



Local Authority Archaeological Services



Report on staffing and casework surveys 1997-2003

From their early beginnings in the late 1960s, archaeological services based in local authorities have grown dramatically in importance and size. This has occurred in response to increasing development pressure and the policy recognition by central and local government of the need to conserve the archaeological resource for the benefit of current and future generations. Information and advice provide the essential basis for the sustainable management of this non-renewable resource.

The national network of local government archaeological services is now responsible for the conservation of over 90% of England's archaeology although it is currently on a non-statutory basis. These archaeological services, which are based in 90 authorities, have four key functions:

- To develop and maintain a comprehensive public information resource (Historic Environment Records) for the understanding and enjoyment of the historic environment,
- To ensure that all development and other land use change takes into account the need properly to conserve the nation's archaeological heritage,
- To conserve the historic environment by improved management, through, for example, agri-environment schemes which can protect

archaeological sites from the damaging effects of ploughing,

- To promote awareness, understanding and enjoyment of England's historic environment through education and outreach programmes.

However, until recently there has been very little published information about local government archaeological services, including important aspects such as their size and structure, and how they have responded to major policy developments such as the introduction of government guidance on archaeology and planning in 1990 (PPG 16) and local government reorganisation in the 1990s. The fact that archaeological services are non-statutory and are subject to short-term local political decisions which can – and have – included the cutting of entire services, also provides an important reason to have such information. This

need has been emphasised by the government's expressed intention in its current review of heritage protection to increase the role of local government historic environment services.

This summary is of key results from research undertaken by the Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers (ALGAO) and English Heritage into local government archaeological services: published in 2002 as *Archaeological Services in Local Government and Planning and Conservation Casework Survey 1997-99*. It also includes results from the ALGAO survey of staffing and casework for 2003.

Top left Medieval strip lynchets, Bakewell, Derbyshire *Courtesy Peak District National Park*
Top centre Archaeological excavation at the Chester amphitheatre 2004. *Courtesy of Chester City Council & English Heritage*
Top right Checking a planning application against a Historic Environment Record to see if archaeological sites are affected. *Courtesy of Hertfordshire County Council*
Above left Excavation of the burial of a prehistoric cattle skull (aurochs) in advance of the construction of the Baldock Bypass, Hertfordshire 2004. *Courtesy of Albion Archaeology*
Above centre Excavation of a Roman brine tank, Nantwich, Cheshire. *Courtesy of Cheshire County Council*
Above right Community archaeologist showing archaeological objects to children. *Courtesy of Gloucestershire County Council Archaeology Service*



People

■ The total number of archaeological staff employed by local authorities increased from 232 in 1997 to 347 in 2003. This represents a major success for local authorities as archaeological services are non-statutory and are constantly under pressure as constraints and demands on local government budgets increase.

■ Funding of posts from external sources, especially by English Heritage, is therefore very important and has been a major reason why numbers have increased. In particular, 25% of archaeological services said in 2000 that they had received funding for staff from English Heritage as part of their programme of pump-priming new posts to deal with new strategic policy developments such as the implementation of PPG 16.

■ The 2003 survey also showed that the recent pump-priming of countryside advisor posts by English Heritage had been responsible for a significant rise in the level of archaeological advice being given on agri-environment schemes.

■ Archaeological services comprised on average 3.5 permanent and 1.5 temporary staff in 2000, of whom approximately 60% provide conservation advice (planning, sustainability and site management) and 40% manage records and information (Historic Environment Records).

■ The average figure masks a wide variation in the number staff within local authority archaeological teams. In 2003, 56 of the 90 ALGEO member local authorities had 3 or more staff and were able to provide a critical mass of skills and expertise. However, a significant

minority are smaller teams of 1 or 2 staff and these generally cannot provide the full range of archaeological conservation services. The number of smaller teams has also increased since 1997 with the creation of Unitary Authorities out of shire counties as a result of local government reorganisation.

■ In addition, a clear trend between 1997 and 2003 demonstrates that the larger archaeological teams were able to build on the critical mass of core staff to develop services and take advantage of external funding opportunities.

Planning

The provision of advice on strategic planning policies (at regional, unitary, county and district council level) and on individual planning applications through the development control process is a key aspect of the work of local government archaeological services.

The publication of government planning policy guidance for archaeology in 1990 (PPG 16) had a significant impact on this area of work by clarifying the role of local authority archaeological staff as providers of information and specialist advice to both planning authorities and developers.

Figures produced for the ALGEO surveys showed that in 2003:

■ All planning applications (over 560,000) were monitored by local authority archaeological services.

■ Over 67,000 planning applications were looked at in detail via historic environment records (HERs) to see whether they had any archaeological implications,

■ Of these, 17,000 (3%) were found to

have significant implications and recommendations were then made to the planning authority for archaeological assessment,

■ Written instructions (project briefs) for 4300 archaeological projects were issued by local authority archaeological services, following recommendations they had made to local planning authorities,

■ Of these, 1000 written instructions were issued for full archaeological excavations,

■ Comparison of these figures with other surveys, especially the Bournemouth University Archaeological Investigations Project, (Darvill, T and Russell, B. 2002. *Archaeology after PPG16: Archaeological Investigations in England 1990-1999*. Bournemouth University) which surveys the reports produced by archaeological organisations, shows that almost all archaeological fieldwork in England is now initiated by local government archaeological services in response to the government's advice in PPG15 and 16,

■ The planning workload of local authority archaeological services increased significantly between 1999 and 2003 with a 53% rise in planning applications with archaeological implications and a corresponding 50% increase in project briefs issued.

Top left Recording an Iron Age ditch during archaeological excavation at Stanborough School, Herts. *Courtesy Archaeological Services and Consultancy Ltd.*

Top centre Planning archaeologist monitoring a field evaluation, Hertford. *Courtesy of Hertfordshire County Council*

Top right Archaeological recording an advance of urban regeneration: remains of 19th century leadworks, Chester. *Courtesy of Chester City Council*



Progress in other areas

In addition to statistics about the people employed by local government archaeological services and their planning casework, the ALGAO surveys have also revealed the dynamic nature of these services, especially how they are adapting to new priorities.

■ Extending the principles of PPGs 15 and 16

Two key principles of government guidance in PPGs 15 and 16 – that the ‘polluter’ should pay for damage/destruction to the historic environment and that assessment of the impact of proposed development on the historic environment should take place before planning permission is granted – have gained acceptance in the wider planning and development community. This is clear from the following results of the planning casework survey:

■ Development not requiring planning permission

In 1999, 3600 consultations were received in advance of development from utility companies such as roads, railways, pipelines and cable-laying. These fall outside the remit of planning law. Their large number marks significant progress for the strategy of local government archaeological services, working with partners in English Heritage, to ensure that all major development should follow the principles of PPGs 15 and 16 and take full regard of the impact on the historic environment. However, there are still some utility companies who resist taking proper account of the historic environment and the procedures of most are deficient in comparison to

development that falls within the remit of planning law. Much other development (‘permitted development’) does not require planning permission. ALGAO will therefore continue to lobby government to bring all development and land use change formally within the remit of PPGs 15 and 16.

■ Advice on historic buildings

The publication of government guidance on historic buildings in PPG 15 in 1994 recognised for the first time that developers of historic buildings (especially Listed Buildings) should make provision for the assessment and mitigation of damaging effects of development proposals in much the same way as PPG 16 had earlier done for below-ground archaeological remains.

The ALGAO planning casework survey shows that over two-thirds of local government archaeological services are providing advice to planning authorities on the assessment and recording of historic buildings, using the expertise they have gained in ensuring that archaeological remains were protected or recorded after PPG 16 was published in 1990. There is evidence from the ALGAO survey for 2003, that this type of advice has grown significantly since 1999

■ Advice to landowners and government bodies on the conservation of archaeological sites

Resources from government, in the form of grants to farmers and landowners, to improve the management of archaeological sites, have grown dramatically since the mid 1990s and

now form one of the most important means of ensuring their conservation. The ALGAO surveys have shown that advising government (Defra) on grant-aid proposals and landowners wishing to make applications to receive grant-aid is a rapidly growing function of local government archaeological services. Local authority archaeological staff have also played a key role in developing the framework for the archaeological dimension of such grants. As the holders of information and local expertise on archaeology which is necessary for landowners to make an application, local government archaeological services have become a vital part of the grant-aid system under Countryside Stewardship, Environmentally Sensitive Areas and the other related schemes. Returns from the ALGAO survey for 2003 have shown clear evidence that this aspect of casework has grown significantly since 1999 (from 2352 consultations in 1999 to 4205 in 2003). However this work is currently provided free of charge by local authorities and it is unlikely that providing the current level of resources for advice – even though it has great benefit to archaeology – is sustainable without additional resources.

Top left Surveying an historic building, The Old Rectory, Shephall, Herts. *Courtesy of Archaeological Services and Consultancy Ltd.*

Top centre left Examining photographs during a monitoring visit on recording of historic buildings, Ashwell, Herts. *Courtesy of Hertfordshire County Council*

Top right Countryside Archaeological Adviser planning a conservation project to repair severe erosion on the Iron Age hillfort at Painswick Beacon. *Courtesy of Gloucestershire County Council Archaeology Service*



Recommendations

1 All local authorities should provide or have access to archaeological services with professional staff that are able to provide information and advice on the management of the historic environment. *Further work is needed to develop and agree specifications including functions and skills for these services.*

2 The ALGAO surveys have shown the vital role that Historic Environment Records (HERs) play in local authority archaeological services providing development control and agri-environment advice. In recognition of the importance of HERs for providing advice and also as a resource for local communities and schools, government has recently recommended in the ministerial decision statement 'Review of Heritage Protection: The Way Forward' that they be made a statutory function of local government. *Government should find parliamentary time to implement this recommendation as soon as possible.*

3 *English Heritage should continue its successful programme of capacity building within local authority archaeological services by pump-priming the creation of new posts.* Such posts have in the past enabled local authorities to create local historic environment records, implement PPG 16 and deliver significant historic environment conservation through agri-environment schemes.

4 *Government should ensure that archaeological services are not further fragmented by local government reorganisation (LGR) resulting from the creation of elected regional government or other structural change.*

The experience of LGR in the 1990s shows that fragmentation did occur in many areas. While this was not always a problem, in most cases it resulted in a weakened service and was detrimental to service provision.

5 The recent proposal by government to provide financial contributions for the provision of historic environment advice by local authorities through the proposed Environmental Stewardship Scheme is welcomed. *Additional resources should, however, be found to support this advice if the number of applications and level and detail of advice required increases significantly.* This is because local authorities do not have the capacity within current resources to accommodate this work-load.

6 *English Heritage, in partnership with ALGAO and the Institute of Historic Buildings Conservation (IHBC), should produce guidance on the assessment and recording of historic buildings within the planning process.*

7 *Government should ensure that all development which impacts on the historic environment (including that by utility companies) follows the best-practice principles and guidance of PPG 16.*



Top left Community workshop in the Forest of Dean, reviewing archaeological survey work and the results of the National Mapping Programme. *Gloucestershire County Council Archaeology Service*
Top centre Aerial photograph of the Roman theatre at St Albans, Herts. *Courtesy of Essex County Council*
Top right Local authority community archaeology: Children from Chester explorer's club digging at a site in the city. *Courtesy of Chester City Council*
Above right Children from St Briavels Primary School learn about Roman pottery at an open day at St Briavels Castle in the Forest of Dean. *Courtesy of Gloucestershire County Council Archaeology Service*
Above centre Archaeological excavation at the Chester amphitheatre 2004. *Courtesy of Chester City Council & English Heritage*
Above BBC Gloucester History Fair – and opportunity to see the HER and bring in finds for identification. *Courtesy of Gloucestershire County Council Archaeology Service*



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