



IHBC RESEARCH NOTES

Market Intelligence: Local Authority Conservation Specialists Jobs Market 2021

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Executive Summary

- The Institute's data set now covers about 2,060 posts continuously over 24 years since 1998.
- The year of 2021 was notable in two respects: the apparent recovery of the local authority jobs market following the Covid-19 pandemic and the first fall in year-on-year average salaries in England since 2015-16 possibly reflecting recruitment at lower levels of expertise and experience than in the past - in all Branch areas.
- Recruitment levels have edged up slightly over the last three years but remain well below those in the first decade of the century.
- The average median salary advertised for advertised posts in 2021 was £33,246- a fall of 3.6% on 2020. This is set against average full-time earnings in the UK in 2021 (according to the Office of National Statistics) which were £25,971.
- In 2016 the Institute derived satisfaction from the expectation from employers that 71% of applicants would be full members of IHBC. This has subsequently fallen back and appears to have stabilised at around 58% in 2021 (55% in 2020).
- Specification of sole Royal Town Planning Institute membership as a job requirement almost disappeared but rose to 21% when considered an alternative to membership of IHBC. No posts specifically requested membership of CIfA as a potential qualifying requirement.
- Development management advice, appeals and enforcement continued to dominate prioritised job functions with a low but slightly expanding level of diversification of workload functions

continuing to be evident; possibly a function of resource constraints.

- The number of posts re-advertised within six months in England increased notably on 2020 seemingly reflecting some difficulty in filling posts.
- Recruitment for posts in North Branch continued to be low (four, but just three in 2020), covering Cleveland, Cumbria, Durham, Northumberland and Tyne & Wear; four in Yorkshire and Humberside and five in the West Midlands - Hereford, Worcester, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire - but were up elsewhere;
- One potentially notable aspect of the jobs market in 2022 was the anticipated effect that the government-backed, fixed-term, local-listing pilot surveys might have but the impact of this notable initiative proved inconclusive.

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

1. Background

1.1 This annual review aims to complement the information gathered in the regular series of Local Authority Conservation Provision Studies undertaken by IHBC.

1.2 The Institute's cumulative data set relates to local authority conservation posts advertised since 1998 and now comprises about 2,060 posts going back 24 years. [\[1\]](#)

1.3 This Note summarises the job vacancies in the calendar year 2021 and aims to assist the Institute to form a picture of the trends in the local government jobs market in respect to workload requirements, qualifications, levels of remuneration etc., and specific fixed-term nationally supported project posts; regional variations and other long-term trends.

1.4 Vacancies are monitored on a weekly basis and although extending to Scotland and Wales (but not Northern Ireland) the statistics in this Note relate to England only as the total of vacancies annually for the other two Home Countries are statistically insignificant and insufficient in number to delineate meaningful statistical trends separately from England.

1.5 Since 2015 an attempt has been made to capture data where initial recruitment within a six-months period was unsuccessful requiring local planning authorities to re-advertise. In 2021 most re-advertisements took place within two months or fewer than 2020 suggesting some urgency to appointment.

2. Size of the market

2.1 Advertised posts in England grew steadily in the late 1990s and in the early 2000s exceeded 120 per year (with a peak of 158 per year in 2003-4). A year-on-year fall then ensued and by the depth of the Recession in 2011 and 2012 there were only 26 vacancies per year for both years. Advertised vacancies have generally not since returned to 1990s levels, averaging only about a half to two-thirds of those pre-Recession numbers.

2.2 In 2020 the Covid-19 pandemic significantly distorted the figures with no job advertising in April but twenty-seven fixed-term High Street Action Zone [HAZ] posts comprised nearly 40% of all the vacancies that year also contorted the data.

2.3 In 2021 job advertising reverted to its more traditional pattern of permanent posts and a steady growth in each of the last three years rather than a continued flatlining that was predicted last year.

3. General salary levels

3.1 Salaries are almost invariably expressed as a range. [2] Employers usually expect successful candidates to be appointed at the bottom of the quoted scales and progress upward on the basis of qualifications and experience. [3]

3.2 None of the vacancies in 2021 appeared to define salary milestones related to career progression when specific targets were met (as was also the case in 2020).

3.3 The average starting salary in England in 2021 was £30,689 with the average finishing salary £35,803 giving a median salary level of £33,246 a fall of 3.6% over 2020. [4] For comparison, average full-time earnings in the UK in 2021 were £31,461 a fall of 0.6% but possibly distorted by the pandemic and associated furlough arrangements. [5]

3.4 The usual caveats regarding potential distortions to national salary averages apply. These are:

- (a) 'career grade' posts with untypically low starting salaries usually recruiting non-graduate or newly graduated staff; or unusually high-end salaries (typically senior management positions) mainly within London councils and;
- (b) regional variations where higher salaries have been paid in London and the South-East throughout the period of this data set and lower ones in the West Midlands and South West.

3.5 The annual numbers of posts advertised also have a bearing on regional salary variations. Larger samples of posts tend to reduce regional

anomalies overall. Further comment about regional salary variations is made in Section 9 below.

4. Balance of permanent posts to temporary & part time posts

4.1 Twenty or more years ago the vast majority of advertised vacancies in local planning authorities were permanent and full-time. Fixed-term posts were usually grant scheme related - often part-funded by central government [6] or by the former English Heritage and latterly Historic England [7] or by the former Heritage Lottery Fund [8] or short-term posts [9] to cover for example, maternity leave [10] (some of these posts also being part-time).

4.2 Table 1 shows a distinct return to full-time posts from a declination in 2020, even making allowance for six of those posts being for maternity cover.

Table 1. Permanent, fixed term & temporary posts 2020 (<i>2020 in italics</i>)				
Permanent	49	59.04%	<i>24</i>	<i>34.79%</i>
Fixed term only	27	32.53%	<i>36</i>	<i>52.17%</i>
Fixed term and part time	2	2.41%	<i>3</i>	<i>4.34%</i>
Part-time only	5	6.02%	<i>6</i>	<i>8.69%</i>
TOTAL	83	100%	<i>69</i>	<i>100%</i>

4.2 No clear reasoning can be discerned for a local authority specifying part-time working and such vacancies where they arise are diffusely distributed geographically. Three sets of full-time job shares split between pairs of authorities were noted in 2021 for Cambridge/South Cambridgeshire; Richmond/Wandsworth London Boroughs; and Bromsgrove with Redditch in the West Midlands but there is otherwise little evidence in job descriptions to suggest that individual local authorities are unable or unwilling to fund full-time posts.

4.3 Shared services between two or more authorities or the merger of two or more authorities appear to be becoming more widespread irrespective of recruitment policies.

5. Qualifications and expertise

5.1 The stated educational requirements for posts varied significantly in 2021 as set out in Table 2 but did not always refer to full membership of the IHBC (or that applicants should be explicitly working towards full membership). Recruiters did not necessarily make explicit if such membership was essential or merely desirable.

Table 2. Educational Requirements (where IHBC uncategorised membership was also a consideration)				
	2021		2020	
Degree only	19	23.17%	19	11.86%
Degree + Post Graduate Qualification	2	2.44%	6	-
Degree + Post Graduate Qualification + IHBC	13	15.85%	3	10.17%
Degree + Post Graduate Qualification + RTPI	-	-	-	1.69%
Degree + IHBC as the principal standard	23	28.05%	26	49.15%
Degree + RTPI membership only	1	1.22%	3	6.79%
Qualification	4	4.88%	2	3.38%
Qualification + IHBC	5	6.09%	3	6.78%
Post Graduate Qualification + IHBC	5	6.09%	1	5.08%
Post Graduate Qualification	2	2.44%	-	1.69%
Other: A-Level, HNC6-7 etc. only	8	9.75%	6	3.38%
	82*	100%	69	100%
Note: one post of 83 did not specify any qualifications requirements				

5.2 In 2021 two things are worthy of remark. Firstly, a shift of recruiters to more overtly requiring a heritage-related post-graduate qualification as

well as a relevant degree (and IHBC membership). (One post proscriptively required an MSc in Conservation – a 12-month internship with day release).

5.3 Secondly, perhaps in a reflection of hierarchically less senior posts, the lower starting salaries referred to above; and for project driven posts less obviously heritage related qualification requirements as varied as needing PRINCE2 [\[11\]](#) (3 vacancies); a Degree in Economics, Business Administration or Project Management; a qualification from the Institute of Customer Service; and, a 'Level 6 in Architecture/ Conservation'.

5.4 Three career posts required an A-level standard education only but two of these anticipated progression to the completion of a relevant degree and eventual IHBC membership.

5.5 As noted in recent years, some local government recruiters in 2021 continued to advertise posts without an apparent need for a specific heritage related qualification but it remains unclear if full membership of IHBC membership is considered a sufficient proxy.

5.6 In 2016 the Institute drew some satisfaction that 71% of applicants were expected to be full members of IHBC (or rather less commonly, working towards full membership). This suggested strong brand recognition for the Institute related to a recognised set of competences and professional status.

5.7 This requirement fell back to a disappointing 58% in 2017 and 2018 and although the percentage rose again in 2019 to 69% it fell back again in 2020 to barely half (55%) and disappointingly in 2021 seems to have stabilised at around this level (again at 58%).

5.8 The sole requirement of Royal Town Planning Institute membership now hardly arises (1.2%) but this swelled to 21.7% (23% in 2020) when identified as an alternative post-nominal to IHBC.

5.9 When membership of other allied institutions, in particular RIBA and RICS were cited as a qualifying requirement the overall total rose to 31% but no posts in 2021 specifically requested membership of CIfA.

6. Roles & responsibilities

6.1 Workload priorities set out in job descriptions always need to be evaluated with caution and the percentage allocations of time to individual tasks is only rarely indicated (4% of posts in 2021) nor are these priorities necessarily adhered to in practice once the post holder is appointed.

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 [\[12\]](#) and may express the overall long-term management objectives 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 are usually discernible.

6.3 The need for 'enthusiasm' was frequently cited in job advertisements and this was especially notable in junior less well remunerated posts.

6.4 The recruitment process is sometimes seen as the opportunity to update a job description and permit specific priorities to be refocused. However, in practice, it is inevitable that short-term, time-limited, high priority workload such as development management advice usually takes priority over large-scale, long-term workload such as conservation area designation, appraisal and review; compliance and enforcement; heritage-at-risk issues or local listing unless these are the clearly stated and principal focus of the post. Further comment is made about 2021 local listing initiatives in Section 8 below.

6.5 In deconstructing the workload requirements of permanent posts, development management advice or direct DM casework usually on listed building cases (and associated appeals and enforcement) continued in 2021 to account for the highest workload priority with 48% of job descriptions a minor decline from 2019 and 2020. This may suggest a minor rebalancing of short-term workload but a clearer trend may emerge over time.

6.6 Deconstructing the interaction with development management; over half of the specified high priority tasks related to advice on applications; about one-third processing development management casework generally, and the remainder more direct and specific responsibility for listed building cases. In every instance this task was also tied to carrying out planning appeals and associated enforcement action.

6.7 Where it occurs, any contraction of the range of workload functions (often in the face of resource constraints) generally marks a departure from holistic best practice (and established excellence models) and is not what the Institute considers a well-balanced service that should constitute the proper exercise of statutory functions and/or effective and appropriate management of the local historic environment. [\[13\]](#)

6.8 While a minor rebalancing from reactive short-term workload (particularly development management) may be discerned in some job specifications, more proactive workload - conservation area review, buildings-at-risk, local listing are not yet clearly prioritised to constitute a trend and it is concerning that few vacancies identify advising and individual owners, occupiers and the general public as any priority.

6.9 With regard to conservation area related work, it has been noted in recent annual reviews that only a low percentage of conservation areas in

England have any form of appraisal and/or management plan [14] and even fewer meet national current best practice standards. [15] Conservation area designation, appraisal, management and review is the second most frequently identified workload priority (38% of posts - as in 2020) but only 3.6% of job descriptions made this the first priority. It is of course, large-scale and long-term work requiring commitment of consistent and sustained resourcing.

6.10 Although Historic England has encouraged prioritisation of heritage-at-risk (particularly since 2017), action to address the matter has not been widely reflected in job descriptions since then. In 2021 only just over 13% of job descriptions identified this as a specific workload element (21% in 2020) with councils placing this well down the list of priorities again being a likely reflection of a requirement for consistent and sustained resourcing over an extended period.

6.11 As has been noted in the past this annual snapshot does 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 as necessary for a balanced conservation service). It does however bring into question the level of a council's commitment to and resourcing of a full and balanced heritage service in relation to the quantum of the heritage assets to be properly managed. [16]

6.12 Full job descriptions accompanying vacancies often include multifarious miscellaneous heritage management tasks required of the new post-holder. [17] These can encompass offering technical and policy advice to owners and occupiers, providing heritage input into local plans, identifying buildings for enforcement or local listing and so on, but they may not necessarily represent the actual priorities as seen by the authority's officer management team or elected councillors.

7. Heritage Action Zones

7.1 Almost 40% of all the posts advertised in 2020 were fixed term HAZ Officer vacancies (27 in total). This fell to seven in 2021 with a narrower duration than hitherto, varying from 24 months in two instances to 36 in three and the remaining two appointments being 30 months each.

7.2 Salary ranges were generally in line with those quoted for other fixed-term appointments in the Branches within which such posts were advertised with the exception being that of the Bacup HAZ Officer at Rossendale BC (North West) with a starting salary nearly 14% lower than any of the equivalents elsewhere.

8. Local listing

8.1 During the latter part of 2019 a ministerial announcement was made that funding would be made available to offer more protection to undesignated heritage assets [18] notwithstanding no legislative provision to do so. In 2020 about 14% of posts identified local listing as a tertiary (or lower) priority workload item but seemingly unrelated to this initiative.

8.2 Initially the (then) Department for Housing, Communities and Local Government [19] announced a funding allocation to support 10 pilot areas but after significant positive interest from other authorities the allocation was increased in February 2021 to £1.5 million to enable 22 areas to proceed.

8.3 During 2021 job vacancies placed with IHBC were monitored to see if this would result in specific short-term appointments to deliver these pilots. The results were inconclusive.

8.4 Only four of the 22 authorities advertised externally for a specific post of 12 months duration: Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire; Tyne & Wear; and Sefton (which may or may not have been on behalf of themselves) or for Merseyside more widely (comprising Knowsley, Sefton and Wirral). Gloucester City Council jointly with Tewksbury District Council advertised for a joint post to survey both the urban area of the former and the large rural district of the latter within just 6 months (which appeared distinctly optimistic).

8.5 Of the remaining pilots, New Forest National Park Authority advertised for a post of 6 months duration (which may or may not have been part of the Hampshire pilot) while Lincolnshire intended this to be completed outside the ambit of local authorities via the charity 'Heritage Lincolnshire'. Surrey County Council requested nominations via social media in October 2021!

8.6 As no other posts were externally advertised, it must be concluded that the remainder: Lancashire; Greater Manchester; Dorset; County Durham; Somerset; South Yorkshire; Cheshire; Cumbria; West Yorkshire; The Black Country; Cotswolds (Cotswold, Forest of Dean, West Oxfordshire); Milton Keynes; Peterborough and Cornwall were all to be completed using existing in-house staff.

8.7 It is not clear how and when (if at all) the survey outcomes will be collated and disseminated; how a uniform baseline standard for selection will be adopted and/or what new legislative provisions (if any) will be made to better protect the range of heritage assets identified when the pilots will be completed.

9. Regional variations

9.1 With regard to the question of regional salary variations and trends, these require cautious interpretation in comparison to past years as the turnover of permanent posts in some Branches is consistently low.

9.2 The overall figures for IHBC Branches in 2021 are set out in Table 3, but as noted above when the total job vacancies within any one IHBC Branch area are quite small this data is not always a reliable guide. The median salary overall in England for 2021 was £33,246 (a fall on 2020).

Table 3. Variations in Median Salaries 2021 by Branch			
Region	Sample	Median (£)	Variation (%)
East Anglia	13	32,580	- 2.00%
East Midlands	8	35,738	+ 7.49%
London	12	37,309	+ 12.22%
North	4	33,994	+ 2.25%
North West	10	31,714	- 4.61%
South	9	33,181	- 0.19%
South East	8	34,642	+ 4.19%
South West	9	28,956	- 3.12%
West Midlands	5	30,770	- 12.90%
Yorkshire	4	34,553	+ 3.93%
Total (& Average)	83	(33,246)	

9.3 In past years median salary scales in London and the South East have generally been consistently higher than in other regions, reflecting higher living and travelling costs (as might reasonably be expected). Conversely in most years, one or more Branch area has generally been lower than the national average (particularly the South West and West Midlands). In 2021 notable deviation from recent years was the higher-than-average increase in advertised salaries in the East Midlands.

9.4 As overall salary ranges fell back in the past year, year-to-year regional figures (not shown above) indicated that average median salaries in the North (a small sample) were notably higher in that Branch area than in 2020; East Anglia, the East Midlands and the West Midlands were marginally higher; Yorkshire was broadly static; and the remaining Branch areas were lower - the South East and the South West notably so.

10. Concluding Note

10.1 The jobs market for local authority conservation specialists continued to recover in 2021 after the deleterious impact of Covid in the early part of 2020 and notwithstanding the continued difficult circumstances operating in local planning authorities. This growth represents a welcome expansion and may mark the gradual rebuilding of capacity from the low point of 2011-12.

10.2 The preponderance of posts advertised in 2021 at lower salary scales is marked and it is difficult to marry this up with any changes in educational requirements. Notwithstanding the hyperbole, enthusiasm seems to carry as much weight in job advertisements as skills and experience – these latter attributes seeming to be in short supply.

10.3 The Institute intends to publish a further market intelligence report on the local authority conservation specialist jobs market 2022 in early 2023.

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Endnotes

1. Between 1998 and c.2009, information concerning local authority vacancies were drawn principally from the weekly pages of *Planning* magazine. Thereafter the decline in planning related posts, the switch to a fortnightly publication of *Planning* (and subsequently more intermittently still) 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. Although posts may occasionally be advertised elsewhere, the data in this Note drawn from these sources is thought to be near definitive.

2. 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.

3. In the past salary progression was also on the basis of an annual increment within the overall scales but the individual remunerative steps within the quoted range is usually short.

4. 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 ie, generates a typical 'smoothed' starting salary in 2021 of £30,523, a finishing salary £35,773, and a median of £33,148.

5. Figure from the Officer for National Statistics.

6. For a time a number of temporary or fixed-term jobs were also funded by the Planning Delivery Grant - particularly to meet the requirements of Best Value Performance Indicator 219 on conservation area appraisals. This national performance indicator was trialled in 2004-5 and introduced in 2006 but abandoned by central government in 2010. Some authorities undertook a programme of appraisals in anticipation of a future national requirement for service uplift, while others simply used the indicator as a pretext to justify additional resources for conservation services. The problems with the indicator were various, not least, not actually being an indicator (ie, not encouraging service improvement]. Many authorities also had such a backlog of appraisals to complete they could not justify the long-term resource commitment.

7. Such as fixed-term Buildings at Risk Officers

8. Now the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF)

9. Projects ranging from 12 to 54 months duration

10. Usually 12 months (although sometimes states as 9 months)

11. PRINCE2 is a process-based method for effective project management, demonstrating the fundamental skills needed to become a successful project manager, standing for **PR**ojects **IN** **C**ontrolled **E**nvironments

12. Usually with a catch-all requirement to encompass 'such other duties as may be required from time to time' or similar phraseology

13. 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

14. Estimated to be about 25%

15. Estimated to be about 10%



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16. See IHBC Guidance Note GN2014/3 Oct 2014 Planning Authority duties in the provision of appropriate specialist advice in England, accessible a https://ihbconline.co.uk/toolbox/guidance_notes/index.html

17. It would appear that some local authorities are unaware of the procedures under which Historic England will now respond to requests to list buildings when this is not a specific urgent threat.

18. Via 'local communities' and implying a new tier of statutory protection

19. Now the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC)