestions made in the accompanying review

“Protecting Our Historic Environment – Making the System Work Better”. The content needs to embrace, as a minimum, all types of record involved in the historic environment.

However a truly holistic approach would recognise that records of the historic environment are a vital part of a sustainable approach to managing the environment generally. An integrated approach (such as is being promoted for Management Agreements in the parallel Review) would embrace Landscape History and Ecological Records. Such an approach is urgently needed to enable a coherent response to the potential impacts of Climate Change.

One of the most effective ways of improving the content would be to ensure, through a combination of guidance and resourcing, that effective procedures are in place for accessing records generated through the Planning System, other Regulatory systems (e.g. Building Control), and Management Agreements. The Review appears to have overlooked the key issues of archive creation and management.

7. What developments need to take place to Historic Environment Records to enable them to contribute most effectively to integrated land management?

Records need to be as comprehensive as possible, and with ease of access and use by a wide range of people. Integrated land management is only one part of the picture – what is needed is an integrated approach to managing the historic environment (see 6 above). This in turn requires owners and managers to adopt policies based on good and evolving information, and will depend as much on how they manage and use their own records as on the public records. HERs and other public records need to provide source material to assist the development of these privately-held records; arguably the most urgent need is to persuade landholders and other owners to adopt good practice in records management.

8. How do you currently access the information in Historic Environment Records?

Records are sometimes accessed through local authority GIS. Planning records, photographs etc are accessed directly.

9. How would you like this information to be delivered, and where?

The information needs to be available to general and academic researchers, property owners and the interested general public, planning authorities and professionals. Information needs to be as available as possible to all parties, and, as a general principle, as close as possible to the point of greatest use. Electronic records will be helpful in many but not all cases. The long-term durability of electronic records remains a concern (in terms of both permanence of the medium, and continued availability of the technology to access it). The internet will be helpful in enabling wide access.

10. How could the service be improved?

A radical review of the scope of HERs is needed (see 1 and 6 above). The review needs to consider:

1. the archives to be held, and their location(s);
2. the presentation/availability of individual records (in hard copy and/or electronic form);
3. their use, interpretation, and synthesis, particularly in developing awareness of the historic environment and its management, and informing those involved.

Promoting wider availability of records, as encouraged in this consultation, is only part of the story. Lessons need to be learned from best practice and visionary approaches, notably that of the (Hackney) Building Exploratory and its associated “Brickfields” website. The full vision could only be developed through integrated Historic Environment services and proper resourcing.

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

The overall approach needs consideration as part of the suggested radical review, and in conjunction with Government initiatives to promote the historic environment in education. Records should be accessible through searches, based on types, themes, locations, etc. Locally held records will be particularly useful for both formal and informal education.

12. How should Historic Environment Records publicise themselves?

There are various means. All schools and colleges should be targeted, leaflets could be distributed to local authority offices and public libraries, and banners could be used on appropriate web-sites.

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

Schools activities may offer the most direct and all-embracing opportunity for HERs to engage with the community as a whole, and individual groups within it. Involvement with local Cultural and Community Strategies, and support for Local Development Frameworks offer potential opportunities which need to be taken up. Availability through the internet may help in enabling some people to access the Records, but **local** availability of Records will be a key factor in engagement. It would be useful to evaluate and emulate examples of Outreach in local and regional settings.

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

See 13 above. Awareness of HERS could be raised by mirroring initiatives tried in such things as benefits awareness. However, it should be accepted that expressions of non-interest may be just that.

Special interest groups could include a wide range of organisations, from local civic societies to senior citizen groups. Some of these could be specifically targeted.

15. Do you consider that the enclosed standards represent an appropriate and sustainable way forward for Historic Environment Records?

They are welcome as suggestions for the way forward. They do not in themselves represent a sustainable way forward because they do not fully embrace the wider implications of what a Historic Environment Record should be, and have not as yet involved the wider Historic Environment community. A radical review is needed as part of an integrated approach to managing the historic environment, and dialogue with key stakeholders is needed to develop the standards (which are very welcome in principle) to deliver that approach.

16. Do you consider that there are there additional ways in which Government can help support the sustainable development of Historic Environment Records?

Historic Environment services should be made Statutory. The Government should instigate the suggested radical review, to include the wider historic environment, and an overview of records and archive management. Standards should be set and resources made available to ensure that all HERS attain the standards of the best.

- 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?**

Historic Environment Records will need to be developed and maintained on a multi-centric basis. A common compatible software system should be employed that can collate locally entered data at a regional and national level.

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

The maintenance of historic records by local authorities should be mandatory. There should be a common standard, to enable consistent collation and assessment of data, but the content and level of data maintained by individual authorities (local / unitary, counties, regions, should be appropriate to their respective roles and needs).

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

This should be part of central government funding for local government.