



## IHBC RESEARCH NOTES

### **Market Intelligence: Local Authority Conservation Specialists Jobs Market 2024**

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### **Executive Summary**

- The Institute's continuous data from 1998 (27 years) now covers 2,275 posts.
- For the third year in a row, 2024 saw a decline in the number of advertised vacancies. Down 13% on 2023 and by more than a quarter by comparison with 2021-22.
- Recruitment levels were broadly consistent in each quarter of the year but remain well below vacancies in the first decade of this century.
- Ninety-three percent of the vacancies were for full-time posts on the permanent establishment.
- Over the last three years there has been a distinct decline of fixed term posts with a similar decline in specifying part-time-hours.
- No fixed-term posts in 2024 were evidently supported by centrally generated grant-aid for specific projects.
- The average median salary for advertised posts in 2024 was £38,091 marking a rise of a mere 0.5% over the previous year.
- The equivalent average full-time salary (in the UK in 2024) according to Office of National Statistics calculations was £37,430.
- Sixty-eight percent of local government recruiters in 2024 expected job applicants to be Full Members of IHBC (or working towards this status), a percentage identical to 2023.
- Reactive development management advice, appeals and enforcement has continued to be the dominant prioritised job functions for the last two decades with limited prioritisation of more proactive tasks a likely reflection of continuing resource constraints.
- In 2024 there was a return to the long-term trend of salaries being higher than the national average in London and the South East and notably lower in the West Midlands.

- Only one post in North Branch was advertised in the whole of 2024 as was the case in 2023 covering Cleveland, Cumbria, Durham, Northumberland and Tyne & Wear.

*NB: although the IHBC is active across the United Kingdom, analysis in this Research Note relates only to information gleaned about England's Local Authorities. (see paragraph 1.4)*

## **1. Background**

1.1 This annual review aims to compliment other similar information gathered periodically by Local Authority Conservation Provision Studies undertaken by IHBC.

1.2 The Institute's cumulative data set relating to local authority conservation posts advertised commenced in 1998. This now comprises 2,275 posts over 27 years. [\[1\]](#)

1.3 IHBC analysis of local government job vacancies in the calendar year 2024 aims to help form a picture of the market in respect of workload requirements; qualifications; levels of remuneration etc.; regional variations and other trends. For the second year in succession, it was notable that the specific fixed-term nationally supported project posts had become negligible in number.

1.4 Advertised posts are monitored weekly and although statistics are collected for Scotland and Wales (but not Northern Ireland) this Note relates only to England as the annual total of vacancies for the other two Home Countries are statistically insignificant and insufficiently numerous to delineate separate meaningful statistics. [\[2\]](#)

1.5 Since 2015 data has also been collected where unsuccessful recruitment within six-months has required the local authority to re-advertise. In 2024 the number of re-advertisements remained relatively small (six v. seven in 2023) with four of the re-adverts within three months. In two other cases re-advertising took place after seven months and nine months respectively.

## **2. Size of the market**

2.1 Historically, advertised posts in England grew steadily in the late 1990s and for eight years between 2001 and 2006 exceeded 120 per year (with a peak of 158 in 2003). A sharp year-on-year fall then ensued so that by the depth of the Recession in 2011 and 2012 only 26 vacancies were advertised in each of those two years.

2.2 Recruitment has generally not returned to levels at the start of the century averaging only about a half to two-thirds of the pre-Recession numbers and some minor distortion in the market can also be attributed to the coronavirus pandemic.

2.3 The year 2024 has seen a further minor contraction in advertised posts, down 13% on 2023 and by more than a quarter by comparison with 2021-22 and may continue to reflect the parlous state of local government finances as referred to briefly in Section 8.

2.4 Numbers of advertisements for recruits were broadly similar in all four quarters in 2024.

### **3. Part-time working v. fixed-term posts**

3.1 It is noticeable that since the end of 2021 there has been a very clear return towards the traditional pattern of employment, i.e., permanent posts in 2024 (93%) is discerned, a feature of recruitment much more commonplace in the late 1990s. This now seems attributable to the conclusion of fixed-life grant-aided schemes. A notable reduction in part-time working was also evident.

### **4. General salary levels**

4.1 Advertised salaries are almost invariably expressed as a range. [\[3\]](#) Employers usually expect successful candidates to be appointed at the bottom of the quoted scale, progressing upward on the basis of qualifications and/or experience [\[4\]](#) but as has usually been noted in recent years, no vacancies in 2024 appeared to be tied to specific career progression milestones and thus to salary increments.

4.2 The average starting salary in England in 2024 was £35,091 with the average finishing salary £41,107 giving a median salary level of £38,091. This was only a very marginal increase (after a 5.1% rise in 2023 over 2022). By comparison, the Office of National Statistics calculates the average salary in the UK for full-time employees in 2024 was £37,430. [\[5\]](#).

4.3 Three caveats have been consistently applied to these annual assessments regarding potential distortions to the national conservation officer salary averages:

- a) at the bottom, 'career grade' posts (including interns and trainees) attract untypically low starting salaries - usually recruiting newly graduated but inexperienced staff; or, uncommonly high-end salaries (typically senior management positions) are mainly located in London LPAs and also reflect higher living costs; [\[6\]](#)
- b) regional variations - where higher salaries have traditionally been paid in London and the South-East throughout the period of this data set - and lower ones, usually in the West Midlands and South West; and,
- c) sampling sizes - where larger Branch samples overall tend to offset regional anomalies.

Further comment is made about this in Section 7 and footnote [\[15\]](#).

## 5. Qualifications and expertise

5.1 As has been noted for several years the stated educational requirements for vacancies have varied significantly. Those for 2024 are as set out in Table 1. Recruiters have not always explicitly referred to Full Membership of the IHBC (although have occasionally stated this to be an objective) nor was a distinction always made as to whether such membership was essential or merely desirable.

5.2 Nevertheless, it is worth highlighting that in 2024 a significant proportion of applicants (68%) were expected to be either Full Members of IHBC (or rather less commonly working towards full membership) and this was the percentage for posts in 2023. [\[7\]](#)

5.3 The requirement of posts for RTPI membership was not evident in 2024 although a Degree in Planning (or Architecture) was occasionally specified. Membership of other allied institutions (RICS or CifA) were not notably cited as a crucial qualifying requirement.

**Table 1. Educational Requirements (where IHBC uncategorised membership was also a consideration)**

	2024		2023	
Degree only	16	26.23%	8	11.43%
Degree + Post Graduate Qualification + IHBC	1	1.64%	4	5.71%
Degree + Post Graduate Qualification + RTPI	1	1.64%	1	1.42%
Degree + IHBC as the principal standard (with or without RTPI/RIBA as an alternative	37	60.65%	40	57.14%
Degree + RIBA membership only	-	-	1	1.42%
Qualification	-	-	5	7.14%
Qualification + IHBC (or RTPI)	3	4.92%	9	12.85%
Post Graduate Qualification	3	4.92%	-	-
Other: HNC 6-7, Prince 2 etc. only	-	-	2	2.85%
	61	100%	70	100%

## 6. Roles & responsibilities

6.1 There always needs to be a degree of caution regarding the evaluation of workload priorities set out in job descriptions. Posts very rarely indicate a percentage of time to be allocated individual tasks – and these priorities are not necessarily adhered to in practice once the post holder is

appointed. Sometimes tasks are dictated by more senior management but occasionally the appointee has some discretion over outputs.

6.2 The priorities set out in the job advertisement do not always tally with those in the formal job specification – which is inevitably more wide ranging [8] and may express the overall long-term management aims for the service rather than just immediate short-term priorities. It is not possible to capture all the functions of job specifications but priorities and some trends can usually be discerned.

6.3 For a number of years recruiters have frequently stated a need for '*enthusiasm*' and '*self-motivation*' (a cynic might suggest this equates to: '*you're on your own*') and these attributes often continue to be cited in job adverts especially for junior, less well remunerated posts. Mentoring is almost never referred to.

6.4 While the recruitment process is sometimes seen as the opportunity to update a job description and refocus on specific current priorities; in deconstructing workload requirements in 2024 it has also been quite clear for a number of years that in practice it is short-term, time-limited, high priority tasks such as development management advice or the processing of listed building consents that dominate, to the extent that just over half of posts (50.8%) – an increase from 2023 – placed this first and foremost (and greater still if ranked as the second priority). In almost every instance this task was also tied to involvement with planning appeals and associated compliance and enforcement action, suggesting a priority for short-term reactive statutory tasks.

6.5 Unless any one of the following are clearly specified as a principal focus such as conservation area designation, appraisal and review; planning policy input; compliance and enforcement; heritage-at-risk issues or local listing; large-scale, long-term resource hungry workload areas are assigned distinctly subsidiary status.

6.6 Although only four posts made conservation area, designation, appraisal or review the top workload priority, a further seventeen made this a secondary or tertiary priority (down from twenty-nine in 2023). Past annual reviews have consistently noted the inadequacy of many past area designations as highlighted by the infrequency of periodic statutory review and/or published appraisals and this is a continuing reflection of the low percentage of conservation areas in England without any form of appraisal and/or management plan [8] even fewer of which meet current Historic England best practice standards. [9]

6.7 As was the case in 2023 it was also notable in 2024 that little concerted attention was seemingly given to two other significant areas of work: buildings-at-risk (no local authority making this its top workload priority); and local listing (with just one council looking to update an existing local list not prepare a new one). [10] These two lacunae, are now seen to reflect job functions requiring consistent and sustained resourcing over an extended period. Also, distinctly notable in 2024 was the low

priority afforded to general external advice to individual historic building owners, the general public or to the facilitation of community engagement.

6.8 A contraction in the range of heritage tasks undertaken (often stemming from resource constraints) constrains the ability to deliver a full, well-balanced service (as widely described in established delivery models of excellence) [\[11\]](#) which is correspondingly reduced. This may also adversely impact on the proper exercise of statutory functions. Failure to maintain effective and appropriate standards for the management of the local historic environment would therefore be likely to fall below what the Institute would consider a best practice service.

6.9 While some minor rebalancing from **reactive** short-term tasks (particularly development management) had been detected in 2022, this is evidently less the case in 2023 and 2024. As noted above, interaction with the development management process (or responsibility for listed building consent casework) remained a clear priority. More **proactive**, resource hungry workload: e.g., conservation area designation, review and management plans; buildings-at-risk; and local listing assumed distinctly less importance - undertaken only when or if residuary time and resources could be found.

6.10 Each annual snapshot has always made clear that the relative priorities defined above do not necessarily imply that other important workload activities are not already taking place or that a wide range of other tasks are never carried out (i.e., those generally regarded when undertaken as are necessary for a balanced conservation service). The absence of such tasks does however call in to question the level of a council's commitment to and resourcing of a full and balanced heritage service relative to the quantum and range of the heritage assets needing to be properly managed. [\[12\]](#)

6.12 Full job descriptions accompanying vacancies often require the new post-holder to carry-out multifarious miscellaneous heritage management tasks but these may not necessarily represent the actual priorities as seen by the authority's officer management team or elected councillors.

## **7. Regional variations**

7.1 Interpretation of variations in salaries and comparisons to previous years require some caution. The turnover of posts in some Branches has been reasonably consistent for some years e.g., East Anglia and the South West but others have been unfailingly low, particularly in the North and to a lesser extent West Midlands as shown in Table 2. [\[13\]](#)



**Table 2. Vacancies per English Branch - Five-year sample 2018-24**

Branch	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018
East Anglia	6	10	12	13	12	5	16
East Midlands	5	7	8	8	5	10	14
London	6	7	17	12	7	9	9
North	1	1	2	4	3	4	5
North West	8	6	5	10	7	2	7
South	7	9	10	9	4	8	1
South East	11	4	5	8	7	9	12
South West	7	11	11	9	9	5	10
West Midlands	3	4	6	5	8	6	6
Yorkshire	7	11	8	4	7	1	8
Total	61	70	84	83	69*	59	88

*Note: In 2020 no posts were advertised in April because of Covid*

7.2 The overall salary variation figures for IHBC Branches in 2024 are set out in Table 3, but as noted above when the total job vacancies within any one IHBC Branch area are consistently quite small (such as North Branch) this data is not always a reliable guide.

7.3 Overall, the median salary in England for 2024 was £38,091, a near static situation over 2023 [\[14\]](#) but not necessarily applying equally across all Branches and also a clear reflection of where e.g., recruitment to senior management posts was sought in London [+35.51%] leading to a general influence of Branch variations elsewhere. [\[15\]](#)

**Table 3. Variations in Median Salaries by Branch 2024**

Region	Sample	Median (£)	Variation (%)
East Anglia	6	38,482	+ 1.02%
East Midlands	5	34,972	- 8.18%
London	6	51,619	+ 35.51%
North*	1	36,126	- 5.16%
North West	8	35,839	- 5.91%
South	7	37,360	- 1.92%
South East	11	39,163	+ 2.81%
South West	7	37,307	- 2.06%
West Midlands	3	33,893	- 11.02%

Yorkshire	7	39,059	+ 2.54%
Total (& Average)	61	(38,091)	

\* very low sample over several years

## 8. Local government finance

8.1 To place local authority recruiting levels and conservation officer posts in some context, statistics from the Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities showed that in 2024 local authority net current expenditure on services in England was budgeted to be £121.1bn of which £80.3bn accounted for three statutory services: education, adult social care, and children's social care.

8.2 Over the past 14 years, English councils have experienced significant reductions in spending power when adjusted for inflation. According to the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS), core funding per person decreased by approximately 26% in real terms between 2010–11 and 2019–20. Although there have been increases in funding since then, core funding per person in 2024–25 is projected to be only 5% higher in real terms than in 2015–16, indicating a partial recovery.

## 9. Concluding Note

9.1 The jobs market for permanent local authority conservation specialists continued to decline in 2024 possibly reflecting the continuing squeeze on local government finance. The level of recruitment in 2024 is less than half the number about two decades ago and perhaps a reflection of continued uncertainty about the economic outlook and the public sector.

9.2 The Institute intends to web-publish a further market intelligence report on the local authority conservation specialist jobs market 2025 in early 2026.

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## Endnotes

1. Between 1998 and c.2009, information concerning local authority vacancies was drawn principally from the weekly pages of *Planning* magazine. Thereafter the decline in planning related posts, the switch to the (typically) fortnightly publication of *Planning* coupled with the development of the IHBC's web-based jobs pages saw the advertising of conservation posts move almost exclusively from the former to the latter. Advertising now rarely appears elsewhere and thus the data in this Note is not drawn from sources beyond IHBC and is considered to be near definitive.



2. In the decade 2015-2024 the number of posts in both Wales and Scotland average just over three per year.
3. Occasionally only a fixed starting or finishing salary is stated. Ranges are usually also given even where appointments are part-time (pro-rata) or fixed-term.
4. Salary progression has generally been on the basis of an annual increment within the overall scales with the individual spinal-point progressions within the quoted range usually being short.
5. Officer for National Statistics  
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/bulletins/annualsurveyofhoursandearnings/2024>
6. To compensate for the effect of unusually low or unusually high ends of salary ranges a comparative analysis is also made by subtracting the three highest and three lowest starting and finishing salaries during the year from the overall sample. This nevertheless generates very similar figures to the overall averages above.
7. While this educational requirement is not quite as high as in 2022 (72.6%) it nevertheless suggests strong awareness of the IHBC's recognised set of professional competences and the Institute's professional status.
8. Usually with a catch-all requirement to encompass 'such other duties as may be required from time to time' or similar phraseology  
  
Estimated to be about 25%
9. Estimated to be about 10%
10. It is now well over four years since the government' launched and did not subsequently evaluate it's local listing pilots among 22 local authorities.
11. For example see IHBC Guidance Note: Annual Conservation Management Statements – Best Practice GN2014/2 accessible at: [https://ihbconline.co.uk/toolbox/guidance\\_notes/consManag.html](https://ihbconline.co.uk/toolbox/guidance_notes/consManag.html)
12. See IHBC Guidance Note GN2014/3 Oct 2014 Planning Authority duties in the provision of appropriate specialist advice in England, accessible at: [https://ihbconline.co.uk/toolbox/guidance\\_notes/index.html](https://ihbconline.co.uk/toolbox/guidance_notes/index.html)
13. But allowance must be made where there had been fixed-term/short life initiatives such as grant-aided schemes.

14. The rise between 2022 and 2023 was a somewhat unexpected and not easily explained rise of 5.1%.
15. In past years median salary scales in London [and the South East] had been consistently higher than in other regions, reflecting higher living and travelling costs (as might reasonably be expected).