

Historic Environment Records: Benchmarks for Good Practice

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English Heritage

Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers

Contents

Introduction	3
Consultation	3
Definitions	4
References	4
<i>DRAFT BENCHMARKS FOR GOOD PRACTICE</i>	
1. User Services and Access	5
2. Information Coverage and Content	6
3. Information Management	7
4. Organisation Management	9
Annex 1: HER Basic compliance specification DRAFT v0.2	10

HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT RECORDS: BENCHMARKS FOR GOOD PRACTICE

Introduction

The Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers (ALGAO) and English Heritage are committed to developing the network of Sites and Monuments Records (SMRs) that, since the mid-1960s, has grown to cover the whole of England. Over the last five years there has been steady progress towards the goal of an accessible, national network of information about the local historic environment.

- In 1998, in a joint statement of co-operation, *Unlocking The Past for the New Millennium*, ALGAO and English Heritage published agreed principles governing SMRs.
- *An Assessment of English SMRs* for ALGAO (Baker 1999) made recommendations for the scope, organisation, management and future development of SMRs.
- *Informing the Future of the Past: Guidelines for SMRs* (2000) was published by English Heritage as a manual for working practice.
- *Power of Place* (2000), the sector's review of policies for managing the historic environment, identified the need for an historic environment information network, with properly funded and curated Historic Environment Record Centres.
- ALGAO's *Strategy 2001-2006* outlined its goals for developing standards and increasing access to information resources for the historic environment.
- *The Historic Environment: A Force for Our Future* (2001) welcomed the recommendation that SMR services should be enhanced in scope and in accessibility. The DCMS will be consulting on options for this later in the year.

Recent proposals to make SMRs a statutory duty for local government have highlighted again the need for agreement on an achievable, defined level of performance for local authorities and other bodies maintaining such Records.

There is also a need for formal recognition of the increasing scope and potential uses of historic environment information services in local public services. 'Sites and Monuments Record' is no longer an accurate or useful description for today's heritage information systems.

Consultation

The SMR community has been working towards establishing broader-based Historic Environment Records for several years and the process of consultation on setting a performance standard began in 2001. This document continues that process, with a draft benchmark document for wider consultation. Consensus is sought among stakeholder organisations on the approach in principle and on the detailed proposals in this document.

The draft presented here sets out an outline checklist, based on the framework devised for the Baker report, of the policies, plans, standards and other measures that are recommended to be in place in an HER for

- User Services and Access
- Information Coverage and Content
- Information Management
- Organisation Management.

Recognising that there is currently a considerable diversity in local SMR arrangements, the Benchmark scheme presents a checklist for self-assessment that is designed to encourage phased development. A two-stage scheme is proposed for defining levels of performance as organisations move positively towards providing fully developed HERs.

The 'first stage' recognises information systems as HERs if they meet a defined level of essential good practice in the four areas of performance. 'Provisional' recognition would be possible for information systems that cannot yet meet that level in all areas but show that they are actively developing towards it. The process of self-assessment using the Benchmark scheme will aid an accurate quantification of the scale of resources that are required to achieve a more even level of provision nationally. It will also assist individual organisations in developing their own forward plans.

The 'second stage' level of the Benchmark scheme is designed to recognise 'developed' HERs that form part of integrated information systems for the local environment. Attainment of this level of best practice is some way off for most organisations and will take different forms according to local arrangements. In many cases full development to stage 2 will need to evolve over an extended period in dialogue with professional colleagues in related conservation and cultural services with whom HERs will be a shared resource. in this area.

An initial stage of consultation has raised the suggestion that some form of external assessment and mentoring of self-assessed performance would be a useful strengthening of the scheme. Views on the desirability of this will be welcomed.

DEFINITIONS

Sites and Monuments Record

An SMR should be defined as a definitive permanent general record of the local historic environment in its national context, publicly and professionally maintained, whose data is accessible and retrievable for a wide range of purposes.
(Baker Report 1999).

Historic Environment Record

The historic environment includes all aspects of our surroundings that have been built, formed or influenced by human activities from earliest to most recent times.

An Historic Environment Record stores and provides access to systematically organised information about these surroundings in a given area. It is maintained and updated for public benefit in accordance with national and international standards and guidance.

An Historic Environment Record makes information accessible to all in order to:

- advance knowledge and understanding of the historic environment;
- inform its care and conservation;
- inform public policies and decision-making on land-use planning and management;
- contribute to environmental improvement and economic regeneration;
- contribute to education and social inclusion;
- encourage participation in the exploration, appreciation and enjoyment of the historic environment.

(ALGAO / English Heritage SMR Working Party 2002)

Benchmark*

A defined level of performance set by consensus or peer review as a recommended mark of attainment. Benchmarks may be used to establish a set of procedures or to define levels of practice.

Standard*

Document containing technical specifications or precise criteria to be used as rules, guidelines or definitions of characteristics, to ensure that material, products, processes and services are fit for their purpose.

**Definitions for terminology adopted from Resource's 'Benchmarks in Collection Care for Museums, Archives and Libraries' (2002).*

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RCHME 1998. *MIDAS: A Manual and Data Standard for Monument Inventories.*

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DRAFT BENCHMARKS FOR GOOD PRACTICE

<p>1. User Services and Access</p>	<p>1st stage HER performance measures</p>	<p>2nd stage HER performance measures</p>
<p>SERVING USER NEEDS</p> <p>1.1 Information services policy <i>Baker Rec 20, 41</i></p> <p>1.2 Access to services <i>Baker Rec 41</i></p>	<p>1.1a. A written policy for information services setting out:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The purposes for which the historic environment record is maintained • The professional and public user groups that it aims to serve • The arrangements for providing information and access for those users according to their particular needs. <p><i>IFP Guidelines E.1-3</i></p> <p>1.2a. Publication of details of public access and search facilities (remote and / or local), including opening hours and charging policy in</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • printed leaflet/poster, • Web site/ page with email address • Index entry in HEIRNET Register. <p>User facilities, according to local policy (1.1a), should include a supervised work area for researchers, appropriately equipped and with facilities for copying, etc. Where such facilities are limited, there should be an appropriate alternative provision such as a specified level of response to postal, telephone and email enquiries and / or remote access to the Record via other services (e.g. from terminals in museums, libraries, record offices).</p> <p><i>IFP Guidelines E.3-4</i></p>	<p>1.1b A developed information services policy based on research into patterns of usage and user satisfaction (1.3a/b.). Specific consideration should be given to provision for access for different types of user and their particular needs.</p> <p><i>Draft National Standard for Access to Archives (Public Service Quality Group)</i></p> <p>1.2b. A dedicated, supervised work area for researchers, appropriately equipped. Developed provision for remote access via intranet (between and within organisations) or internet:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> e.g. online access to high level data through a catalogue (e.g. Greater London with ADS) or fully mounted on own site (e.g. Durham) e.g. Fully mounted interoperable system accessible through gateway / portal such as HEIRPORT <p>Conformity with e-Government Interoperability Framework (Dublin core) and emerging guidelines for GIS.</p> <p>Configuration in accordance with agreed computer communication protocols to support interoperability and cross-searching, e.g. Z39-50, Open Archives Initiative.</p> <p><i>IFP Guidance B.10, E.7</i> <i>Draft National Standard for Access to Archives (Public Service Quality Group)</i></p>
<p>SATISFYING USER NEEDS</p> <p>1.3 Research into user profiles and service satisfaction <i>Baker Rec 38,39</i></p>	<p>1.3a. A maintained record of users and type of enquiry for both local and remote use (e.g. web hits, telephone enquiries, as well as visits by researchers).</p> <p><i>IFP Guidelines E.2, Panel 7</i></p>	<p>1.3b. Systematically collected information on user satisfaction. Market research into the profile and information needs of identified user groups; and into awareness and needs among potential new user groups, such as schools and educational organisations</p>
<p>REACHING NEW AUDIENCES</p> <p>1.4 Development of outreach</p>	<p>1.4a. Programme of outreach activities to develop new audiences and promote wider use of resources; or outline proposals for how a balanced programme will be developed in the future.</p> <p><i>IFP Guidelines E.6</i></p>	<p>1.4b. Developed programme of outreach activities based on user responses and market research (above 1.3a. and b.). Resources for use in education should be a priority. These might range from new media and data formats (for presentation of interpreted information for specific user groups / topics e.g. through NGfL) to exhibitions, leaflets, trails, open days, field programmes, etc.</p>

<p>2. Information Coverage and Content</p>	<p>1st stage HER performance measures</p>	<p>2nd stage HER performance measures</p>
<p>INFORMATION CONTENT</p> <p>2.1 Information policy <i>Baker Rec 19, 23, 28, 29</i></p> <p>2.2 Information coverage and content <i>Baker Rec 28</i></p> <p>2.3 Primary or unique archive material should be managed by an appropriate curatorial service. <i>Baker Rec 33</i></p>	<p>2.1a. A written policy setting out the scope, geographical coverage and content of information resources that should be accessible through the service (digital, non-digital and reference collections). The policy should take account of related historic environment information systems, museum, library and record office collections that complement the Record's holdings.</p> <p>In principle, the Record should be inclusive of subject and period for all archaeology, terrestrial and maritime, either through its own holdings or links with related information resources. In practice, the circumstances of its development and resources may mean that the Record is not all-inclusive. The policy should be explicit about differential coverage in period and topic and selective inclusion or omissions (e.g. cut-off dates, datasets from thematic surveys).</p> <p>The policy will include a statement of existing arrangements for exchanging or sharing data and networking systems with related local records and other information providers / originators. This will also cover licence agreements (e.g. with NMR) and a statement on IPR issues.</p> <p><i>IFP Guidelines B.4, C, E.4.4</i></p> <p>2.2a. The coverage of an HER, in accordance with its information policy, should include units of information compiled from the sources outlined in detail in <i>IFP Guidelines</i> (D.3 - 5). It should provide comprehensive coverage for statutorily and non-statutorily designated historic places in its area through its own data holdings or linkages to others.</p> <p>A draft minimum content standard is appended at Annex 1: HER Basic compliance specification DRAFT v0.2.</p> <p><i>IFP Guidelines B.5-7, D.3-5)</i></p> <p>2.3a. Primary archive (digital, non-digital and finds) should be deposited with an appropriate repository. A disposals policy for staged transfers may be required and security copying / scanning of non-digital material as appropriate.</p> <p><i>IFP Guidelines B.4.3</i></p>	<p>2.1b. A written policy setting out the extended scope, coverage and content of information resources, including historic buildings and areas, developed through consultation and agreements with partner authorities, specialist user groups and other historic / local environment information systems serving the same geographical area (see 3.6b.).</p> <p>Coverage should be aim to be inclusive of subject and period for all archaeology and aspects of the historic environment (e.g. HLC, historical ecology datasets, historic buildings and areas) including standardised arrangements for updating information.</p> <p>2.2b. Enhanced coverage based on consultation and agreements about shared data holdings within the authority and with partner authorities and information resources, typically including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - additional heritage data sets, e.g. for 'local list' buildings, historical ecology - integrated, pan-authority GIS with historic building, landscape and natural environment information layers, - networked arrangements for shared access to distributed systems, - collaborative projects creating multi-disciplinary information resources with libraries, museums and record offices.

<p>3. Information Management</p>	<p>1st stage HER performance measures</p>	<p>2nd stage HER performance measures</p>
<p>SYSTEM ORGANISATION AND PROCEDURES</p> <p>3.1 Formally adopted procedures for documentation practice <i>Baker Rec 44</i></p> <p>3.2 Computerised database(s) and relevant information schemes compiled in accordance with national data standards. <i>Baker Rec 3, 31</i></p> <p>3.3 GIS for current and historical mapping, linked to the Record databases. <i>Baker Rec 31, 15</i></p> <p>3.4 Supporting reference collections (secondary sources, maps, graphic and photographic material) <i>Baker Rec 32</i></p>	<p>3.1a. Written manual or 'recording guidelines' to provide quality assurance and documenting 3.2a. - 3.5a. <i>IFP Guidelines B.5 - B.7, C.</i></p> <p>3.2a. Compliance with a basic MIDAS data content standard and with Event - Monument-Archive/Source (EMA) information schemes; conformity with INSCRIPTION wordlists and thesauri. <i>MIDAS - A Manual and Data Standard for Monument Inventories</i></p> <p>3.3a. Compliance with national standards for spatial data and guidance on GIS good practice, e.g. ADS <i>GIS Guide to Good Practice Guide</i>, NGDF metadata standard. <i>IFP Guidelines B.8</i></p> <p>3.4a. A written guide and index to supporting reference collections held by the Record. Collections should be housed and maintained to relevant environmental and storage standards. <i>IFP Guidelines B.11-12.</i></p>	<p>3.1b. Extended written manual for procedures to cover the range of historic environment information systems with which the Record shares data or has links. ?Adoption of full procedural standard (e.g. equivalent to SPECTRUM for museums) for which documentation may be developed in next 5 years.</p> <p>3.2b. Compliance with developing standards for historic environment data content and information schemes: ? extended Dublin Core scheme for historic environment data ? a standard / guidance for hierarchical data models ? an information scheme for building and landscape management records</p> <p>3.3b. Extended procedural manual for documentation practice to support a developed GIS system for integrated management of spatial and map-based data for historic environment, linked to databases and text-based information. Compliance with developing standards for GIS data content and protocols for exchanging and sharing GIS data: ? a standard for core historic environment spatial data and recording scheme.</p> <p>3.4b. A catalogue of reference collections, cross-indexed with the computerised Record. Forward plan programme for enhancing and digitising reference collections such as historic maps, photographs and other material indexed in the Record.</p>
<p>QUALITY AND SECURITY MEASURES</p> <p>3.5 Data security <i>Baker Rec 43, 44</i></p> <p>3.6 Information audit on quinquennial basis <i>Baker Rec 14</i></p>	<p>3.5a. System security policy covering arrangements, or planned future provision, for</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • storage and handling of digital and other modern media; • multi-layered security procedures; • long-term digital archiving and security copying of non-digital material. <p><i>IFP Guidelines B.9.2</i></p> <p>3.6a. Report of information audit to assess the quality of data and identify the need for validation and enhancement. <i>NMR SMR data audit specification: section 6</i></p>	<p>3.5b. Repeat audits on a quinquennial cycle.</p>

3. Information Management (cont.)	1 st stage HER performance measures	2 nd stage HER performance measures
<p>QUALITY AND SECURITY MEASURES (continued)</p> <p>3.7 Data validation and currency: <i>Baker Rec 42</i></p> <p>3.8 Safeguards against foreseeable risks and disaster <i>Baker Rec 44</i></p>	<p>3.7a An assessment of backlog, update and enhancement requirements. A prioritised programme, based on the results of an information audit (3.6a.), for data validation, recasting of earlier records, essential core data indexing, routine updating and enhancement projects should form part of the Record's Forward Plan. ** <u>National Guidelines needed.</u></p> <p><i>IFP Guidelines D.3-5</i></p> <p>Risk assessment and emergency preparedness plan</p> <p><i>IFP Guidelines B.12</i></p>	<p>3.7b. Cleared backlogs of data validation and core data entry; implementation of a programme for new data capture to maintain and extend core data sets as appropriate. There should be a phased programme of enhancement forming part of the Record's Forward Plan (see 3.4b.)</p> <p><i>IFP Guidelines D.4-5</i></p>

<p>4. Organisation Management</p>	<p>1st stage HER performance measures</p>	<p>2nd stage HER performance measures</p>
<p>CORPORATE AND BUSINESS ARRANGEMENTS</p> <p>4.1 Formal adoption as a maintained public information resource for understanding and enjoyment of the local historic environment. <i>Baker Rec 18</i></p> <p>4.2 Formal agreement on geographical coverage and service levels with partners / service providers <i>Baker Rec 7, 22, 28</i></p> <p>4.3 Statement of purpose or mission statement, policies and key aims of the service. <i>Baker Rec 30</i></p> <p>4.4 Forward Plan supported by appropriate budgetary provision <i>Baker Rec 26, 30</i></p> <p>STAFFING AND SUPPORT SERVICES</p> <p>4.5 Professional archaeological / historic environment officer post with primary responsibility for managing the Record <i>Baker Rec 24(a)</i></p> <p>4.6 Appropriate internal management arrangements, in relation to the organisation's overall structure, including administrative and clerical support. <i>Baker Rec 24 (a)</i></p> <p>4.7 Technical advice: system support for IT and access to other relevant professional advice on archive and records management <i>Baker Rec 24(a)</i></p> <p>4.8 Staff training and development programme and resources <i>Baker Rec 27</i></p>	<p>4.1a.</p> <p>i. Resolution of governing body to adopt the Record formally, in accordance with the 'Benchmark' Scheme.</p> <p>ii. Where the governing body is not the local planning authority (lpa), or acts on behalf of one or more local authorities, formal recognition of the Record is desirable from the relevant lpas. This might, for example, be incorporated in service level agreements.</p> <p>4.2a. Resolution of governing body; service level agreements and contracts.</p> <p>4.3a. Formally adopted policies and strategic plan for the service. <i>IFP Guidelines B.2</i></p> <p>4.4a. Forward plan for the service to achieve implementation of programmes and projects identified in Section 1-3, indicating the resources secured and required for the plan period (3 year recommended). <i>IFP Guidelines B.2</i></p> <p>4.5a. Staffing provision and structure commensurate with the level of services provided. This will include at least one full-time member of staff with appropriate qualifications, experience, and with membership of relevant professional body. <i>IFP Guidelines B.3, E.3.1</i></p> <p>4.6a. Organisation 'management tree' illustrating arrangements for administrative and clerical support for the service.</p> <p>4.7a. Provision for identified IT support and arrangements for obtaining advice on management of archive and primary records from a professional archivist / museum record officer. <i>IFP Guidelines B.9</i></p> <p>4.8a. Organisation training plan showing commitment to CPD and formal review process for training and development of staff. There should be budgetary provision for relevant specialist and software training courses. Training plans should also be in place for student and volunteer placements <i>IFP Guidelines B.3</i></p>	<p>Annual review of service level agreements.</p> <p>Annual review of Forward Plan.</p> <p>4.5b. Staffing provision and structure commensurate with the level of services provided. This will include personnel with qualifications, experience, and membership of relevant professional bodies, as appropriate for managing an extended range of historic environment information resources (as outlined in 2.2) <i>IFP Guidelines B.3</i></p>

Annex 1**HER Basic compliance specification DRAFT v0.2**

This document is drafted for consideration by the SMR / HER community. It sets out the MIDAS units of information deemed appropriate for a basic level of SMR / HER provision. The document is based on the assumption that the basic range of SMR / HER functions is as follows:-

- Basic development control and responses to proposals for land-use change (Is anything affected by this proposal? Has the site been investigated in the past?). Note that logging of applications is not covered by this version of the basic standard.
- Some comparative work (How rare is this type / date of site in my area?)
- Some informational / research work (Where can I find more information? Has this site been investigated in detail?)

To comply with the standard a system must be able to store and process the following information:

Notes:-** indicates that a controlled terminology standard is available.

Monuments:

MIDAS Unit of Information	Optional (O) / Mandatory (M)	Repeatable group (R) /Unique (U)	Notes
Primary Reference Number	M	U	
Name	O	R	If no Name is given, a Description is Mandatory
Description	O	U	
Date of Compilation	M	U	
Date of Last Update	M	U	
Compiler	M	U	
Protection Status**	M	R	
Protection Grade**	M		
Monument Type**	M	R	
Period**	M		
Evidence**	M		
O.S. 100 km square	M		
O.S. Easting	M	R	One grid reference is required for basic compliance
O.S. Northing	M		
National Grid Reference Precision**	M		
Topology**	M		
Unitary Authority**	M		
County**	M	R	
District**	M		
Parish**	M		
Internal Cross-Reference Primary Reference Number	O		R
Internal Cross-reference Qualifier	O		

Events:

MIDAS Unit of Information	Optional (O) /Mandatory (M)	Repeatable (R) /Unique (U)	Notes
Primary Reference Number	M	U	
Name	O	R	If no Name is given, a Description is Mandatory
Description	O	U	
Date of Compilation	M	U	
Date of Last Update	M	U	
Compiler	M	U	
Event Type**	M	U	
Minimum Date	M	U	
Maximum Date	M	U	
Associated Person Name	M	R	One or other is mandatory
Associated Organisation Name			
Associated Role	M		
O.S. 100 km square	M	R	One grid reference is required for basic level compliance
O.S. Easting	M		
O.S. Northing	M		
National Grid Reference Precision**	O		
Topology**	O		
Unitary Authority**	M	R	
County**	M		
District**	M		
Parish**	M		
Internal Cross-Reference Primary Reference Number	O	R	To connect to Monument and Archive Source information, or other Event information
Internal Cross-reference Qualifier	O		

Archive / Source information:

MIDAS Unit of Information	Optional (O) / Mandatory (M)	Repeatable (R) /Unique (U)	Notes
Primary Reference Number	M	U	
Date of Compilation	M	U	
Date of Last Update	M	U	
Compiler	M	U	
Archive / Source Type**	M	U	
Archive Source Title	M	U	
Date of Origination	M	U	
Statement of Responsibility	M	U	
O.S. 100 km square	O	R	A single grid reference is required for basic compliance
O.S. Easting	O		
O.S. Northing	O		
National Grid Reference Precision**	O		
Topology**	O		
Unitary Authority**	M	R	
County**	M		
District**	M		
Parish**	M		
Internal Cross-Reference Primary Reference Number	O	R	To connect to Events and Monument records, or other Archive records
Internal Cross-reference Qualifier	O		