



IHBC RESEARCH NOTES

Market Intelligence: Local Authority Conservation Specialists Jobs Market 2025

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Executive Summary

- The Institute's continuous data from 1998 (28 years) now covers 2,333 posts.
- For the fourth year in a row 2025 saw a decline in the number of advertised vacancies. Slightly down by 5% on 2024 but by more than 30% by comparison with 2022-23.
- Recruitment levels were broadly consisted in each quarter of the year but remain well below vacancies in the first decade of this century.
- Eighty-six percent of the vacancies were for full-time posts on the permanent establishment.
- As was the case in 2024, with one exception, no fixed-term posts were evidently supported by centrally generated grant-aid for specific projects.
- The average median salary for advertised posts in 2025 was £40,720 marking a sharp rise of 6.4% over the previous year.
- The equivalent average full-time salary [in the UK in 2025] according to Office of National Statistics calculations was £39,039.
- Sixty-nine percent of local government recruiters in 2025 expected job applicants to be Full Members of IHBC (or working towards this status), a percentage that has remained near constant since 2023.
- Reactive development management advice, appeals and enforcement has continued to be the dominant prioritised job functions for the last two decades
- Only very limited prioritisation was given to more proactive tasks and a likely reflection of continuing resource constraints.
- In 2025 the long-term trend of salaries being higher than the national average was maintained in London and the South East (but

this year also in East Anglia and Yorkshire). Salaries were notably lower in the East and West Midlands.

- For the first time since 2013 no posts were advertised in North Branch 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 English Local Planning Authorities. (see paragraph 1.4)

1. Background

1.1 This annual review aims to complement other similar periodic information gathering by, for example the Local Authority Conservation Provision Studies undertaken by IHBC.

1.2 The Institute's cumulative data-set related to advertised local authority conservation posts commenced in 1998. This now comprises statistics on 2,333 vacancies spanning 28 years. [\[1\]](#)

1.3 IHBC analysis of local government job vacancies in the calendar year 2025 aims to help form a picture of the market in respect of permanent v. fixed-term posts; workload requirements; qualifications; levels of remuneration etc.; regional variations and other trends. Specific fixed-term, nationally supported project posts now have no measurable impact on advertised vacancies.

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 2025 the number of re-advertisements remained relatively small (nine v. seven in 2023) with five of those re-adverts being placed within three months.

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 each of those two years. There was also a sharp fall in the early part of 2020 as a consequence of the Covid pandemic.

2.2 Recruitment in 2025 has never returned to levels at the start of the century, averaging less than two-thirds of the pre-recession numbers and averaging just over one vacancy per week in England in 2025.

2.3 The continuing contraction in advertised posts in 2025 may continue to reflect both the parlous state of local government finances and anticipation of future local authority mergers and amalgamations which are referred to briefly in Section 8 and footnote 16.

2.4 Numbers of advertisements for recruits were broadly similar in all four quarters in 2025.

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

3.1 In the continuing absence of centrally-funded, fixed-life, grant-aided schemes; a clear return to the traditional pattern of permanent local authority posts has been noticeable with overall levels this year and since 2016-17 being more typically of those found in the late 1990s. A notable reduction in part-time working (8% of posts) in 2025 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 in 2025 (as has been the case over the past decade), no vacancies appeared to be tied to specific career progression milestones and thus to salary increments.

4.2 The average starting salary in England in 2025 was £38,330 with the average finishing salary £43,110 giving a median salary level of £40,720. This was a noteworthy increase of 6.4% (after a 0.5% rise in 2024). By comparison, the Office of National Statistics calculates the average salary in the UK for full-time employees in 2025 was £39,049. [\[5\]](#)

4.3 Three caveats have consistently been applied to IHBC's annual assessments of national Conservation Officer salary averages, cognizant of the following potential distortions:

- a. "career grade" posts at the bottom of salary scales attract untypically low starting salaries – where newly graduated but inexperienced staff are usually recruited; while conversely uncommonly highly renumerated posts (typically for senior team-management positions) occur mainly within London LPAs (and are also likely to reflect the higher living costs in the capital; [\[6\]](#)
- 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, frequently in the East and West Midlands and the South West; and,
- c. sampling sizes - where larger samples for individual Branches have tended to offset regional anomalies.

Further comment is made about this in Section 7 and footnote 14.

5. Qualifications and expertise

5.1 As has been noted for several years, the stated qualifying requirements and expected educational and professional attainments for vacancies have varied significantly. Those for 2025 are as set out in Table 1.

5.2 Recruiters have not always explicitly referred to Full Membership of the IHBC being necessary (although this has occasionally been stated as a recruit's future objective) nor was a distinction always made as to whether such membership was 'essential' or merely 'desirable'.

5.3 Nevertheless, it is worth highlighting that in 2025 over two-thirds of applicants (69%) (68% in 2024) were expected to be either Full Members of IHBC (or rather less commonly working towards Full Membership). [\[7\]](#)

5.4 Membership of the RTPI was not an evident requirement for posts in 2025 although a Degree in Planning (or Architecture) was occasionally specified. Membership of other allied institutions (RICS or CIIfA) were notably not cited as a crucial qualifying requirement.

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

	2025		2024	
Masters	1	1.72%	-	-
Degree only	11	18.96%	16	26.23%
Degree + Post Graduate Qualification + IHBC	8	13.79%	1	1.64%
Degree + Post Graduate Qualification + RTPI	3	5.17%	1	1.64%
Degree + Post Graduate Qualification (No institution specified)	3	5.17%	-	-
Degree + IHBC as the principal standard (with or without RTPI/RIBA as an alternative)	21	36.20%	37	60.65%
Degree + RTPI membership only	1	1.72%	-	-
Degree + RIBA membership only	-	-	-	-
Qualification	2	3.44%	-	-
Qualification + IHBC (or RTPI)	6		3	4.92%
Post Graduate Qualification	1	1.72%	3	4.92%
Other: HNC 6-7, Prince 2 etc. only	1	1.72%	-	-
	58	100%	61	100%

6. Roles & responsibilities

6.1 A degree of caution is always required regarding the evaluation of workload priorities as set out in job descriptions. Posts only very rarely

indicate the percentage of time to be allocated to individual tasks. Furthermore, these priorities are not necessarily adhered to in practice following the appointment of the post holder. Sometimes tasks are dictated by more senior management, although occasionally appointees have some discretion over priorities and outputs.

6.2 Priorities set out in job advertisements 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 It was noted with some dismay during the year that three local authorities required successful appointees to deal with applications for Conservation Area Consent despite this having been abolished on 1st October 2013!

6.4 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 frequently continue to be cited in job adverts especially for junior, less well renumerated posts. Mentoring (given or received) is almost never referred to.

6.5 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 2025 it has also been quite clear for a number of years, that in practice short-term, time-limited tasks such as development management advice or the processing of listed building consents dominates to the extent that more than half of posts (58.6%) – an increase from 2023 and 2024 - placed this first and foremost (and greater still if ranked as the second priority). In almost every instance this task was given high priority, usually tied to involvement with planning appeals and associated quality assurance, compliance and enforcement action emphasising its statutory and high priority but reactive status.

6.6 None of the following were clearly specified as a principal focus such as (in no particular order): conservation area designation, appraisal and review; planning policy input; heritage-at-risk issues or local listing. As large-scale, long-term resource hungry workload areas these were assigned a distinctly subsidiary status.

6.7 During 2025 only one post made conservation area, designation, appraisal or review the top workload priority, a further nine made this a secondary or tertiary priority (down from twenty-nine in 2023).

6.8 Past annual workflow reviews have consistently noted not only the inadequate documentation of many conservation area designations but also the infrequency of periodic statutory review. This is also reflected in the continuing and troubling issue of the low percentage of conservation areas in England without any form of character appraisal and/or

management plan [\[9\]](#) even fewer of which meet current Historic England best practice standards. [\[10\]](#)

6.9 In 2025 (as has been the case since 2023), no local authority made heritage-at-risk its top heritage management workload priority (just one LPA making it a secondary priority) and no LPA assigning local listing work any higher than a fifth priority with only six authorities (10%) assigning the updating of an existing local list or the preparation of a new one any status. These two lacunae in what might constitute a balanced workload are seen as reflecting specific job functions requiring consistent and sustained resourcing over an extended period.

6.10 Also, distinctly notable in 2025 was the low priority afforded specifically to making available heritage advice to individual historic building owners and occupiers and the general public, or the facilitation of community engagement.

6.11 Contraction in the range of the tasks expected to be undertaken (often stemming from resource constraints) inhibits an ability to deliver a full range of well-balanced heritage services (as widely described in established delivery models of excellence). [\[11\]](#) The proper exercise of statutory functions may also be adversely affected.

6.12 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.

6.13 In summary, although some minor rebalancing from prioritising reactive short-term workload (particularly development management) to proactive long-term workload had been detected in the middle of the first decade of the 21st century this is no longer clearly evident in job descriptions for new posts and interaction with the development management process (or responsibility for listed building consent casework) has resumed pre-eminence.

6.14 Proactive tasks: conservation area designation, review and management; heritage-at-risk; and local listing are all resource hungry and are assigned lesser importance to be undertaken only when, or if, residuary time and resources could be found.

6.15 Each annual snapshot has always made clear that the relative priorities defined above do not necessarily imply that other important activities are not already taking place or that a wide range of other tasks are never carried out (i.e., those generally considered as representing a balanced conservation service). The absence of such resource-hungry tasks does however, call in to question the level of commitment to, and resourcing of a fully balanced heritage service by a local planning authority in relation to the quantum, range and physical condition of the heritage assets in its care. [\[12\]](#)

6.16 Finally it should be noted that 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 year-on-year variations in salaries 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 other have been unfailingly low, particularly in the North and to a lesser extent West Midlands as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Branch	2025	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019
East Anglia	12	6	10	12	13	12	5
East Midlands	10	5	7	8	8	5	10
London	6	6	7	17	12	7	9
North	Nil	1	1	2	4	3	4
North West	1	8	6	5	10	7	2
South	5	7	9	10	9	4	8
South East	4	11	4	5	8	7	9
South West	8	7	11	11	9	9	5
West Midlands	3	3	4	6	5	8	6
Yorkshire	9	7	11	8	4	7	1
Total	58	61	70	84	83	69*	59

7.2 Notable in 2025 was that no vacancies were advertised in the North Branch area (Cleveland, Cumbria, Durham, Northumberland and Tyne & Wear), the first occurrence since 2013. Also notable was the single vacancy in the North West (Cheshire, Greater Manchester, the Isle of Man, Lancashire and Merseyside) - set against an overall decline in vacancies for the fourth year in a row. Also, vacancies in the South East (4) fell back in 2025 to the general average before 2024.

7.3 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, (or none in North Branch in 2025) this data is not always a reliable guide.

7.4 Overall, the median salary in England for 2025 was £40,720, a 6.4% increase from 2024 (the median had been virtually static between 2023 and 2024 [\[13\]](#) but not necessarily applying equally across all Branches and also a clear reflection of where e.g., recruitment below senior management posts was sought in London this led to a fall in the median average from £51,619 in 2024 to £47,459 in 2025. Also, and figures for London Branch posts have tended to influence Branch variations elsewhere. [\[14\]](#)

Table 3. Variations in Median Salaries by Branch 2025			
Region	Sample	Median (£)	Variation (%)
East Anglia	12	42,560	+4.52%
East Midlands	10	36,807	-9.61%
London	6	47,459	+16.55%
North*	0	-	-
North West (single sample)	1	38,413	-5.66%
South	5	38,310	-5.92%
South East	4	41,570	+2.09%
South West	8	39,502	-2.99%
West Midlands	3	35,693	-12.34%
Yorkshire	9	43,125	+5.90%
Total (& Average)	58	(40,720)	

* Very low samples over several years

7.5 Whether the sharp overall increase in average salaries from the previous year and the second largest, year-on-year since 2013-14, is an indication of difficulties in recruiting staff of a sufficiently high professional calibre is difficult to determine but this may have been reflected by an increase of re-advertisement of posts (although not in resultant enhanced salary grades) during the course of the year.

8. Local government finance & structure

8.1 To place local authority recruiting levels and conservation officer posts in some context, statistics from the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) showed that in 2024 local authority net current expenditure on services in England was budgeted to be £138.7bn of which £88.03bn accounted for three statutory services: education, adult social care, and childrens 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 25% 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. [\[15\]](#)

8.3 During 2025 the government approved a number of mergers and amalgamations of local authorities, with, for example the intended formation of two new authorities Surrey East and Surrey West replacing 12 existing councils by April 2027. [\[16\]](#) Consultations are currently taking place on four proposals from councils in Essex, Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock; four alternatives in Hampshire, the Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and Southampton; three separate proposals from councils in Norfolk; and two each alternative reorganisations from councils in Suffolk and West Sussex.

8.4 If approved in whatever form, these organisational changes will eventually have significant implications for local authority staffing and resources in the delivery of a good standard of heritage management. This is likely to be reflected in the numbers of future posts; their job descriptions; expected levels of expertise; and renumeration for staff in those newly (re)constituted authorities.

8.5 While this new pattern for local government may take some time to fully emerge; it is hoped that the IHBC's annual assessments of salaries, functions and professional competences for heritage professionals may provide some helpful comparators.

8.6 Currently there are no commonly agreed (and certainly no statutory) benchmarks for what constitutes the delivery of a best practice public sector heritage management service.

9. Concluding Note

9.1 The jobs market for permanent local authority conservation specialists continued to contract in 2025. The level of recruitment this year was less than half the number about two decades ago and perhaps a reflection of continued uncertainty about the economic outlook, the general state of the public sector and the continuing squeeze on local government resources, but not yet, perhaps the eventual structure and proper resourcing of future local government functions in England.

9.2 The Institute intends to web-publish a further market intelligence report on the local authority conservation specialist jobs market 2026 in early 2027.

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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. In 2025 the total number in both Home Countries combined was seven.

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/2025>
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 did not reach the heights of 2022 (72.6%) it nevertheless still suggests a 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.
9. Estimated to be about 25%
10. Estimated to be about 10%
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
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
13. The rise between 2022 and 2023 was a somewhat unexpected and a not easily explained rise of 5.1%.
14. 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).
15. According to analysis by the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS), local authority funding per person fell substantially through much of the 2010s and then recovered somewhat in the early-to-mid 2020s. Between 2015-16 and 2019-20, real-terms per-person funding continued to fall after the large cuts earlier in the decade. However,

more recent increases in funding have largely reversed those later 2010s cuts. The IFS estimates that core funding per person in 2024-25 was about 5% higher in real terms than in 2015-16 — meaning that overall per-person funding in 2024-25 had recovered slightly above 2015-16 levels. Extending projections into 2025-26, funding is set to increase further with additional real-terms rises confirmed in the 2025-26 Local Government Finance Settlement. Core spending power per person is therefore higher in 2025-26 than in 2015-16, implying a positive real-terms increase over that decade. An analysis from the UK National Audit Office (NAO) also supports this trajectory: it finds that Core Spending Power (CSP) per person fell by about 1% from 2015-16 to 2023-24 in real terms, but is forecast to rise by about 7% between 2023-24 and 2025-26 — meaning that overall from 2015-16 to 2025-26 core funding per person is now projected to be higher on a real-terms basis than in 2015-16.

16. East Surrey Council is set to cover Elmbridge, Epsom and Ewell, Mole Valley, Reigate and Banstead, and Tandridge. West Surrey Council will take in Guildford, Runnymede, Spelthorne, Surrey Heath, Waverley, and Woking.