

• **Leaders of district councils  
in prospective unitary authorities  
and county councils  
in reorganised areas**

**Our Ref: TGH.NL 10/95**

**Date: 31 October 1995**

**Dear Sir or Madam,**

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION: GUIDANCE TO LOCAL AUTHORITIES  
ON ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL RECORD SYSTEMS.**

1. **The forthcoming reorganisation of local government in the English Shire counties from April 1996 will have a number of consequences for the conservation services currently provided by local authorities.**
2. **On the 8th August, the Department of National Heritage issued guidance to local authorities on the key issues for the continued care, preservation and management of the historic environment. The guidance gave advance notice of the issuing of detailed advice on arrangements for archaeological and architectural record systems by this body.**
3. **This guidance note is intended to assist authorities in ensuring that an appropriate and comprehensive resource inventory of the historic environment is maintained to support their responsibilities for the protection and management of the historic environment. These are set out in the national policy framework of PPG 15 and PPG 16 (*Planning and the historic environment and Archaeology and Planning*).**
4. **The RCHME is able to assist local authorities in meeting their responsibilities through the provision of advice, training and practical support. It is also able to assist in the preparation of the management statement required by the Department of National Heritage on proposed arrangements for securing a conservation service.**

5. This guidance has been prepared in consultation with the Department of National Heritage, English Heritage, the Association of County Archaeologists, the Association of District Archaeologists and the Council for British Archaeology.

Yours sincerely,

*Tom Hassall*

---

T. G. Hassall

From the Secretary, T G Hassall MA FSA MIFA

Direct dial: (01793) 414625

Direct FAX: (01793) 414771

[NMRC 1/95]

---

**ROYAL COMMISSION ON THE HISTORICAL MONUMENTS  
OF ENGLAND**  
**National Monuments Record Centre**  
**Kemble Drive**  
**Swindon SN2 2GZ**

---

[October, 1995]

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1992:  
Guidance from RCHME for New Authorities on the role of  
Sites and Monuments Records.**

**Introduction.**

1. Throughout England there is a wealth of archaeological and historic sites surviving both above and below ground, which extend from single artefacts to complex multi-period sites and on a larger scale, to recognisable historic landscapes and towns. This is widely acknowledged to be a resource of unique cultural and social value. The maintenance of an efficient conservation service within local authorities is essential to the proper management of this resource. The forthcoming reorganisation of local government in shire counties will have a significant impact on the provision of these services in local authorities, both new and old.
2. The Royal Commission on Historical Monuments for England (RCHME) is the national body of survey and record for the historic environment. It is responsible for co-ordinating the work of the local heritage records currently maintained by county councils, known conventionally as 'Sites and Monuments Records' (SMRs), and heritage records held by a smaller number of district councils, including the Urban Archaeological Databases (UADs) currently being set up in historic towns, with that of its own central National Monuments Record. The RCHME is concerned to ensure efficient arrangements and adequate provision for maintaining this network following local government reorganisation.
3. English Heritage is the national body responsible for protection and management of the historic environment. It is responsible for advising both central and local government on policy and measures for the protection and management of historic sites, buildings and areas and for distributing grants for repair and recording purposes.
4. The Department of National Heritage recently issued guidance to new local authorities on requirements for maintaining a conservation service for the historic environment<sup>1</sup>. This stated that the maintenance of a local up to date *Inventory* of sites and monuments within an SMR is essential for the effective implementation of Planning Policy Guidance Notes 15 and 16. As advised in paragraph 12 of the DNH paper, this note offers detailed guidance to new authorities on SMR service provision and the development of archaeological and architectural record systems.

5. RCHME is also concerned with the archival services traditionally provided at county level by County Record Offices and records of historic buildings, many of which are currently maintained by conservation officers in district councils (although records are sometimes also maintained at county level). Detailed advice on future provision for archives has been circulated by the Department of National Heritage.<sup>ii</sup>
6. It should be noted that there is a statutory requirement under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 for RCHME to be advised of all proposals to demolish or alter Listed Buildings. This affords the Commission the opportunity to consider the need for recording in advance of changes being made, in the context of the national priorities of its Emergency Recording section.
7. PPGs 15<sup>iii</sup> and 16<sup>iv</sup> set out Government policies for the identification, protection and recording of archaeological sites, listed buildings, conservation areas and other elements of the historic environment. These Guidance Notes emphasise the importance of the planning system in protecting the historic environment and the central role of the SMR in informing planning policies for the historic environment and in development control.

### **Content and role of the SMR.**

8. Sites and Monuments Records normally include some or all of the following:
  - ◇ A computerised inventory of archaeological sites and monuments. Some SMRs also have records of historic buildings which may be derived from the statutory lists and other sources.
  - ◇ A map base, normally at 1:10000 scale, showing the location, and often the extent of sites and monuments.
  - ◇ A historic map library, containing copies of estate maps, tithe maps, early editions of the Ordnance Survey mapping and works of other historic cartographers.
  - ◇ Secondary record files, containing additional information, notes, and correspondence relating to sites indexed within the computerised SMR.
  - ◇ A photographic collection which may include historic and aerial photographs
  - ◇ Records of surveys, including plans, diagrams, drawings etc.
  - ◇ A collection of archaeological and architectural books and journals relevant to the county.
  - ◇ In almost every county, SMRs are staffed by at least one professional officer with knowledge and experience of the local archaeology and interpretation of the SMR records.
9. It should be noted that SMRs are not normally suitable repositories for original archival material, though they may hold copies of this. Where original material is held, arrangements should be made for its deposition in a recognised archive (such as the County Record Office), with a copy retained by the SMR if required<sup>v</sup>.

10. In some authorities, the SMR and records of historic buildings have been integrated into a single database supporting the functions of a heritage group collectively responsible for archaeology, historic buildings and conservation areas. This is a development to be encouraged, providing appropriate data standards are effected, as is the future integration of comparable records for the natural environment.
11. Amongst the key responsibilities of the curatorial archaeological sections in county councils is the maintenance of the County Sites and Monuments Record, and the provision of planning advice. A smaller number of district councils and unitary authorities also hold similar records as part of the conservation service. The SMR provides a measure against which changes to the historic environment can be assessed and should be a major information source for state of the environment reports. As well as contributing to strategic planning at a county-level, the SMR provides an essential archaeological information and advisory service to the development control process within constituent district and unitary authorities and is also a valuable resource for education and for promotion of the heritage.
12. PPG 16 emphasises the central role of the SMR in informing development policies for the protection and management of archaeological remains, and urges local authorities to make full use of County Archaeological Officers or their equivalents.
13. District council archaeological services and conservation officers will normally benefit from close links and data exchange arrangements with the wider county SMR. Such links allow the better consideration of strategic issues, the comparison of site and building types across wide geographical areas and linkage to the National Monuments Record.

### **Size and staffing of SMRs**

14. There is no single ideal size or structure for the maintenance of Sites and Monuments Records. In each case, this will depend upon a number of factors, including:
  - ◇ the density of the known historic resource reflected by the number of entries in the SMR.
  - ◇ the development pressure to which it is subject.
  - ◇ the extent of activity likely to identify new sites or require emendation of existing records.
  - ◇ the range of activities the SMR is required to support.
  - ◇ the number and complexity of enquiries to the SMR.
  - ◇ the size and economic status of the administrative area.
15. In areas of deep and complex stratigraphy and a high density of archaeological and architectural remains, often subject to intensive planning pressure, more localised SMR records may be appropriate. As part of their response to PPG 16, English Heritage are funding a programme of Urban Archaeological Strategies in major historic cities to facilitate the integration of archaeological considerations into the planning process. The programme includes the compilation of Urban Archaeological Databases in

collaboration with RCHME which are related to the planning procedures adopted by the relevant local planning authority.

16. The minimum staffing requirement to provide an effective service in a typical SMR should be at least one full time officer (or equivalent) dedicated to this task and where possible at least one full-time assistant, particularly in larger SMRs (as measured against the criteria in 14, above). In each case, new authorities should ensure that the present available staff resource is not diluted and that services continue to be provided to at least the same standard following reorganisation.
17. Although there are benefits in keeping development control advice close to the SMR, where possible, the core tasks of maintaining, updating and providing information and advice from the SMR should be held separate from the role of development control. Experience has shown that where these functions have been combined in a single post, it has been to the detriment of maintenance of the SMR. English Heritage has facilitated the establishment of specific development control posts in local authorities which are appropriate to discharging this function.

#### **Services from RCHME.**

18. The RCHME is available to provide a range of advice, information and assistance to new authorities, including the identification and implementation of requirements for maintaining SMR records and recording activities as part of the conservation service.
19. We can advise on:
  - ◇ Suitable hardware and software systems for archaeological and architectural recording.
  - ◇ the selection and implementation of appropriate national standards in recording, documentation and archaeological and architectural survey.
  - ◇ the content of records of architecture and archaeology, including maritime recording.
  - ◇ The management of archive material resulting from excavations and recording activities.
20. We can also advise on the preparation of the audit of requirements requested in the recent DNH guidance note<sup>vi</sup> in relation to archaeological and architectural record systems.
21. We can, on receipt of relevant information, suggest suitable staffing arrangements appropriate for providing an SMR service to new authorities and provide guidance on the integration of archaeological and architectural heritage records.
22. RCHME is able to offer training to staff of local authority conservation services in a number of areas. Amongst the topics which can be offered are archaeological and architectural field survey, (including maritime and aerial photographic survey, recording and interpretation), database administration, and collections management. If there is sufficient demand, RCHME will also consider establishing formal training courses for the staff of SMRs.

## **SMR Organisation.**

23. In a review of SMRs conducted in 1993 by RCHME<sup>vii</sup>, the following recommendations were made:
  - ◊ The record of England's historic environment should be acknowledged as an extended database, curated by RCHME's National Monuments Record in partnership with the Department of National Heritage, English Heritage and local SMRs
  - ◊ The statutory position of local SMRs needs to be strengthened if they are to serve current government policy for conservation of the historic environment. The position has been summarised in the White Paper *This Common Inheritance* and further defined in the Town and Country Planning General Development Order, 1988, Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (PPG16) and related measures.
  - ◊ The Local Government Commission for England should encourage all new unitary authorities to make adequate financial provision for SMR services within their Standard Spending Assessments.
24. In planning future arrangements for the provision of SMR services, an important consideration in each case will be the disruption caused and potential duplication of resources required as a result of fragmenting the existing SMR.
25. Agreements for the exchange of information between the NMR and existing county SMRs are already in place, while protocols for district based records (including urban archaeological databases) and county SMRs are currently being established between the Association of County Archaeological Officers and the Association of District Archaeological Officers.
26. The RCHME is deeply concerned about the implications of dividing and recasting existing computerised SMRs along new geographical boundaries. This will incur considerable short term additional costs in the division and replication of supporting maps, files and library resources. Equally, many of the proposed new authorities may be of insufficient size to warrant the full time professional staff and equipment normally required to provide an efficient SMR service.
27. Responding to these concerns, the LGC has suggested that specific provision should be made for specialist services to avoid the fragmentation of current staff and resources.

## **Recommendations.**

28. We would therefore recommend that new authorities not currently developing urban archaeological databases or maintaining detailed SMR records at the district level should, in the first instance, consider securing SMR services either through a 'bought-in' service or through joint working arrangements. These should provide an SMR service analogous to that provided by the present county councils.
29. Where SMR services are secured through joint working arrangements, we consider that these should be the subject of special safeguards and guarantees to ensure their continued effective delivery, whether maintained through a 'lead authority' or by an 'arms length partnership'.

30. New authorities already having a core component of detailed heritage records based around a district conservation service or urban archaeological database should ensure co-ordination with the county SMR in order that effective coverage of the whole is maintained.
31. In the interests of regional strategic planning and to allow the cost-effective exchange of information between local and national bodies, all new unitary councils should require their SMRs, however managed and consulted, to adopt common, nationally agreed data standards.<sup>viii ix</sup>
32. They should similarly be required to establish arrangements for access and exchange of data with neighbouring authorities, the National Monuments Record, English Heritage and other relevant agencies concerned with the recording, understanding and preservation of the historic environment.
33. The Royal Commission would welcome the opportunity to discuss with the new shadow authorities their proposals for the support and delivery of heritage records services prior to the submission of a management statement to the Department of National Heritage on their proposed arrangements for securing conservation advice.

**Contact for further advice:**

The SMR Liaison Officer,  
RCHME,  
National Monuments Record Centre,  
Kemble Drive,  
Swindon SN2 2GZ (Tel: 0793 414727; Fax: 0793 414770)

---

**Notes:**

**i LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANIZATION: GUIDANCE NOTE FOR NEW AUTHORITIES. DNH, 1995.**

<sup>ii</sup> **Guidance on the care, preservation and management of records following changes arising from the Local Government Act 1992. DNH, 1995.**

<sup>iii</sup> **Planning Policy Guidance Note 15: Planning and the Historic Environment**

<sup>iv</sup> **Planning Policy Guidance Note 16: Archaeology and Planning**

<sup>v</sup> *For contact addresses see the current edition of Record Repositories in Great Britain. A Geographical directory. HMSO, for the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts.*

<sup>vi</sup> **Cf. Par. 7, P. 2**

<sup>vii</sup> **Recording England's Past: A Review of national and local SMRs in England. RCHME 1993**

<sup>viii</sup> **Recording England's Past: A Data Standard for the Extended National Archaeological Record. RCHME 1993.**

<sup>ix</sup> **Urban Archaeology Databases: Data Standards and Compilers Manual. RCHME and EH, 1993.**

---