



Heritage Division, Room 303  
2-4 Cockspur Street, London, SW1Y 5DH  
Telephone: 0171 211 6365 Facsimile: 0171 211 6382

Leaders of district councils  
in prospective unitary authorities  
and county councils  
in reorganized areas

Your ref:

Our ref: HSD 56/2/1

Date: 8 August 1995

Dear Sir or Madam

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANIZATION: GUIDANCE TO LOCAL AUTHORITIES ON CONSERVATION OF THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT**

1. The forthcoming reorganization of local government in the English shire counties from April 1996 will have a number of consequences for local authority services falling under this Department's umbrella. These will probably be greatest for services provided at county level, but will affect many authorities new and old.

2. On 16 June, the Department issued strategic guidance to all local authorities affected by reorganization to emphasize the importance of maintaining effective services in the culture and leisure fields. That guidance gave advance notice of the issuing of advice on particular subject areas.

3. The Department is today issuing guidance to local authorities on the provision of conservation services; I enclose a copy with this letter. The guidance has been prepared in consultation with English Heritage, the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England and the Department of the Environment.

4. The guidance is intended to assist authorities in meeting their responsibilities for the protection and management of the historic environment, within the national policy framework set out in PPG 15 and PPG 16 (*Planning and the Historic Environment* and *Archaeology and Planning*). More specifically, it gives advice on:-

- i. assessing the requirement, and designing the size and structure of conservation service required for a particular area (paragraphs 5-7);
- ii. ensuring that a comprehensive resource inventory of the historic environment is maintained, and made fully accessible for use in connection with development control etc (paragraphs 8-12);
- iii. integrating conservation policies with broader planning policies for the area, and ensuring that staff responsible for development and conservation controls have effective access to all fields of conservation advice (paragraphs 13-16);

iv. identifying the opportunities that conservation can create for promoting economic prosperity and regeneration (paragraphs 17-21);

v. managing historic properties in local authorities' own care to high standards, and making the most of the educational opportunities that they and related collections offer (paragraphs 22-25).

5. Your attention is drawn to paragraph 7, which asks authorities to submit a management statement to the Department of their proposed arrangements for securing conservation advice within a year of their creation.

Yours faithfully

Handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "A H Corner".

A H CORNER

# LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANIZATION

## GUIDANCE NOTE FOR NEW AUTHORITIES

### INTRODUCTION

1. England's archaeological and built heritage is widely acknowledged as a resource of unique cultural and social value. The Government's commitment to the heritage is reflected in the far-reaching responsibilities and powers, both statutory and discretionary, that enable local authorities to deliver a conservation service at local level. Indeed, the protection and enhancement of the heritage depend critically on the competence of local authorities to operate this service effectively. The establishment of new authorities has significant implications for its future.

2. PPGs 15 and 16 - *Planning and the Historic Environment* and *Archaeology and Planning* - set out Government policies for the identification and safeguard of archaeological sites, listed buildings, conservation areas and other elements of the historic environment. They emphasize the importance of the planning system in protecting these, and the need to ensure that all local authority policies that affect heritage interests pay due regard to the principles of sustainable development.

3. In urging local authorities to maintain and strengthen their commitment to the stewardship of the historic environment, PPG 15 stresses that

'... above all, local authorities should ensure that they can call on sufficient specialist conservation advice whether individually or jointly to inform their decision-making and to assist owners and other members of the public';

and PPG 16 that

'... all planning authorities should make full use of the expertise of County Archaeological Officers or their equivalents.'

4. This guidance offers advice to new authorities on the implementation of these requirements, and invites them to set out their proposals for meeting their conservation responsibilities. In this context, the term 'new authority' means those local authorities that inherit county functions as a result of local government reorganization.

### THE CONSERVATION SERVICE

#### Assessing the requirement

5. There is no single ideal size or structure for the conservation service and the staffing requirement for each authority will depend upon a range of factors. These will include:

- (a) the nature of the resource, indicated by
  - the number and character of entries in the sites and monuments record (see paragraph 8 onwards),
  - the number of listed buildings,

- the number and size of conservation areas,
  - the number of registered historic parks and gardens,
  - the historic character of the authority area as revealed in landscape assessments and state of environment reports;
- (b) the pressure to which it is subject, indicated by
- the number of planning applications affecting archaeology,
  - the number of listed building consent applications to alter or demolish listed buildings, and notifiable applications affecting listed buildings,
  - the number of applications for conservation area consent, or notifiable applications in conservation areas,
  - the number of planning applications affecting registered parks and gardens;
- (c) the condition of the resource, indicated by
- the percentage of listed buildings judged to be at risk,
  - the percentage of historic buildings in need of urgent repair in conservation areas,
  - the percentage of archaeological features under threat,
  - the rate of loss of landscape features such as hedges and walls;
- (d) the size and economic status of the administrative area, indicated by
- population,
  - employment levels,
  - household income,
  - retail spending,
  - property values;
- (e) the existence of appropriate advice in other tiers of local government or in other associated locations or organizations.

6. Effective conservation demands specialist skills and expertise on a wide range of subjects - archaeology, historic buildings, conservation areas, historic landscape, and registered parks and gardens. It also requires a service structure that ensures authoritative advice can be accessed at need. Ideally, new authorities should endeavour to provide this service themselves, but may seek jointly-funded voluntary arrangements with neighbouring authorities where this is not practicable.

7. New authorities are asked to conduct an audit of their requirements in the light of this guidance, and to submit a management statement to the Department of National Heritage setting out their proposed arrangements for securing a full range of specialist conservation advice within a year of their creation. Where the Secretary of State is not satisfied with these arrangements, he may, under paragraph 7 of Schedule 4 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, direct the authority to enter into a management agreement with another local planning authority for the purpose of obtaining the necessary specialist advice.

### **Resource inventory**

8. The foundation of all preservation and management policies, as well as the baseline for monitoring related environmental change, is the resource inventory, a comprehensive database of

the sites, features and areas of archaeological and historic interest within the locality. This database has an important role at strategic level and should be a major contributor to state of the environment reports. It should also provide documentary support for development control and a valuable educational resource.

9. Over the past two decades, a sustained programme of public investment in archaeological and allied research by English Heritage and, more recently, the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England (RCHME), has led to the creation of a computerized sites and monuments record (SMR) for each shire county in England. PPG 16 underlines the central role of the SMR as a first requirement in developing policies for the protection and management of archaeological remains, and urges local authorities to make full use of County Archaeological Officers or their equivalents.

10. In some counties, the SMR and Historic Buildings Record have been integrated into a single database underpinning the functions of a heritage group collectively responsible for archaeology, historic buildings and conservation areas. This is a development to be encouraged, as is the future integration of comparable records for the natural environment.

11. New authorities are asked to ensure:

- (a) that adequate provision for a SMR service is made within their budgets;
- (b) that where an authority is too small to support a separate viable SMR, it takes steps to maintain a jointly-supported centralized SMR advisory service analogous to that previously maintained at county level, and to secure ready access to this for development planning and control purposes;
- (c) that however managed and constituted, each SMR adopts common, nationally agreed data standards and establishes arrangements for access and the exchange of data with neighbouring authorities, the National Monuments Record and other relevant agencies concerned with the recording, understanding and preservation of the archaeological and historic environment.

12. Further detailed advice on SMR provision will be published by the RCHME, in its capacity as lead agency for the development of archaeological and architectural record systems.

## **Conservation advice**

### **Planning and development control**

13. PPGs 15 and 16 urge authorities to reflect their heritage commitment in the formulation of policy and allocation of resources, to adopt suitable policies in structure and local plans and to give practical effect to these through their responsibilities for planning, listed building and conservation area control, and related highways functions.

14. Structure, local and unitary development plans are the main vehicle for ensuring that conservation policies are co-ordinated and integrated with other planning policies affecting the various components of the historic environment. Structure plans (and the first part of unitary development plans) provide the strategic safeguard for conservation interests by setting out clear policy guidance on the area as a whole, based on constraints derived from the resource inventory.

Local plans (and the second part of unitary development plans) set out development control policies in more detail. They may cite, for example, measures to protect, enhance and preserve sites of archaeological interest and their settings, or factors to be taken into account in assessing proposals for a change of use of particular types of historic buildings or new development in their vicinity.

15. Access to informed conservation advice is also required for development control, and for the pre-application and pre-works consultation to which PPGs 15 and 16 attach particular importance. Local authorities determine planning applications involving archaeological sites, historic buildings and areas. They also determine applications for consent to demolish or alter listed buildings and to demolish unlisted buildings in conservation areas, and have power to take enforcement action where necessary.

16. New authorities are asked to ensure:

- (a) that their Development Plans adequately reflect the conservation interest and needs of the area;
- (b) that they have formalized and effective access to all fields of conservation advice provided by appropriately qualified and experienced staff, supported by reliable and comprehensive inventories and records;
- (c) that, where feasible, conservation staff are located in units large enough to be able to build upon the expertise that has already been developed for conservation work and to command sufficient resources and specialist skills to cover the range of work adequately;
- (d) that these specialist teams are located within or with direct access to the planning function at a senior professional level;
- (e) that, where a unitary authority is too small to justify extensive resources 'in house', it seeks explicit arrangements to secure access to specialist services provided by other authorities and agencies, or sets up joint arrangements.

### Enhancement and regeneration

17. PPGs 15 and 16 acknowledge that conservation plays a key part in promoting economic prosperity by fostering the growth of tourism and by providing the attractive living and working conditions that encourage inward investment to an area. Grant programmes, supported by local commitment to a conservation strategy can seek to remove blight, restore confidence and enhance the attractions of historic areas to the point where their continued maintenance may be self-sustaining.

18. Conservation staff contribute to this vital process in a variety of ways, particularly:

- (a) by contributing to strategic regeneration initiatives attracting funding from public and private sources;
- (b) by advising on the designation and preservation of conservation areas and schemes for their repair and enhancement;

- (c) by maintaining registers of buildings at risk and promoting schemes for repair and re-use; and
- (d) by dispensing grant-aid.

19. Local authorities have a statutory duty to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of over 8,000 conservation areas in England. In a limited number of these English Heritage has traditionally made grants available, either through town scheme arrangements, which bring in joint funding from local authorities, or as direct grants to specified buildings or projects. Grants offered under the new English Heritage conservation area partnerships scheme (CAPS) will introduce greater delegation of management to local authorities and an enhanced role for conservation staff. Funding will be provided, subject to the availability of resources, to schemes of demonstrable quality, where there is a clear financial need for support. Conservation advice will be essential at each stage of the partnership process, in the qualifying assessment of an area's special architectural or historic interest, in the audit of the fabric and formulation of a programme of work, in the reconciliation of the scheme with the key conservation objectives of the local plan, and finally, in the management of the partnership scheme itself.

20. The national survey of listed buildings at risk, funded by English Heritage since 1989, relies on the expertise, energy and commitment of local authority conservation staff to identify rescue priorities and devise schemes for safeguarding the buildings concerned. Registers of buildings at risk may also be maintained to attract potential purchasers.

21. New authorities are asked to ensure that full account is taken of these important activities in the assessment of their conservation staffing requirement.

#### Management of the heritage estate

22. As owners and managers of a wide range of heritage properties, local authorities have a special responsibility to set an example to others by promoting best conservation practice. The majority of historic buildings in local authority ownership or care are in day-to-day use as schools, museums, town halls or offices. Others, regularly open to the public, include important but vulnerable buildings with no viable economic use, that depend upon local authority support for their survival. A number of authorities have also concluded local management agreements with English Heritage in relation to historic properties in the latter's care.

23. It is vital that the future of all historic buildings and monuments owned or managed by local authorities is safeguarded following structural reorganization. New authorities with inherited management responsibilities are asked to ensure:

- (a) that arrangements are made to safeguard the future of all historic properties in their ownership or care; and
- (b) that adequate funds for maintenance and repair are set aside where properties are incapable of being self-supporting.

#### Education and interpretation

24. Visits to archaeological and historic sites form an essential part of the national curriculum with many of these sites in local authority ownership or care. Local authorities also have an

important role in relation to the curation and display of primary and secondary source material in museums, libraries and records offices, many of which run successful education departments. Specialist conservation staff assist in conservation education, maintaining buildings, archaeology and interpretation centres and publishing technical advice on a wide range of conservation issues.

25. New authorities are asked to ensure:
- (a) that, at the very least, the current level of provision for these educational and interpretative activities is maintained; and
  - (b) that existing record collections continue to be serviced by teams of specialists, and to be readily accessible to the public.

### **FURTHER ADVICE**

26. Further advice on the local authority conservation service can be obtained from:

English Heritage  
23 Savile Row  
London  
W1X 1AB

(tel: 0171-973 3000; fax: 0171-973 3001)

A list of area teams and team leaders is annexed. They will be responsible for liaison with any new authorities in the geographical areas that they presently cover.

27. Advice on sites and monuments records can be obtained from:

The SMR Liaison Officer  
Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England  
National Monuments Record Centre  
Kemble Drive  
Swindon  
SN2 2GZ

(tel: 01793-414700; fax: 01793-414707)



ENGLISH HERITAGE AREA TEAMS AND TEAM LEADERS (LONDON EXCLUDED)

South East

Berkshire, East Sussex, Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Kent, Oxfordshire, Surrey, West Sussex

Team Leader: Mr Bill Startin

South West

Avon, Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Gloucestershire, Somerset, Wiltshire, Isles of Scilly

Team Leader: Miss Jill Kerr

Anglia

Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Norfolk, Suffolk

Team Leader: Ms Paula Griffiths

East Midlands

Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire, Nottinghamshire

Team Leader: Dr Anthony Streeten

West Midlands

Hereford and Worcester, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, West Midlands

Team Leader: Mr Paul Hoppen

North

Cleveland, Cumbria, Durham, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear

Team Leader: Dr David Fraser

North West

Cheshire, Lancashire, Greater Manchester, Merseyside

Team Leader: Mr Michael Coupe

Yorkshire and Humberside

Humberside, North Yorkshire, South Yorkshire, West Yorkshire

Team Leader: Mr Geoffrey Noble