



21st Century Challenges for Archaeology: **Local Authority Archaeology Services: Building resilience by anticipating change**



Final Report

For
The Chartered Institute for Archaeologists

MSDS Heritage



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21st Century Challenges for Archaeology: Local Authority Archaeology Services: Building resilience by anticipating change

Final Report

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Contents

1.0	Executive Summary.....	4
1.1	Key Findings	4
1.2	Recommendations.....	6
2.0	Acknowledgements	8
3.0	Appendices.....	8
4.0	Background	9
5.0	Aims and Objectives.....	11
5.1	Objectives.....	11
5.2	Aims.....	11
6.0	Methodology.....	12
6.1	Data Collection: Survey	12
6.2	Data Collection: Focus Groups.....	14
6.3	Data Analysis	14
6.4	The use of artificial intelligence	15
6.5	Reflections on the methodology	16
7.0	Analysis of service models and delivery	18
7.1	Measurement	19
7.2	Public benefit	19
7.3	Resourcing.....	19
8.0	Survey demographics.....	20
8.1	Service users	20
8.2	Service providers.....	21
9.0	User Experience	22
9.1	Consistency and standardisation.....	22
9.2	Communication.....	23
9.3	Training and skills.....	23
9.4	Positive feedback	24
9.5	Recommendations.....	25
10.0	Challenges and Opportunities: Discussion	26
10.1	Developments in planning	26
10.2	Development of Historic Environment Records.....	31
10.3	Local Authority structural change	34
10.4	Service resilience	40
10.5	Climate Change and Resilience.....	45
10.6	Museums.....	49
10.7	Public benefit and engagement.....	53

11.0	ClfA Standard for Archaeological Advice by Historic Environment Services	58
12.0	Project Conclusions.....	61
13.0	Project Recommendations	63
13.1	Advocacy Recommendations.....	63
13.2	Strategic Recommendations.....	63
13.3	Training Recommendations.....	64
13.4	Communication Recommendations	65

Figures

Figure 1: Type of service user (n=145)	20
Figure 2: Geographic regions where individuals either work or have an archaeological interest in.	21
Figure 3: Regional distribution of named Local Authorities (n=43).	21

Tables

Table 1: Key Project Recommendations	7
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1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.0.1 This report presents the findings of a sector-wide study examining the challenges, opportunities, and future resilience of Local Authority Historic Environment Services in England. This project builds on the earlier Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers (ALGAO) review of delivery models, undertaken by Landward Research. This project extends the analysis by incorporating the perspectives of service users and service providers supported by survey responses, focus groups and thematic analysis.
- 1.0.2 A key objective of the project was to use this analysis as a basis to explore the challenges and opportunities facing local authorities in the current political context that may require, or enable, developments in the current system. It should be noted that the analysis in this report is not directly focused on the diverse types of service delivery. However, it does attempt to infer where different services may be vulnerable to different threats or positioned differently to adapt to particular opportunities.
- 1.0.3 This project has also drawn on the 21CAP work package 2.1 Advocacy Foresight project, which collates currently identified policy threats and opportunities and will feed outcomes into ongoing sector advocacy, as the identified policy threats and opportunities will provide 'change scenarios' relevant to future action.
- 1.0.4 The project has been funded by Historic England as part of the 21st Century Challenges for Archaeology programme.

1.1 Key Findings

- 1.1.1 Several key themes emerged during the analysis which are summarised here.

Consistency

- 1.1.2 Consistency is a recurrent theme within the analysis, principally from service users. Service user frustration relates to three main areas: variability in HER data quality and formats, differences in charging structures, and inconsistencies in planning advice and expectations. While it was often unclear exactly what users would like to see or the reasons for variation between authorities, it is evident that there is a commonly held perception that differences between the way authorities deliver services was experienced as a challenge by many users.

Communication

- 1.1.3 Issues with communication were raised by service users with challenges including slow response times, lack of clarity about roles, difficulty accessing individuals and limited awareness of Historic Environment Record (HER) standards and processes. These issues also extended to internal collaboration between services including natural environment teams.

Developments in planning

- 1.1.4 Concern was raised across both service users and providers that any planning reform could result in the further erosion of protections for the historic environment including reducing the opportunities for pre-determination evaluation. Service providers also raised concerns that planning reforms may result in increasing workloads without a corresponding increase in funding.

- 1.1.5 Interestingly, service users were more likely to perceive potential opportunities such as improving public benefit outcomes, increasing access to HER data and more consistency in requirements across local authorities.

Historic Environment Records

- 1.1.6 While the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act (LURA) 2023 introduced a statutory duty for HERs, its implementation details remain uncertain. While many believe statutory status could strengthen HER protection, improve consistency and drive investment, there are concerns that without dedicated funding, clear national guidance and realistic expectations, statutory HERs may not be able to deliver meaningful improvements.
- 1.1.7 Optimistically, both service providers and users identified potential opportunities such as better integration with digital planning, enhanced public access to data and the use of tools such as opportunity/constraint mapping and deposit modelling. However, to fully utilise such opportunities, there is a need for strategic planning, strategic investment and sector-wide advocacy.

Local Authority structural change

- 1.1.8 Unsurprisingly, Local Authority structural change is a major source of uncertainty for many Local Authority Historic Environment Services. It was recognised that reorganisation can create real opportunities, particularly through unitary models and improved integration with internal planning teams. However, it also poses significant risks if not supported by adequate investment, statutory protections and informed decision-making. The general consensus is that effective advocacy, strong planning and sector-wide guidance are essential to ensure positive outcomes for historic environment services during this period of change.

Service resilience

- 1.1.9 The analysis shows that Local Authority Historic Environment Services are experiencing significant pressures from long-term under-funding, reduced capacity and rising workloads. Services have faced budget cuts, recruitment freezes and growing backlogs with limited capacity to do anything beyond their minimum statutory duties.
- 1.1.10 Recruitment remains a challenge for some services due to a variety of factors such as low pay compared to the private sector, lack of qualified applicants and limited opportunities for succession planning. Reduced capacity and lack of formal training significantly impacts services ability to train junior staff leaving teams vulnerable as senior staff approach retirement. Some services rely on temporary staff or have merged roles e.g., HER and development control which risks a dilution of specialist skills.

Climate change and resilience

- 1.1.11 The project analysis shows that many Local Authority Historic Environment Services are involved in climate change and nature recovery projects. However, the level of involvement in such projects varies between Historic Environment teams and is limited by under-resourcing, lack of project specific guidance and weak collaboration with the natural environment sector. This limitation is further compounded by differences in language and skills gaps.
- 1.1.12 The historic environment can provide opportunities for the natural environment e.g., through historic building reuse and the use of archaeological features to support ecological outcomes. To maximise the benefits provided by the historic environment, there is an urgent need for clearer guidance tailored to different project types, stronger cross-sector training and

knowledge sharing and improved use of palaeoenvironmental evidence. There is also a requirement for increased advocacy to embed the historic environment within wider climate and nature recovery frameworks.

Museums

- 1.1.13 Unsurprisingly, the report shows that museums face several significant challenges including issues with resourcing and archive deposition with many museums no longer accepting archives. While it was recognised that museums would benefit from statutory protection, the full reality of this could only be achieved with adequate and secure funding. Whilst achieving statutory protection is unlikely to happen soon, there are processes within the current system which could be improved to better integrate museums in the planning process. This includes more explicit wording in Written Schemes of Investigation on museum engagement, clearer reference to deposition processes and earlier communication between commercial companies and collecting museums.
- 1.1.14 Focus group participants stressed that museums' public engagement expertise is underused in commercial archaeology. Earlier involvement could enable joint outreach initiatives and a greater use of Section 106 funding to achieve more meaningful engagement. However, the limited resources of museums must be acknowledged. The report also found that there is concern that museums are losing archaeological curators as a specialist role. To help alleviate this, there was strong support for a mentoring and support network to be established to strengthen cross-sector relationships between museums, commercial companies and local authority teams.

Public benefit and engagement

- 1.1.15 Public benefit and engagement are central themes across the project. Both service users and providers see an opportunity within proposed planning reforms to secure stronger and clearer public benefit requirements in planning policy. It was noted that current practices rely too heavily on grey literature and often fail to reach wider audiences. Discussions called for more creative and accessible dissemination and greater alignment with community interests.
- 1.1.16 Focus group participants highlighted the need for a sector-wide value framework to demonstrate the social, cultural and economic benefits of the historic environment drawing on existing social value tools and ongoing national initiatives. It was also suggested that there is a requirement for more specific wording relating to public engagement in planning conditions along with better guidance for planning officers.

1.2 Recommendations

- 1.2.1 A series of recommendations have been made throughout this report based on the key themes outlined above. These recommendations are categorised according to advocacy, strategy, training and communication as described in Section 13.0. A concise version of these recommendations is outlined in Table 1 below.

Advocacy Recommendations	
Recommendation 1	Explore more partnerships working between key stakeholders both within and outside the sector.
Recommendation 2	Develop advocacy resources in three key areas: - Local authority service development including support for unitarisation and positive outcomes - Local authority historic environment roles to provide an evidence base for use by local authority services - The roles and value provided by archaeological advisory services, and additional value that could be unlocked through investment.
Recommendation 3	Increase advocacy for policy changes relating to three key areas: - Implementation of statutory HER provisions - Embedding the historic environment in climate change/nature recovery frameworks - Stronger wording within planning legislation/conditions relating to public benefit and museums/archive deposition
Strategic Recommendations	
Recommendation 1	A local government network should be established within ClfA to facilitate communication, training and strategic partnership working between service providers and users.
Recommendation 2	A strategic review should be carried out by ClfA and ALGAO to investigate consistency in service delivery and provision.
Recommendation 3	In partnership with key stakeholders, support the development and creation of a public value framework for archaeological projects.
Recommendation 4	Develop tailored guidance in partnership with Natural England to cover specific types of climate change and nature recovery projects.
Recommendation 5	In partnership with the SMA, ClfA should conduct a strategic review of standards relating to specialist analysis techniques applied to archives.
Training Recommendations	
Recommendation 1	ClfA and ALGAO should work in partnership to conduct a skills mapping exercise for local government historic environment services.
Recommendation 2	ClfA and ALGAO should explore the potential to support apprenticeships and secondments as a method of increasing and sharing skills within local authority historic environment services and the wider sector.
Recommendation 3	In partnership with Natural England, ClfA and ALGAO should develop a joint training strategy to increase skills relating to the historic and natural environments.
Recommendation 4	A centralised repository of resources should be developed in partnership with key stakeholders. These resources should include case studies and best practice guidance for: - Streamlining archive deposition processes within museums. - The historic environment within climate /nature recovery projects. - Public benefit and engagement
Recommendation 5	The sector should explore and develop mentoring networks to provide support and skills/knowledge sharing across the sector.
Communication Recommendations	
Recommendation 1	Greater communication between different elements of the sector should be facilitated through key stakeholders.

Table 1: Key Project Recommendations

2.0 Acknowledgements

- 2.0.1 The project team would like to thank Historic England for providing funding for this project. The team would also like to thank everyone who contributed to the project through participating in the survey and focus groups.
- 2.0.2 The project team would like to particularly thank the following individuals for their support and contributions throughout the project.
- ALGAO: Richard Oram and Quinton Carroll
 - Historic England: Emily La Trobe Bateman, Rachel Prosser, Andy Brown and Dan Miles
 - Oxford Archaeology: Dr Nick Overton
 - SMA: Ben Donnelly Symes and Gail Boyle
 - CBA: Gail Boyle and Neil Redfern
 - MOLA: Dr Sadie Watson
 - Dr Richard Hoggett

3.0 Appendices

- 3.0.1 The project report is supported by three appendices which contain details of the format of the data collection and the survey results. The appendices are as follows:
- **Appendix 1: Data Collection:** This appendix includes the format of the survey, the survey questions by section and the format of the focus groups.
 - **Appendix 2: User Experience:** This appendix contains the analysis of the user experience survey results by question.
 - **Appendix 3: Challenges and Opportunities:** This appendix contains the analysis of the challenges and opportunities survey results.

4.0 Background

- 4.0.1 The ALGAO report on Understanding Models for the Delivery of Local Authority Archaeology Services delivered a comprehensive and valuable survey of current delivery models and a thoughtful analysis of their pros and cons from the perspective of service providers. This project enriches that analysis by including the perspectives of users and other stakeholders and analysing some of the identifiable external change factors.
- 4.0.2 The ALGAO report captured a higher resolution picture than ever before of the existing systems of local authority archaeology service delivery, by collating and recording systems and structures and analysing the effects that these have on delivery. The key element of the report is a detailed SWOT analysis of the various delivery models, with quantitative data supported by qualitative insights from individual service providers.
- 4.0.3 This ClfA follow-up project has undertaken qualitative research into stakeholder views of the ALGAO SWOTs and produced a consolidated body of supplier views on the same issues of service delivery.
- 4.0.4 This project has also used this resource of views to capture information that will be used to review and update the ClfA/ALGAO Standard and guidance for archaeological advice by historic environment services. This will help to support ClfA's ongoing work to review and update its suite of Standard and Guidance documents.
- 4.0.5 In the current economic climate, there is considerable uncertainty surrounding the financial situation for local authorities. While the sector needs to understand the quantitative impact of any public service cuts, this project focuses on qualitative data to provide a snapshot of service resilience and planning. This project's work or its eventual further outputs may interface with any future approaches to collect more quantitative data on potential impacts of, for instance, a renewed period of public spending cuts and austerity.
- 4.0.6 There will always be uncertainty about Government's reform agenda and the effects of wider societal issues. Our identification of change factors has been based on the best guesses of stakeholders. Some of these change factors are identified in the ALGAO report, as well as through other sector initiatives (including the Heritage Sector Resilience Plan 2) and in consultation with expert stakeholders. In addition to the possible effects of recession/public service budget cuts, we understand these to include:
- Local government reorganisation (inc. the creation of new Unitary authorities, devolution, etc.)
 - Planning reform, including the growth of digital planning, PropTech, zonal planning/simplified regulatory areas
 - HERs being placed on a statutory footing/subject to new statutory regulation
 - Potential investment in HERs/improvements to digital functionality
 - Potential to improve services' outreach
 - Potential to improve services' public or political influence
 - Potential to improve services' financial resilience (including project funding, grant agreements/funding arrangements, service diversification/commercialisation)

- Potential to improve services' relationships with stakeholders (including planners, conservation officers, ecology, floods & property services, decision-makers, clients)
- Potential to improve leadership (including developing/safeguarding specialist skills growth, retention, critical mass, succession planning)
- Potential to improve services' contribution to training/education
- Potential to improve services' contribution to research

4.0.7 While the relatively high-level scope of the project has meant that the potential for detailed opportunity/threat analysis has been fairly limited – particularly where stakeholders lacked tangible detail about the nature of some of the above issues – there has been sufficient methodological flexibility to allow for certain issues to be subject to deeper analysis, which has in turn revealed many interesting stakeholder views or examples of practice. This analysis has also identified areas for potential further investigation. We therefore also hope that this project's outputs may provide useful information for further studies.

4.0.8 Following conclusion of the report, ClfA will share insights and analysis to local authority service providers and users with the aim of furthering discussion and seeking to equip members to face challenges and changes originating outside their direct control. We hope that this project will help the sector by encouraging idea sharing and forethought, leading to improved resilience of services. These actions will seek to interface with wider sector strategic initiatives such as the Heritage Sector Resilience Plan 2.

5.0 Aims and Objectives

5.1 Objectives

- 5.1.1 The main objective of the project was to provide a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing local authorities in the current political context and provide helpful advice to local authority archaeology services and individuals, collated from peers and services users.

5.2 Aims

- 5.2.1 The project aimed to:

- Survey a range of users of local authority archaeology services to supplement the SWOT analysis undertaken previously by ALGAO.
- Conduct horizon scanning with local government experts, local authority archaeology service employees and service users to scope concerns about the present context of challenges and opportunities for services.
- Undertake qualitative investigation with focus groups to collage stakeholder views on a range of key challenges and opportunities to develop information about possible local authority archaeology service responses.
- Provide a published resource that will collate analysis and reflection from local authorities and other stakeholders to help manage change to their own services.
- Review local authority archaeology service models against their ability to meet and deliver the CIfA/ALGAO Standard and guidance for archaeological advice by historic environment services.

6.0 Methodology

6.1 Data Collection: Survey

- 6.1.1 The data collection comprised two elements; the first consisting of a Microsoft Forms online survey which ran between July 2024 and January 2025. The survey consisted of three main sections with an overall total of 186 questions which could be completed by respondents. The survey was designed to use conditional branching to direct respondents down different paths through the survey based on their answers, making the experience more relevant and shorter by only showing respondents the questions that applied to them.
- 6.1.2 The survey sections were as follows:
- **User experience:** These questions related to an individual's or organisation's experience of Local Authority Historic Environment Services.
 - **Future Challenges and Opportunities (Users):** This section included questions regarding key topics and was completed by Local Authority Service Users.
 - **Future Challenges and Opportunities (Providers):** This section included questions regarding key topics and was completed by Local Authority Service Providers.
- 6.1.3 Every question from the survey is presented in the appendices to this report. High level analysis of responses, including the presentation of data for all respondents is included, along with a sample of representative or interesting answers from free-text questions. We recommend these sections to those wishing to explore the dataset for additional value.
- 6.1.4 The full spreadsheet of survey data is available via the ADS¹ for those who wish to further analyse the survey data by audience, or cross-reference answers. We recognise that there is a high likelihood that this dataset will retain value to researchers exploring various topics.
- 6.1.5 The information included in this report (Sections 7.0 - 10.0) presents a selective analysis of key themes present in the survey data and explored further in focus groups as part of this project. These themes and issues focus on key areas where actionable recommendations can be made and reflect the project goals to provide useful insight to 21CAP, as per the project's objectives.

User Experience

- 6.1.6 This section of the survey consisted of up to 119 questions relating to a user's experience of Local Authority Historic Environment Services. These questions were split into sub-sections as follows:
- 6.1.7 **About you:** These questions were general and related to geographical location, whether the respondent was answering as an individual or on behalf of an organisation and the reasons why they have accessed Local Authority Historic Environment Services. All respondents were presented with these questions.
- 6.1.8 **Local Authority Historic Environment Records – Individuals:** The questions in this section of the survey related to an individual's experience of Historic Environment Records.
- 6.1.9 Users who had accessed Historic Environment Records multiple times, were asked a series of questions related to their recollections of good experiences and bad experiences of Historic

¹ Link forthcoming upon finalisation of this report.

Environment Records. They were also asked to rate their average experience of Historic Environment Records based on these recollections.

- 6.1.10 Users who only had a single experience relating to Historic Environment Records were also asked a series of questions based on this one experience.
- 6.1.11 **Local Authority Archaeological Planning Services – Individuals:** The questions in this section of the survey related to an individual's experience of Archaeological Planning Services.
- 6.1.12 For users who had accessed Archaeological Planning Services multiple times, they were asked a series of questions about their recollections of good experiences and bad experiences of the services. They were also asked to rate their average experience of Archaeological Planning Services based on these recollections.
- 6.1.13 Users who only had a single experience of an Archaeological Planning Service were also asked a series of questions based on this one experience.
- 6.1.14 **Local Authority Museum Services – Individuals:** The questions in this section of the survey related to an individual's experience of Museum Services. This section also included a series of questions relating to any difficulties encountered by users when accessing Museums Services.
- 6.1.15 For users who had accessed Museum Services multiple times, they were asked a series of questions related to their recollections of good experiences and bad experiences of these services. They were also asked to rate their average experience of Museum Services based on these recollections.
- 6.1.16 Users who only had a single experience of a Museum Service were also asked a series of questions based on this one experience.
- 6.1.17 The survey provided an opportunity for organisations to answer questions relating to their average experience of Historic Environment Records, Archaeological Planning Services and Museum Services.
- 6.1.18 The questions in this section are outlined in Table 1 of Appendix 1 – Data Collection.

Future Challenges and Opportunities

- 6.1.19 **Service Users:** This section of the survey consisted of nine questions relating to four key topics and was completed by service users only. The topics were:
 - Developments in Planning
 - Local Authority Structural Change
 - Development of Historic Environment Records
 - Service Resilience
- 6.1.20 **Service Providers:** This section of the survey consisted of 47 questions relating to seven key topics and was completed by service providers only. The topics were:
 - Developments in Planning
 - Local Authority Structural Change
 - Development of Historic Environment Records
 - Service Resilience
 - Climate Change and Resilience
 - Museums

- Chartered Institute for Archaeologists Standard for Archaeological Advice by Historic Environment Services

6.1.21 The questions in these sections are outlined in Tables 2 and 3 of Appendix 1 – Data Collection.

6.2 Data Collection: Focus Groups

6.2.1 The second part of the data collection consisted of a series of eight focus groups which were held throughout June 2025. Attendees of the sessions included individuals who had expressed an interest in attending via the survey and individuals who were directly invited by the project team. The focus groups had a total of 69 participants across the eight sessions.

6.2.2 The topics of the focus groups were based on subjects covered in the Challenges and Opportunities section of the survey as well as key themes identified in the survey results. Six of the sessions concentrated on a single subject while two groups were multi-topic. The subjects covered by the focus groups were:

- Enhancing public benefit outcomes
- Statutory HERs, standards and other implementation opportunities
- Devolution and Local Government reorganisation
- Service resilience opportunities
- Museum challenges and opportunities
- Climate change and resilience
- Multi-topic

6.2.3 To aid discussion, a series of questions were set for each focus group. These questions were developed based on the themes identified in the survey results and in consultation with key stakeholders in each topic.

6.2.4 The questions for each focus group can be found in Appendix 1 – Data Collection.

6.2.5 The focus groups were held online via Microsoft Teams with two hours allocated for each discussion. Each session was recorded and an automatic transcription generated with the permission of the participants.

6.3 Data Analysis

Survey results (User Experience and Challenges & Opportunities)

6.3.1 The statistics generated from the multiple-choice questions in the survey were analysed using Microsoft Excel. Excel charts were used to present the results where appropriate while the experience ratings were generated using an online calculator².

6.3.2 The responses given in the free text field questions were analysed using artificial intelligence. Microsoft Co-Pilot was used to identify themes within the responses and to categorise them according to these themes. The responses were manually checked against the autogenerated themes for accuracy and where necessary, were recategorised. Co-Pilot was also asked to generate a description of each theme, and these were cross-referenced against the responses to ensure their veracity. Once this analysis was completed, a series of statistics were generated

² <https://www.omnicalculator.com/statistics/five-star-rating>

using Microsoft Excel to visually demonstrate the themes and number of responses assigned to each one.

- 6.3.3 All statistics relating to the results of the user experience section of the survey are presented in Appendix 2 – User Experience.

Focus Groups

- 6.3.4 The first stage in the analysis of the focus group discussions involved the use of Microsoft Co-Pilot and ChatGPT to generate intelligent summaries of the transcriptions for each session. This summary included key points raised in the discussion with suggested recommendations and actions.
- 6.3.5 The summaries were then manually cross-referenced against the transcriptions to check their accuracy. Additional information was taken from the transcriptions where appropriate to provide evidence for the identified key discussion points. These combined summaries were used as the basis of the focus group discussions as outlined in Section 10.0.

6.4 The use of artificial intelligence

- 6.4.1 To align with best practice as set out in the ClfA statement on the use of Artificial Intelligence³, the following sections outline the use of artificial intelligence in the project.
- 6.4.2 **Executive Summary:** Microsoft Co-Pilot was used to assist in the creation of the Executive Summary.
- 6.4.3 **Survey:** Microsoft Co-Pilot was used to analyse the free-text answers to questions in both the User Experience and Challenges and Opportunities sections of the survey. The survey responses were provided to Co-Pilot without any personal details. The analysis by the AI involved the identification of themes within the survey responses relating to particular questions. Each theme was described and the survey responses categorised accordingly. Once this analysis was complete, the themes generated by Co-Pilot were manually checked and cross-referenced against the responses.
- 6.4.4 **Focus Groups:** As outlined in 6.2.5, the focus groups were held online with an automatic transcription generated with the permission of the participants. As outlined in 6.3.4 and 6.3.5, intelligent summaries of these transcriptions were created for each focus group using a combination of Microsoft Co-Pilot and ChatGPT. These summaries were manually checked for their veracity before being used as a basis for discussion.
- 6.4.5 Microsoft Co-Pilot and ChatGPT were used during July and December 2025. The project team are satisfied that the data generated by Artificial Intelligence (AI) has been checked for accuracy and take responsibility for the factual accuracy of this report. The project team also declares that the use of AI within the project is responsible and lawful and complies with data protection and copyright legislation.

³ [Statement-on-the-use-of-Artificial-Intelligence](#)

6.5 Reflections on the methodology

Survey

- 6.5.1 The survey was large with a total of 186 questions, and it was anticipated that this would deter people from completing the survey. The total number of responses (215) exceeded the project team's expectations for such a large survey and there are likely to be several reasons for this.
- 6.5.2 The use of conditional branching as outlined in 6.1.1 allowed respondents to tailor the survey which may have encouraged them to take more time to consider their responses. In addition, not every question was mandatory which allowed respondents to quickly determine which questions they wanted to answer.
- 6.5.3 The survey was tested prior to promotion and an estimated amount of time needed to complete the survey was included in associated documentation. This potentially may have contributed to the higher level of responses as individuals will have had a clearer understanding of how much time they needed to allocate to the survey.
- 6.5.4 The survey also provided an opportunity to be entered into a prize draw to win one of four £25 Amazon vouchers. A total of 107 respondents expressed interest in being entered into the draw, which represents 49.7% of the overall number of respondents. It is unknown if the total number of responses would have changed if this incentive had not been offered but it potentially may have increased the motivation of some respondents.

Artificial Intelligence

- 6.5.5 As outlined in 6.4, AI was used as a first stage in the data analysis. The dataset generated by this project was large and the use of AI enabled an initial analysis to be conducted relatively quickly. This was particularly relevant for the survey results as the generation of key themes provided a focus for more detailed analysis.
- 6.5.6 In line with best practice⁴, the AI analysis was manually checked against the survey responses for accuracy. While relatively accurate, there were instances where manual corrections had to be made to the AI analysis due to responses being categorised incorrectly or duplicate themes being identified. As the survey dataset was broken down by section and then by question, the individual datasets were small enough to easily allow this manual cross-referencing to take place. This may not be feasible on datasets which are significantly larger.
- 6.5.7 It was also found that Microsoft Co-Pilot in particular, does not always carry out the same task in the same way each time. A significant amount of time was spent determining the exact wording which would enable the analysis to be structured in the same way each time. If AI is to be used in projects in this future, this is something which should be considered when determining timescales and budgets.
- 6.5.8 The project team concludes that the use of AI was a helpful tool in this project, but that significant human oversight was required. As outlined above, while initial summarisation was valuable, the project team found it necessary to return to the raw data at various points, not just to cross reference the AI analysis but also to absorb the information more fully. The need

⁴ [Statement-on-the-use-of-Artificial-Intelligence](#)

to check for the AI analysis for accuracy, was considerably time consuming and it is unclear whether the use of AI facilitated productivity or speed benefits for the project overall.

Qualitative data reliability

- 6.5.9 We recognise that respondents' individual comments are based on perceptions, and we cannot be certain what these perceptions are based upon in many cases. It is likely that at least some user experiences may not be fair representations of objective reality. We have approached comments as if all are made in good faith while also attempting to identify the potential for observations to not express a fully accurate picture where reflecting of a given situation.
- 6.5.10 The responses in the survey which comprise the qualitative data element of the project are the opinions and views of the survey respondents. As a result, we recognise that these responses are based on an individual's perception of a particular service or experience. The survey has provided a snapshot of these perceptions, but we cannot be certain what experiences these perceptions have been based on in many cases. We also recognise that many of the comments made by survey respondents are subjective by their nature and may not reflect a rounded version of their experience.
- 6.5.11 Throughout the project, we have approached all responses in good faith while recognising the potential for observations to not fully reflect the whole experience these observations are based on

7.0 Analysis of service models and delivery

- 7.0.1 The evidence from the survey and focus groups broadly supports the conclusions from the ALGAO 2022 report *Delivery Models for Local Authority Archaeology*⁵. It has been substantially not possible to articulate any definitive correlation between specific service types and delivery outcomes.
- 7.0.2 Partially, this lack of correlation may relate to the relatively small sample size of respondents, and the wide variety of other differences between authority services. This means that even where services of a particular type exhibit similar issues, this cannot be reliably judged to be statistically significant or definitively a result of the service delivery model. Analysis is also made more difficult by the qualitative nature of much of the data collected.
- 7.0.3 The data shows that there is at least a perception of a wide variation in performance within all service types. Furthermore, comments from participants were far more likely to identify other factors, such as capacity, integration of key teams, managerial support, and clarity of role as the factors responsible for good or bad outcomes. This accords with the ALGAO (2022) conclusions that no single delivery model for local authority archaeology services can be considered universally optimal. The 21CAP survey data reinforces this conclusion.
- 7.0.4 There are, however, some observable trends. Whereas differences relating explicitly to service type are not observable, service size does seem to be a meaningful indicator for a variety of outcomes. For example, where services articulated an absence of unrelated constraints (e.g. poor management), it tended to be the larger county/unitary authorities who were able to share proactive good practice case studies. Similarly, it was larger services that generally reported greater levels of satisfaction with challenges such as succession planning, skills, and training. This may indicate greater opportunity and flexibility to come up with solutions to problems within larger authorities. The performance of the Greater London Archaeological Advisory Service (GLAAS) is an anomaly in terms of other shared services, but it too appears to demonstrate similar capability, potentially as a result of its size and unique funding arrangements.
- 7.0.5 When considering structural change, participants did express that a change in service delivery model alone would not be a solution to issues. Respondents consistently state that restructuring without investment leads to service erosion; change is acceptable only where it improves integration, clarity, and resourcing.
- 7.0.6 However, preferences were revealed for brigading specialist services, which was seen as bringing greater strength to specialist advice and providing a more secure basis for protecting budget allocation.
- 7.0.7 Providers report that being part of planning teams improves relationships, influence, and strategic input, while externalised arrangements (e.g. with cultural services) risk marginalisation. Structural change is seen as beneficial only where it improves integration. Respondents emphasised that close working relationships with planners, conservation officers, and other specialists is essential to effective service delivery. Conversely, externalised

⁵ <https://landward.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Understanding-Models-for-the-Delivery-of-Archaeological-Services.pdf>

arrangements are frequently associated with reduced visibility, weaker informal influence, and diminished strategic input, particularly where services are treated as consultees rather than partners.

- 7.0.8 Shared and joint service models are recognised as potentially being capable of providing efficiency gains of shared services, but respondents frequently warn of loss of local knowledge, weaker relationships, and inconsistency across large geographies when services are centralised without adequate staffing. In addition, shared services which are outsourced or hosted in a single authority may be likely to suffer from dilution of local knowledge and reduced influence in non-host authorities. Similarly, responses also reinforced conclusions from the ALGAO report that outsourcing of services or externally contracted models can reduce visibility, weaken feedback loops (e.g. to HERs), and distance services from local planning cultures.
- 7.0.9 Large unitary councils appear to be widely favoured by those with experience of them as they are apparently consistently able to deliver the benefits of integration with planners and other specialists and appear able to work efficiently across their entire areas, avoiding administrative issues, such as working with separate lower tier authorities.

7.1 Measurement

- 7.1.1 Both the ALGAO and 21CAP research provides evidence that authorities should be cautious about reliance on simplistic productivity measures such as case numbers or throughput as indicators of effectiveness. 21CAP user experience data provides strong empirical support for this view. Positive user experiences are consistently associated with good communication, clear and proportionate advice, and professional judgement, rather than speed alone. Providers further warn that accelerating planning processes without corresponding increases in capacity risks undermining pre-determination evaluation and leading to poorer archaeological and planning outcomes.

7.2 Public benefit

- 7.2.1 A significant area where 21CAP extends ALGAO's findings is in the emphasis placed on public benefit and legitimacy. Respondents – both users and providers – frame it as a strategic necessity. There is widespread concern that failure to clearly articulate and deliver public benefit, beyond the production of technical reports, leaves the sector vulnerable in the context of planning reform and wider political pressure. Respondents argue that archaeology's contribution to place-making, community engagement, wellbeing, and climate and nature recovery agendas must be made more explicit if services are to remain resilient and supported.

7.3 Resourcing

- 7.3.1 Both studies converge on the conclusion that under-resourcing is the primary systemic risk facing local authority archaeology services. Staffing shortages, recruitment and retention difficulties, and budgetary pressures are repeatedly identified as limiting factors across all delivery models. Structural reform, shared services, or changes in governance are unlikely to deliver positive outcomes unless accompanied by sustained investment and clear statutory backing. As such, the combined evidence base strongly suggests that debates about service models should be secondary to addressing capacity, integration, and long-term funding.

8.0 Survey demographics

- 8.0.1 The survey recorded 215 responses across all sections of the survey. A total of 145 responses were received for the user experience section of the survey, 132 of these responses were from an individual while 13 responses were made on behalf of an organisation.
- 8.0.2 A total of 186 responses were received for the challenges and opportunities section of the survey. Of these, 123 responded as users while 64 respondents were providers of local authority historic environment services.
- 8.0.3 Respondents answered an average of 41.7 questions and took an average of 39 minutes to complete the survey.
- 8.0.4 A selection of the demographic data is presented below with the full survey results shown in Appendix 1 – Data Collection.

8.1 Service users

- 8.1.1 As can be seen in Figure 1, the overwhelming majority of respondents were professional archaeologists. Twenty (20) responses identified as private individuals and other professionals which represent the next largest group of users. Disappointingly, only a total of 13 responses came from academics and community groups.
- 8.1.2 While landowners and applicants were listed as an option in the survey, no responses were received from this category of users. While the survey was disseminated widely through a variety of organisations and methods, this audience was recognised as particularly difficult to access.

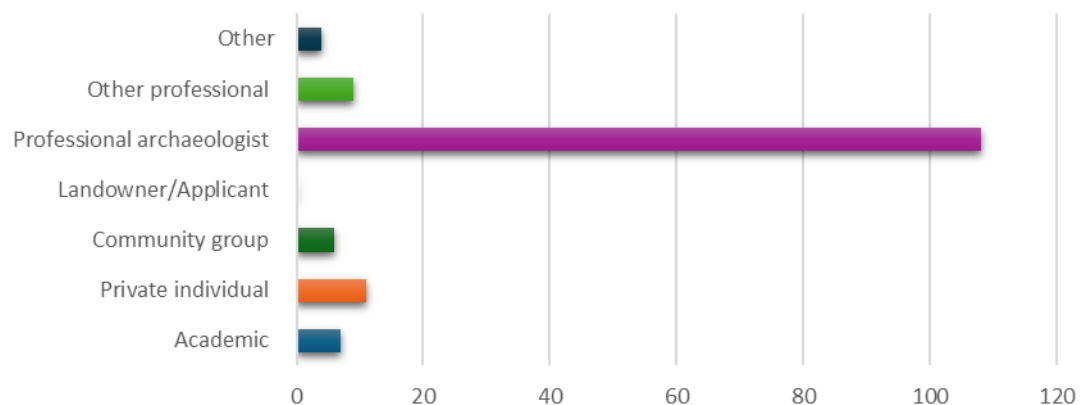


Figure 1: Type of service user (n=145)

- 8.1.3 Service users were asked which geographic regions they have an archaeological interest or where they regularly work. Perhaps unsurprisingly, users indicated that they have a national remit in terms of their archaeological research interest/work. Nineteen (19) respondents chose multiple regions while 18 work or have an interest solely in the East Midlands. As can be seen in Figure 2, other regions accounted for less than ten responses each.

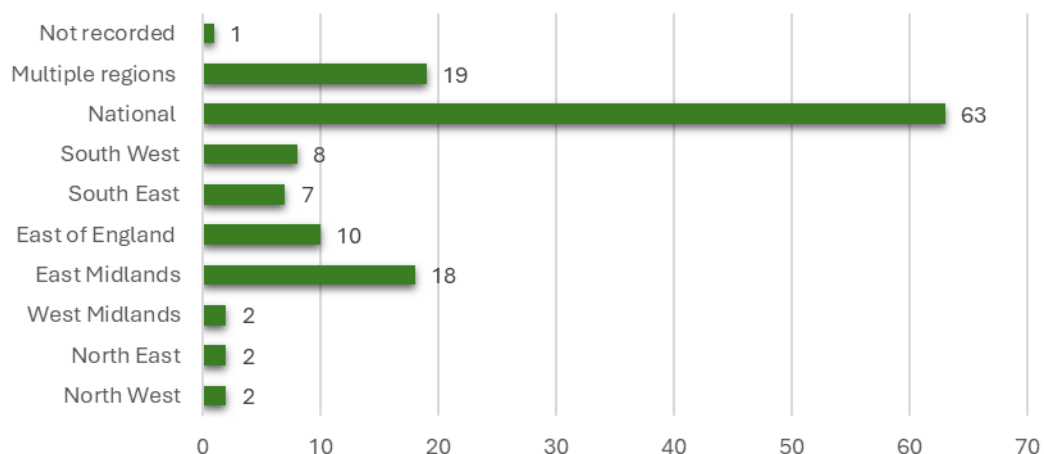


Figure 2: Geographic regions where individuals either work or have an archaeological interest in.

8.1.4 As outlined in 8.0.1, 13 survey responses were made on behalf of an organisation. These organisations represented in the responses included consultancies, archaeological companies and one heritage agency. Similarly to individuals, organisations indicated that they have a national remit in terms of their work and/or archaeological interest. Interestingly, while the East Midlands represented the largest number of responses for a single region for individuals, this region is not represented at all in the organisational responses.

8.2 Service providers

8.2.1 The service provider section on future challenges and opportunities received a total of 64 individual responses. These responses span 45 Local Authorities and one national organisation. Of the 45 Local Authorities identified in the survey, 43 were named while two organisations were identified only as “A County Council in England” and “County Level (2 tier)”.

8.2.2 The 43 identified Local Authorities were classified according to region as shown in Figure 3. The largest number of Local Authorities represented in the survey are in the South-East, South-West and the Yorkshire and Humber regions.

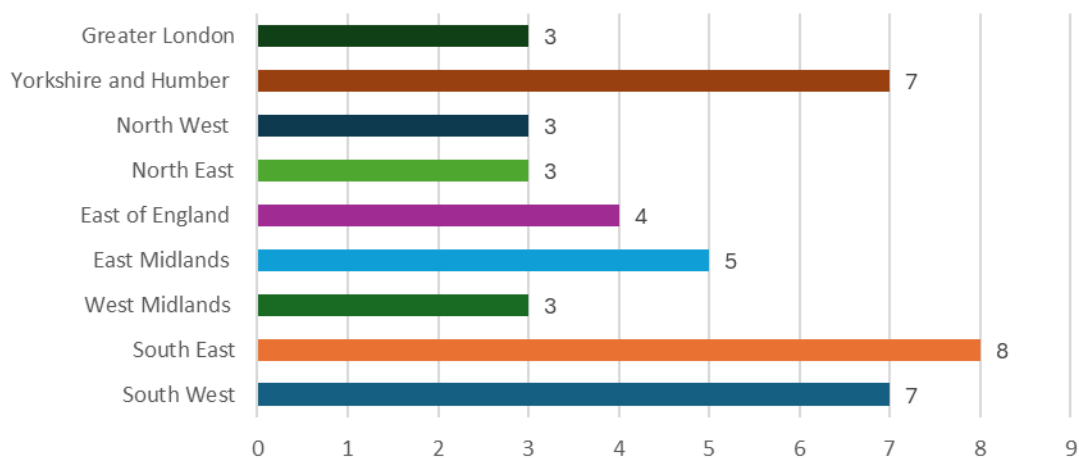


Figure 3: Regional distribution of named Local Authorities (n=43).

9.0 User Experience

9.0.1 Several key themes were identified in the results of the user experience part of the survey which are discussed in 9.1 to 9.4 below.

9.0.2 The full results of the user experience survey can be found in Appendix 2 – User Experience.

9.1 Consistency and standardisation

9.1.1 One of the most cited issues by users of local authority services was consistency and standardisation. While it was often unclear exactly what respondents would like to see or the reasons for variation between authorities, it is evident that there is a commonly held perception that differences between the way authorities deliver services was experienced as a challenge by many users. This is also an area where the ALGAO report was comparatively silent.

9.1.2 Within the overall theme of consistency and standardisation, there are subcategories which are discussed in more detail below.

Data

9.1.3 Several responses referred to the inconsistency and standardisation in the data provided by Historic Environment Records. Specifically, users expressed frustration with how data is presented with reference to the use of polygons and/or points to indicate spatial locations of records. This frustration appears to revolve around the length of time taken by users to sort the HER data once received.

9.1.4 Users also expressed concerns about the poor quality of data contained within HER records, with monument and event records being specifically mentioned. While some responses expressed frustration, others were pragmatic with recognition that under-resourcing of HERs over several decades has led to this situation.

Service charges

9.1.5 Perhaps predictably, inconsistency in charging was cited in many responses across both HERs and archaeological planning services. Some users question what they perceive as high charges for HER searches as they believe that the task of exporting data is relatively simple. Some responses question whether the charging is justified for the service that they receive, whether that is data received from the HER or archaeological planning advice. Users also expressed concern at the lack of transparency in charging structures and lack of consistency in charging policies across different local authorities. Additionally, the potential for charging policies to conflict with open data requirements was mentioned.

Provision of advice

9.1.6 Several responses raised concerns with regards to inconsistencies in advice across both HERs and archaeological planning services. In relation to HERs, responses indicate that this inconsistency lies in how individual HERs approach projects which are outside the standard planning process, e.g., nature recovery projects. Many of these projects do not necessarily lead to income generation for HERs and there is a perception amongst some users that HERs focus primarily on projects or processes which are income generating to the detriment of the historic environment as a whole.

- 9.1.7 Natural England responded to the survey as an organisation and part of their response illustrates how consistency in HERs could benefit both the natural and historic environments. They stated that *“Natural England would be able to work much more effectively and deliver greater benefits for the historic and natural environment if the services HERs offered were more consistent and their work which mostly takes place outside of the planning system was better integrated into HER core purposes. For instance, Natural England could state that staff must rather than should consult their local HER in more areas of their work if they could be sure that HERs would be able to respond effectively.”*.
- 9.1.8 Users also expressed concerns about perceived inconsistencies in archaeological planning advice provided by different local authorities. Some responses questioned whether these inconsistencies are due to a lack of experience on behalf of individuals. Several users specifically mention geophysical surveys as an area of inconsistency with responses indicating that they believe there is an issue with a lack of experience in this area in general.
- 9.1.9 While not directly discussed in the survey or focus groups, advisors on this project raised issues relating to grey literature reports, highlighting issues of length and content. We recognise that this and other issues relating to the relationship between LPA archaeologists and archaeologists working for developers may also benefit from discussion in relation to these issues of consistency.
- 9.1.10 Throughout this report, we recognise that consistency of approach is not the same as consistency of outcome. For example, individual planning applications will be treated on a case-by-case basis, reflecting, among other things, proposed development impacts and site-specific conditions.

9.2 Communication

- 9.2.1 Communication is another recurring theme in user responses across both HERs and archaeological planning services. This theme is primarily concerned with slow response times to both HER data requests and archaeological advice with some users indicating that these delays have affected the overall project timetable. While many of these responses express frustration, other users recognise that response times are often a result of underfunding and reduced capacity within both HER and archaeological planning teams. Poor communication is also cited several times in survey responses relating to museums.
- 9.2.2 A small number of users mention that the lack of direct contact details for individuals within HER and archaeological planning teams on local authority websites is a challenge when attempting to access these services. This is particularly difficult when working in a new area.
- 9.2.3 While not specifically related to communication between services and users, some responses appear to show that there is a lack of understanding with regards to how HERs are structured, what national standards are adhered to etc. This is not a fault of individual services but more a failure in communication within the wider sector.

9.3 Training and skills

- 9.3.1 Training and skills are only specifically mentioned in a small number of responses, however, it is a topic which is appropriate to discuss within the context of this report. As outlined in 9.1.8

some responses questioned a perceived lack of experience within HERs and archaeological planning services in relation to both archaeological planning advice and advice for non-planning related projects such as woodland creation or nature recovery projects.

- 9.3.2 The organisational response by Natural England is particularly relevant here and has been presented in part below to illustrate this theme. They stated that *“Across Natural England specialists also report that local authority staff (as with staff in the wider sector) have not always had the training or knowledge required to understand farming or nature conservation practices sufficiently to be able to give good advice. They find that many responses from local authorities are framed purely in terms of planning policy which does not apply in these contexts, and often without mentioning the relevant legal and policy frameworks which do apply. This can lead to misinformed advice regarding evaluation or mitigation measures that are over- or under-cautious as the impacts involved have not been properly understood.”*.
- 9.3.3 Training and skills in relation to natural environment projects is discussed in more detail in sections 10.5.12 to 10.5.16.

9.4 Positive feedback

- 9.4.1 Despite this critique, a significant number of positive responses were received about local authority service providers from users. In these responses, users have praised archaeological planning services for their responsiveness, expertise and pragmatism in relation to the advice provided. Users also appreciated HERs who responded quickly and with good quality of data. Users also mention effective collaboration and staff helpfulness in their responses which indicates that good working relationships have been established in these examples.
- 9.4.2 Many responses, both positive and negative, illustrate that users appreciate that local authority archaeological services have been subject to chronic underfunding over a series of decades which has led to reduced capacity and resourcing. The majority of these responses recognise that any negative experience is principally related to these issues. Some responses express concern about the vulnerability of these services in the light of local government cuts and highlight that the landscape of commercial archaeology would quickly change if local authority historic environment teams were further reduced or eliminated completely.

9.5 Recommendations

9.5.1 Based on the user experience survey results, a number of recommendations are outlined below.

Consistency and standardisation - Recommendation 1:

Explore the potential for a strategic review of consistency in service delivery.

Possible action: a ClfA event to discuss consistency and standardisation and what can realistically be done, as well as improve user understanding of why inconsistency may exist. Could seek to develop advocacy goals for planning policy change, funding, and other standards and guidance. This event could also scope inconsistency in relation to fieldwork assessments and reporting where these similarly impact the efficiency of development control processes.

Consistency and standardisation - Recommendation 2:

The sector should consider a strategic review to investigate further perceptions of inconsistency in services provision, identifying potential issues and solutions, and informing advocacy to draw attention to problems that require external action to solve.

Consistency and standardisation - Recommendation 3:

To improve understanding of roles and responsibilities in local authority archaeological services, it is suggested that opportunities (e.g. ClfA tea break or HER Forum events, or a special issue of the Archaeologist ideally in collaboration with Historic England and/or ALGAO) are explored to bring user and provider audiences together to discuss issues identified by users. It is also suggested that any promotion of HER projects should be included in ClfA news bulletins as well as through the HER Forum.

10.0 Challenges and Opportunities: Discussion

10.0.1 Several themes were identified in both the challenges and opportunities section of the survey and in the focus groups. These themes are discussed within the context of the focus group topics in the following sections.

10.1 Developments in planning

10.1.1 The past 15 years has seen frequent planning changes impact local authority historic environment services. Several elements of recent legislative change, and some current Government activities and near-future plans are known in sufficient detail to discuss meaningfully by survey respondents and focus group participants. Other elements of future, more hypothetical change were also probed.

10.1.2 Many survey responses to questions referred to the implementation of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act's (2023) provision to introduce a statutory duty on local authorities to maintain a Historic Environment Record. These comments are dealt with separately in section 10.2 below.

Opportunities (service providers)

10.1.3 When asked about the potential opportunities for any upcoming planning 'overhaul' (citing the UK Government's own words), service provider respondents provided a small number of specific reflections on potential improvements that could be delivered via planning reform. Respondents did not provide any detailed consideration of the issues raised. Some understandably described a lack of information about what was being proposed by Government. Survey responses did not elicit notable proactive sentiment for change.

10.1.4 The sense of pessimism was notable in many service provider answers. Answers to the question "What opportunities do you perceive from the new Government's proposed planning 'overhaul'?" included: *"none"* (x6), *"For the archaeological planning role - none as yet"*, *"limited"*, and *"I would not call them opportunities"*, and *"None really - the best we can hope for is nothing changes to radically to sideline us"*. In total, 14 of 56 service provider responses (25%) communicated a wholly pessimistic view.

10.1.5 The opportunity most commonly raised by providers was to strengthen the wording around public benefit in the NPPF. Comments indicated that current archives and reports for the HER did not satisfy the potential for accessibility of results and engagement. One respondent wrote that *"Many LPAs feel you can't ask more than the minimum [in reference to public engagement]"*.

10.1.6 Improvements to the way that archaeology delivers public benefit were also linked to opportunities to influence wider Government agendas, including place-shaping and health and wellbeing. Even more broadly, these opportunities were described as being the 'ultimate justification' of our sector.

10.1.7 Several respondents discussed the potential to improve funding of services through better structuring of fees, and increase staffing resource, including via local authorities setting their own fees to help meet new requirements for tighter deadlines. Although there was also a

concern about a lack of transparent information about how the benefits of fee increases would be apportioned.

- 10.1.8 Service provider comments in this section were, on the whole, not resistant to the Government's aims to build more (c.f concerns about 'growth agenda', see 10.1.19), with some seeing this as an opportunity for archaeological knowledge gain, assuming no erosion of existing provisions. However, many commenters went on to caveat comments, suggesting that more of the same poor-quality archaeology would not be beneficial. Comments articulated that providers had the impression that in the rush to evaluate and mitigate ever more development, some work failed on the delivery of valuable research outputs. Other comments noted that since development is often intensely focussed in certain areas, there are still large areas where knowledge does not advance. Respondents did not directly relate this to the opportunity to improve processes for research synthesis, but this would seem to be a reasonable logical leap.
- 10.1.9 One service provider comment reflected on the positive potential of brownfield development on former Green Belt sites as an opportunity for archaeological knowledge gain. Others raised the potential to speed up processes (especially NSIPs), to simplify the process for allocating sites.
- 10.1.10 Among opportunities to align with trends for increased certainty and consistency in planning, the Greater London system of archaeological priority areas was cited as an example of good practice and a way to streamline planning for 'delivery-focused' authorities. A GLAAS representative explained how the system allowed for clearer expectations to be communicated with planners and applicants and how this was appreciated and led to better reactions to archaeological work requirements, as planners were able to more easily explain the reasoning for work, and applicants were aware earlier in the process of the likelihood.

Opportunities (service users)

- 10.1.11 Service user responses illustrate strong support of local authority colleagues among all groups, commonly citing the need for increased staffing and better resourcing, as well as the impact of low salaries of skills. These issues were perceived as being a critical limiting factor in performance by many.
- 10.1.12 Professional archaeologist users also concurred with providers on opportunities to amend the NPPF to make the requirements for public dissemination and community engagement clearer – not simply *“uploading grey literature to ADS (where no one outside professionals will ever look or find it!)”*. Wider views on where the current system failed to deliver clear public outcomes were also provided. Ideas included that sites preserved in situ should also be subject to greater requirements for interpretation.
- 10.1.13 Users highlighted the potential to improve HER data for better use informing strategic issues such as design codes, biodiversity net gain, local nature recovery strategies, and place making. Improvements were also linked to the digital planning agenda.
- 10.1.14 Users tended to focus more on where the system could be improved in ways that would not necessarily require planning reform but could be influenced or led by it. The most frequently mentioned opportunity was improving consistency and proportionality across different local authority areas.

- 10.1.15 Whereas service providers were highly concerned at the potential to lose the ability to undertake pre-determination assessment, some users (archaeologists) commented that over-reliance on pre-determination trial trenching was a problem, and that disproportionate requirements should be addressed in policy, guidance, or standards to help with managing inconsistencies in approach. The specific issue of variance in interpretation of publication expectations was mentioned, and many respondents highlighted issues related to the consistency of presentation of HER data.
- 10.1.16 Opportunities to ensure sufficient archive capacity, improve research agendas, including by enabling research synthesis were mentioned. More specific ideas for policy change highlighted were better processes for securing transfer of title during the application process, and the potential to increase flexibility in enforcement of conditions to enable archaeologists to focus on more significant remains. One commenter raised the issue of the NPPF's use of 'substantial' and 'less than substantial' harm and advocated for a more nuanced system.
- 10.1.17 One respondent considered the issues of inefficiencies in archaeological processes on the applicant side and suggested that significant issues were caused by the bottlenecks associated with land agents who are unable to gain/provide access to land for archaeological surveys. This causes knock-on impacts for contracting/consulting archaeologists and for local authorities.
- 10.1.18 Of the small group of non-archaeological users (e.g. community groups / private individuals) there was a tendency to focus on non-heritage issues, such as creative re-use of buildings, brownfield development, using buildings for homes above retail stores in urban areas.

Concerns (providers)

- 10.1.19 When asked about aspects of the current system that they were concerned about losing, service provider responses referred to a general sense of concern about planning reforms eroding existing provisions. Respondents commonly cited fears of losing protections for historic buildings and archaeological sites, amid a general Government commitment to delivering 'growth' where heritage was more likely to be seen as a blocker than a contributor. One response expressed this concern: *"threats from the pressure to build houses at any cost – this may mean that heritage assets are lost and go unrecorded."*
- 10.1.20 Effects of this agenda were cited as including increased housing targets, shorter determination periods, and related effects of increased workload. Some respondents considered that there was a trend of *"watering down regulations"* in the guise of streamlining process for applicants.
- 10.1.21 In survey comments, service providers drew a direct connection between the Government desire for streamlined planning processes, developer lobbying and the potential effect that archaeological specialist advice would be restricted in future reforms.
- 10.1.22 Similarly, some respondents recalled the suggestion from early in the process of the NPPF's development where a 'presumption in favour of development' was proposed. While this phrasing has not been politically current for some time, the phrase is currently 'presumption in favour of *sustainable* development'; it is clear that many service providers retain a concern that similar proposals may return, and there is a perception that governments' proposals for planning reform are aiming to delivering this goal in spirit. A more radical suggestion to replace the current system with a developer levy funding and 'regional archaeology hubs' was also mentioned.

- 10.1.23 Another general concern was related to the lack of adequate demonstration of the public value of the archaeological work being done and a concern that there could be a “*public backlash*” if the value was not clear. One respondent also mentioned a perception of the historic environment as a “*blocker*” as a concern.
- 10.1.24 The most frequently mentioned specific concern was for the loss, or restriction of pre-determination evaluation and assessment as developers increasingly seek to minimise precautionary assessments of archaeological deposits.
- 10.1.25 The wider trend towards the expansion of permitted development rights was also commonly raised as a concern.
- 10.1.26 Some respondents reflected on the past proposals for streamlined development ‘zones’, as well as similar hypothetical policies to provide ‘deemed consent’ at plan making stage or ‘fast tracked’ consent routes. The general concern in these cases was for the potential removal of site-by-site consideration of impacts on the historic environment.
- 10.1.27 Other current areas of policy reform were highlighted, including reforms to NSIP, which were perceived as a potential threat to the ability to inform major projects, and concerns that archaeologists will not have opportunity to comment on brownfield/grey belt site developments.

Concerns (users)

- 10.1.28 User concerns mirrored the provider concerns, with the vast majority simply concerned that provision enabling the appropriate management of the archaeological resource in planning remained in place and that it was suitably resourced.
- 10.1.29 Overall, the user concerns were extremely supportive of the role and importance of the local authority specialist, with one commenting: “*Overall the county archaeologists do an important job, and it would be very bad if we lost them. They are needed to control the loss of archaeology. If they weren't there, who would be overseeing planning applications to ensure that the necessary work is done?*”. Another respondent praised the “*critical friend*” role that local authority archaeologists play in the system and others praised the value of local knowledge, and the important relationships that experienced local authority archaeologists have with all the relevant stakeholders in the area.
- 10.1.30 Users were similarly keen to ensure pre-determination evaluation, opportunities for pre-application discussion, and HER access, were not lost.
- 10.1.31 The responses show that consulting/contracting archaeologists and local authority archaeologists want the same outcomes for the historic environment. Although there are differences of opinion about pragmatic policy solutions to improve efficiency and delivery, it is all with the best interests of the archaeological heritage and the public in mind.
- 10.1.32 Some more specific comments included reference to; being able to contact the specialist officer directly, rather than having to go via a planning officer.

Conclusions

- 10.1.33 The opportunities and challenges generally mirror the recognised advocacy objectives of the archaeological sector (e.g. The Archaeology Forum's advocacy framework). Ongoing work to further prepare for and engage with government reform proposals to protect archaeological provisions are well in-hand. However, the survey was not successful at drawing out additional detailed insights from practitioners about specific advocacy asks or goals.
- 10.1.34 There were a number of issues which are notably areas where further proactive work to develop positive proposals and policy solutions would be desirable. More work needs to be done to understand and prepare for opportunities for service development. These include the need to produce research relating to the digital planning agenda. An ongoing commitment to hosting events to discuss and develop ideas with thought leaders would be beneficial.
- 10.1.35 Rather than addressing planning reform directly, for instance by referring to the potential for legislative or policy change, most users focused on the same common themes that were raised in their comments about the performance of the current system. These themes include consistency, standardisation, consistency, and time to respond. Analysis and recommendations relating to these issues are discussed in Section 9.0.
- 10.1.36 Wider evidence to support the case that archaeological services are value for money is also potentially needed – both to present nationally to government, and to share with local service providers and constituents. This must include a pervasive commitment to understanding and improving the direct public benefit of archaeology. A proactive long-term strategy for archaeology services and public messaging about the value of services would be a desirable outcome.
- 10.1.37 The contrast between the dominant negativity of many service provider answers with those of service users is notable. Service users were much more willing to engage with what changes they wanted to see than were service providers. This may indicate a satisfaction with the status quo of service provision, but it is clear that there is also a sense that improvements are not realistic given the pressing political agendas and financial challenges facing their teams and planning departments specifically, and local authorities generally. This is a concerning observation. Consideration of what the sector can do to both support people in challenging roles, and advocate for improvements in the environment should be part of the conversation for groups addressing skills issues in the sector, for example the Historic Environment Skills Forum.
- 10.1.38 It is notable, that service users also perceive this challenge, and commonly sought to stress that they value and respect the role of Local Authority Archaeologists and were just as likely to refer to the need for greater resource and greater support to be provided to people in these roles. One user said: *“Overall the county archaeologists do an important job, and it would be very bad if we lost them. They are needed to control the loss of archaeology. If they weren't there, who would be overseeing planning applications to ensure that the necessary work is done?”*. Fostering this sense of solidarity should be a goal of ongoing dialogue between groups of professionals, which may be facilitated by CIfA, ALGAO, and/or FAME.
- 10.1.39 Additionally, these efforts would likely also improve mutual understanding of roles between services users and providers. Such mutual understanding would help practitioners to respecting the challenges faced across the system and provide a more pragmatic basis for seeking mutually

beneficial positive change to remedy issues. CPD resources and opportunities for communication and dialogue should be pursued.

Developments in Planning Recommendations

10.1.40 Based on the survey responses and the focus group discussion, a number of recommendations have been created which are outlined below.

Developments in Planning - Recommendation 1:

ClfA/ALGAO should commit to a proactive delivery of CPD and advocacy events with members, leveraging expert input into the formation of policy positions and advice to decision-makers. Opportunities should also be sought via ClfA/ALGAO events to improve mutual understanding of challenges faced by local authority service providers and users, and frame proactive conversations about improvements to services and opportunities presented by planning reform.

Developments in Planning - Recommendation 2:

Advocacy resources such as detailed briefings articulating the value of archaeological advisory services and in relation to any proposed planning reforms should be prepared for sector advocates to use both to government and local government, and for service providers to use internally.

10.2 Development of Historic Environment Records

Statutory HERs

- 10.2.1 Many survey responses and a focus group discussed the issue of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act's (LURA - 2023) provision to introduce a statutory duty on local authorities to maintain a Historic Environment Record, which has not yet been implemented at the time of writing.
- 10.2.2 The necessity to advocate to ensure the implementation of the Statutory HERs provision of the Act was a common subject in survey responses. Some respondents (including service providers) appeared to be under the impression that HERs were already subject to statutory protections, with comments stating things such as *"now that HERs are statutory..."*.
- 10.2.3 Many survey respondents and focus group participants were generally hopeful that statutory HERs would protect services and encourage local authorities to invest in improvement. Others feared that merely protecting the HER would not have any meaningful effect on funding for staff and wider political support – for instance, citing the ongoing plight of libraries despite being a statutory requirement. Focus group participants considered the risk that Statutory HER provision may confuse and even harm advisory capacity if HER specialists were assumed to be able to cover development control advice and other roles and skillsets.
- 10.2.4 Many comments were reticent about the uncertain future of implementation of the statutory HERs clause – and did not look beyond this future point of coming into force. However, where respondents did look ahead, they mentioned the need for new specifications for statutory HERs and questioned whether improved funding arrangements to support enhancements to meet the potential of HER services was assured, indicating some optimism about the potential if it were to be.
- 10.2.5 Users echoed desires for improvement and, as in responses to other questions, raised issues relating to standardisation of data, terminology and processes across HERs with a goal of improving the useability and accessibility of data.

- 10.2.6 Where comments relating to standardisation and consistency were explained in detail, they cited terminology and database structures and the challenges of managing cross-boundary projects as well as the differences in charging between authorities.
- 10.2.7 It may be that these users are unaware of the range of HER standards (e.g. MIDAS) or HER audit processes. Nonetheless, it may be useful to consider further the nature of the apparent dislocation between existing HER standards and guidance, and expectations that users have for standardisation and consistency.
- 10.2.8 Comments also referenced the desire for HER gateway improvements. Historic England and ClfA should consider whether greater communication of the current updates of Heritage Gateway could be delivered in the coming months.

Focus group

- 10.2.9 A focus group considered the implementation of Statutory HERs in detail, including what standards should be in place to support statutory HERs. Participants were representatives of a range of types of local authority service, including county, unitary, metropolitan borough, and Greater London Archaeological Advisory Service. Participants from the user side included two heritage consultants, both also with previous experience working in HERs.
- 10.2.10 Focus group participants echoed points from the survey responses regarding the overall opportunities around implementation, resource challenges, and advocacy to ensure implementation. However, the group was able to discuss hypothetical opportunities and solutions to challenges in more detail.
- 10.2.11 The group recognised that defining future potential improvements to HERs that could be targeted was a necessary precursor to calculating the costs of delivering those improvements. As such, uncertainty or scepticism about what resources are likely to be available was moot.

LURA regulations

- 10.2.12 There was some agreement that national regulations under LURA as supporting Government guidance for Statutory HERs could be useful at setting national expectations.
- 10.2.13 The group considered what is considered an 'up to date' record as an example of what might be in national regulations. It was noted that backlogs vary greatly and could benefit from national targets. One participant admitted that they still have a 10-year backlog, which could not be addressed without additional funding.
- 10.2.14 Additionally, charging rates were considered, as it was noted that LURA mentions the ability to charge for services. On this issue, there was concern that there was an existing wide variance in charging approaches. Participants were conscious that different organisations would have different costs/overheads and that there would be no one-size-fits-all solution. Participants were not supportive of overly prescriptive charging rules. However, participants did recognise that some authorities recognise that they undercharge, whereas others make a small surplus to invest into other parts of the service. It was noted that sharing experiences to inform designing appropriate cost recovery strategies may be useful. Participants noted that this data was collected by the HER audit, annually.
- 10.2.15 Participants agreed that there was a wide variety of service provision across the country currently, and that if national guidance did not come with an investment plan to bring the level up, the bar may be set at, or towards, a lowest common denominator, rather than aspirational.

10.2.16 Other suggested targets for improved integration into online planning portals, integration with the move digital planning, and a greater potential for public access to data and increased outreach.

Wider HER improvements

10.2.17 Wider discussion around the potential to benefit from statutory HERs centred on the idea that HERs should be used more pro-actively to steer local agendas (e.g. strategic planning, environment, culture), recognising that specialists have specific valuable knowledge about places – which should be used to shape plan-making and strategic planning discussions.

10.2.18 There was strong support for the principle that HERs should be developing opportunity and constraint mapping. One participant said *“My concern is that the HER has vast amounts of information, but it isn’t enabled. We haven’t got any way to do constraint or opportunity mapping. We have no framework to do that and no strategy to deliver it in. If the data is not curated, it’s of little use.”*. Another participant said *“We need to make sure that we don’t do just planning records not a historic environment record. We’re a historic activity record and we shouldn’t be, we need to analyse our backlog of information and input into Archaeological Priority Areas”*.

10.2.19 The potential for proactive deposit modelling or opportunity mapping was discussed passionately. Developing this would deliver *“all the things the Council wants to do. We just don’t have the capacity, and we don’t have the voice at a management level”*.

10.2.20 The issue of improving HER record quality was discussed, with wide recognition that improving past data is difficult to achieve and hard to set measurable goals for. Furthermore, inherent weaknesses in data, such as a geographic bias toward areas of past activity need to be recognised and management methodologies set accordingly. Participants noted the need to push back against any approach to interpreting HER data that assumed that absence of evidence could be equated with evidence of absence.

10.2.21 However, participants noted that delivering higher quality records for both new records and updated records, would increase the potential usability of HERs in the short and long term. Participants proposed that a measure for whether we are successful at improving usability of HERs might be that the ‘selective’ SHINE dataset was made redundant in ten years due to HER records presenting a more useful and at least equal quality database.

Existing guidance/audit processes

10.2.22 It was acknowledged by participants that there were various existing HER guidance documents, and that the roles of these should not be misunderstood. It was noted the MIDAS standards are about technical issues such as how many fields a record needs and GIS metadata. The ClfA standard is a broad benchmark (see 11.0). These documents do not necessarily advance good practice development. It was suggested that the MIDAS standards could benefit from an update. Participants did not reflect directly on the UK HER manual which is a platform that aims to provide an overview of standards, best practice and service and system provision.

Development of Historic Environment Records Recommendations

10.2.23 Based on the survey responses and the focus group discussion, a number of recommendations have been created which are outlined below.

Development of Historic Environment Records - Recommendation 1:

The archaeology sector should ensure that lobbying for the implementation for statutory HER provisions remains a priority: This should include briefings on what Statutory HERs could deliver with investment, with a vision developed through further discussions. The approach should seek to be aspirational in terms of standards, without encouraging a one-size-fits all solution to regulation, as well as an aspirational target for government investment. Further sector consultation on these standards is needed, including further engagement with user audiences on what consistency might look like. An updated briefing outlining local government archaeology service roles would be beneficial.

Development of Historic Environment Records - Recommendation 2:

Historic England should consider the potential for increased comms/promotion of analysis from its HER Audit and the good practice set out in the UK HER Manual: This could address apparent differing opinions over what good practice looks like to issues such as charging, cost recovery, and record backlogs. Discussion with both service providers and users about the content and use of the HER Manual may help to better understand why perceptions of inconsistency remain.

Development of Historic Environment Records - Recommendation 3:

The sector should consider the benefits of alert mapping / sensitivity mapping, drawing on conclusions from the 2023 Historic England led project, and promoting the benefits of such systems through CPD events, focussed on practical delivery methods with ClfA/ALGAO members. Work with stakeholders to ensure relevant experiences and lessons learned are built into any policy proposal should be undertaken, drawing on the existing Historic England Research ([Archaeological Sensitivity Mapping](#)).

Additional advocacy to local authorities and funders should be considered to enable organisations to develop such systems, ensuring that new systems are seen as an additional benefit and not a substitute for expert advice. Sector advocacy to government should also promote the benefits of investment in delivering efficiency outcomes if these systems could be developed across the county, potentially in parallel with the development of Sustainable Development Strategies or new style local plans.

10.3 Local Authority structural change

- 10.3.1 The upcoming processes of local authority structural change, resulting from Government plans to institute Mayoral or Foundational authorities across all of England, and the process of 'unitarisation' - i.e. reorganising of existing two-tier authorities into unitary authorities – was recognised in survey responses and by focus group participants as a key challenge for the coming years.
- 10.3.2 The general sense among respondents to the survey is of uncertainty about how plans will develop in their area. Many respondents felt adrift from high level political machinations about their regions (feeling "[low down the pecking order](#)"). Many were aware of emerging proposals and plans, with a minority not aware of plans in their region.

- 10.3.3 A small number of respondents and participants highlighted that they had taken proactive action to anticipate and inform proposals for how their services might be affected by reorganisation (see specific experiences section below).
- 10.3.4 There was a general fear of rushed decisions over new structures, and that proposals affecting historic environment services may not be adequately considered for their detailed impacts. Additionally, respondents were concerned about the bureaucratic upheaval of managing transition. There was also a concern about the potential for political disagreement within areas about the hosting and operation of historic environment services.

Survey and focus group feedback

- 10.3.5 Survey respondents (users and providers) highlighted concerns about the potential for structural reform to affect resources. Some anticipated the combining of teams and shrinking of resources, citing ongoing crisis in local authority funding which structural reform will not fix. Many respondents considered the positive potential economies of scale that could free up resources for investigation and monitoring. Several of these commentators further worried about moves to larger services masking reductions in overall funding/capacity.
- 10.3.6 Additional opportunities cited with the move to unitaries included building closer ties with built and natural environment specialists and planning officers – a benefit consistently cited over two-tier models. However, where large country historic environment services are proposed to reorganise into multiple unitaries, splitting the service would reduce economies of scale to the detriment of existing team sustainability.
- 10.3.7 Many respondents, especially service users, emphasised the benefits of amalgamated services with *“critical mass”* and which may be enabled for some within larger structures. Many mentioned consistency of approach as a desirable outcome from such reorganisation. Service users frequently perceived smaller services being under-resourced.
- 10.3.8 Focus group participants gave strong support to the effectiveness of the unitary model, with one noting that *“I can’t tell you how immensely helpful sitting within a planning department... has been”* noting that since moving to a new county service that *“we’ve never met half of our district planners”*. Key benefits included being involved early in local plan and strategic site allocation discussions. Downsides were discussed in relation to additional competing budget pressures affecting unitaries.
- 10.3.9 Another reason the unitary model is favoured is that it avoids challenges faced by county authorities needing to negotiate service level agreements. This was also discussed by the focus group, with some participants noting that districts refusing to pay for archaeological advice provided by the county has led to multiple *“black holes”* over the past decade and remains a (sometimes annual) challenge for many.
- 10.3.10 There were some calls (mostly from service users, including from Natural England) to not *“shy away”* from difficult decisions relating to the reorganisation of HERs – setting up new, larger, HERs or splitting them to ‘rationalise’ the number of HERs – citing, for example, the value of the HER data being seen to belong to them and not as *“advice from a remote authority”*. There were references to larger HERs providing greater consistency and a sense that the sector should seek at least some outcome of increased consistency through any national change. Several made calls (again, mostly from service users) to consider Welsh and Scottish approaches to

nationally consistent HERs as a desirable goal for England. However, the larger number of service providers were keen to avoid the cost and technical challenges of splitting, merging, or duplicating HERs under new structures.

- 10.3.11 A smaller number of respondents cited the desirability to retain local historic environment advice, including that their existing relationships (e.g. within a city council) worked well currently and that the benefits of a larger merged services were not assured.
- 10.3.12 Some survey respondents did not consider plans to restructure to be significant, citing that regular transformations over the past 15 years had been weathered.
- 10.3.13 Some respondents noted a concern that the lack of an implemented statutory duty to maintain an HER was concerning, with the implication that without such a statutory duty, archaeology advisory services and HERs may be vulnerable to being undervalued or cut.
- 10.3.14 Regarding devolved planning powers for strategic authorities, participants were concerned about the likelihood that this could lead to different regions adopting widely varying approaches to issues like culture, heritage, and placemaking. Although some respondents recognised that they do not expect Strategic Authorities to impact core planning advisory or HER services, there was a lack of clarity about how historic environment expertise would input to any operation of strategic powers.
- 10.3.15 The potential for strategic authorities to align with Regional Research Frameworks was also raised as a potentially useful opportunity. Other issues, such as heritage crime, heritage at risk, and a more general sense of opportunity to influence strategic thinking were cited as issues where more regional control would be beneficial.
- 10.3.16 Some positive examples of existing strategic authorities enabling partnerships on nature recovery, place-making, and regeneration were cited – e.g. ‘Nature North’ and the ‘Northern Nature, Culture, and Place Forum’. These were cited as examples showing the opportunities for historic environment services to collaborate in new effective ways.
- 10.3.17 The question of whether strategic authorities hosting larger combined HERs might be possible was discussed in the focus group, with participants generally preferring to continue to host HERs in their current arrangements, keeping the service located in the same place as planning advisory services. However, the principle of fewer, larger, HERs delivering a more consistent and accessible service was favoured by many (especially service users) in survey responses.

Specific examples of experience

- 10.3.18 Survey respondents and focus group participants shared some valuable specific experiences from current and historic structural reorganisation. Focus group participants representing several authorities who have previously gone through unitarisation, as well as large county services, and small unitary services, engaged in a valuable discussion of their experiences. Many themes were echoed by survey respondents who provided detailed experiences.
- 10.3.19 A focus group participant from Worcestershire described how their service had proactively prepared a business case to support preferred options for their historic environment service to feed into Council discussions. They had not been asked for this but felt that it was important to articulate the service’s relationships with planning, museums, archives, etc. They had made efforts to communicate the benefits of being moved to sit with planning in any reorganisation

proposal. By setting out business cases for a range of reorganisation scenarios they had been able to articulate costings for HER migration if a split was proposed. They have proposed that, in the case of a split into two unitaries, that continuing to share an HER would be more cost effective. They have received quotations from Exegesis for splitting the HER, and for ongoing hosting costs, which are almost double for a split HER hosted in two new unitaries.

10.3.20 A focus group participant representing Buckinghamshire articulated the importance of being able to identify where income generation was possible, noting the importance of charging for pre-app advice and monitoring of fieldwork as part of any change plans.

10.3.21 A survey respondent from North Yorkshire Council, which underwent restructure to become a Unitary council merging seven Districts within the original County border, reported that the new authority structures were far better placed to deal strategically with issues across a large area. The respondent also reported that the ability of the historic environment team to engage directly with a larger group of planning and other specialist colleagues was far more effective than being perceived to be acting “*as a consultee*” under the previous structure.

10.3.22 One anonymous respondent noted that their experience of restructuring into two new unitary authorities resulted in the historic environment service being maintained as a shared service across both authorities, covering the same area as under the old two-tier arrangement. They were concerned that splitting the combined service resources and expertise would be unviable.

10.3.23 Two responses, one from Northamptonshire, another anonymous, described how their areas had been reorganised into two Unitary Authorities. Each noted that they had retained their single ‘county-wide’ service, with a split team embedded within the new authorities. Both respondents noted how this was working well, but felt vulnerable as their unusual ‘shared’ status required them to continually justify the special arrangement, and that future management may not support the arrangement.

10.3.24 A respondent from Lincolnshire was optimistic that a single unitary would present opportunities to improve efficiency and overcome existing communication issues, by bringing the existing outsourced archaeological advice service that is contracted to certain districts in house, enabling more seamless feeding of information from planning advice back to the HER.

10.3.25 A respondent from Berkshire, which was divided into six unitaries in the 1990s, worried that their small unitary now fell under the minimum population size the Government has set for unitaries and was worried that they may lose their job if merged into a larger service.

10.3.26 Although many respondents from London suggested that they did not expect any change in London due to the established Mayoral authority and the GLA, one London respondent discussed the peculiarity of the funding arrangement for Greater London’s archaeology service, provided, and substantially funded by, Historic England and the fact that this model is not replicable elsewhere and may appear an unfair benefit following wider local government reorganisation, nationally.

Consensus issues

10.3.27 It should be recognised that diverse structural contexts and experiences of local authority archaeology services means that it is difficult to generalise any advice for all services. Nonetheless, focus group participants (who represented a mix of unitary, two-tier, shared services, and included services that had previously undergone unitarisation, as well as those

who were dealing with proposals under the current wave of unitarisation) agreed some important points:

- 10.3.28 Strong consensus that archaeological advice and HERs should remain closely linked with planning functions. Moving HERs to sit with cultural and archive services is not an attractive option, on balance.
- 10.3.29 The experience of services within unitary authorities is generally good, as they enable these good relationships in most cases and avoid challenges such as needing to agree service level agreements with districts.
- 10.3.30 There are multiple scenarios where more complex service changes may be proposed, such as the need to share access to a single pre-existing 'county' HER across multiple new unitaries, or either merge, or run multiple existing HERs in parallel in a new large unitary area. In these instances, the sector should aim to provide clear advice that articulates risks and opportunities.
- 10.3.31 Opportunities related to economies of scale and integration of HE with Unitary services should be capitalised upon but need strong advocacy to ensure moves don't mask overall reduction in budget.
- 10.3.32 The implementation of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act's statutory duty on authorities to maintain an HER is a crucial goal, given the potential risk of non-statutory services being seen as less important in any reorganisation.
- 10.3.33 Both the survey and focus groups highlighted that archaeological advisors who sit alongside local authority planning teams tend to have a better relationship with planning officers and are more visible, and more successful at exerting influence, for example, over attaching conditions to consents. They also tend to report stronger working as part of multidisciplinary teams. Services with these characteristics could present a 'default best option' for any re-organisation that the sector seeks to influence.
- 10.3.34 Comments from those in existing unitary authorities all cited how the model works well because it integrated historic environment advisors with planning advisors and other specialist and related services, reducing feelings of "*us and them*" between county and district. However, there was some concern that some large unitaries could decide to leave planning teams in former district teams/offices and that these benefits may not always materialise.
- 10.3.35 Despite this strong positive affirmation of the benefits of unitary authorities, challenges were articulated associated with upheaval during transition, including the risk of heritage services being deprioritised in larger authorities, loss of local expertise, and the risk of watering-down of resources in the guise of economies of scale.
- 10.3.36 A demand for a strong 'plan' to help authorities articulate the important relationships they need to maintain, as well as aspirations for positive outcomes that they target was heard within the focus group. Resources from sector bodies like ClfA and ALGAO were requested to help shape communication and minimise anxiety as individual authority services approach internal reorganisation discussions.

Conclusions

- 10.3.37 There is a need for advocacy resources to help support the process of unitarisation and supply information to help decision-makers, and government officials as approaches to devolution

develop, and which help local service providers advocate within their own services. The sector needs to present resources that enable local authorities to proceed towards change with a positive plan for historic environment services.

10.3.38 These advocacy resources should include the following principles:

- The sector supports transition to unitary authorities, as they are generally seen as an effective way to structure the provision of historic environment services alongside vital parallel services in planning, environment, and archives.
- Historic Environment services, including planning advice and HERs are best located within planning services, not cultural, libraries, or archives services, and generally best not siloed in separate organisations.
- Be clear about the costs of splitting HERs vs. entering new SLAs with existing services.
- There are opportunities for HERs and historic environment specialists to feed into Strategic Authority approaches to placemaking, nature recovery, and culture strategies, and these need to be enabled, irrespective of where these services sit.

10.3.39 Advocacy could also include more ambitious reflection on long-term HER improvements to deliver fewer larger HERs to improve consistency – recognising that the most beneficial changes may be cost prohibitive and resources may limit realistic potential for HER rationalisation in the short term, but should be factored into planning, if possible.

10.3.40 These desirable characteristics should be further developed in appropriate advocacy forums (e.g. Heritage Alliance’s Devolution Working Group). We also note ALGAO’s ongoing project that is seeking to further evidence and support authorities’ transitions in the current reorganisation process.

10.3.41 Any advocacy should recognise that there will not be a one size fits all model and should highlight the main circumstances that are likely to require more bespoke solutions (e.g. where existing city council HERs or small unitaries may be proposed to merge with surrounding former services, and where existing counties may be split across multiple new unitaries).

10.3.42 Additionally, where existing relationships function well, there may be strong arguments for retaining structures (e.g. established outsourced services) if existing benefits are likely to be retained.

10.3.43 Briefings should be shared with historic environment service providers to use as support for their internal advocacy as well as targeted to national government and emerging local/strategic authority partners.

10.3.44 The archaeology sector, particularly CifA, ALGAO, and Historic England should prepare clear, actionable advice and guidance, and encourage the sharing of experiences and good practice as authorities continue to prepare for service changes: This should include advice on how to create cost-benefit analyses of different structural scenarios, and draft business cases for preferred models, supported by case studies. Further information designed for historic environment teams to use in internal lobbying to influence future placements of services should also be provided.

Local Government Structural Change Recommendations

10.3.45 Based on the survey responses and the focus group discussion, a number of recommendations have been created which are outlined below.

Local Authority Structural Change - Recommendation 1:

The archaeology sector should support the process of unitarisation and prepare advocacy briefings that articulate potential positive outcomes to aim for. These resources should seek to enable local authorities to proceed towards change with a positive plan for historic environment services.

Local Authority Structural Change - Recommendation 2:

The historic environment sector should prioritise the development of messaging and strategies to engage with Strategic Authorities. This work should seek to promote key interests of the sector in placemaking, nature-recovery, and culture.

10.4 Service resilience

10.4.1 A prevalent theme across many questions of the survey and focus group discussions was the financial resilience of services and the secondary effects of having constrained budgets. The survey questions focused specifically on structural challenges and risk factors such as overall council budgets and the threat of Section 114 'bankruptcy' issues.

10.4.2 While focus group discussion attempted to probe issues related to positive responses, there was a sense from some participants that opportunities were not available to them, and a wider 'luck of the draw' as to whether their service operated effectively within wider structures. Those services who did offer positive, proactive examples of how they had engaged with challenges were generally the more content, financially comfortable services.

Budget cuts and effects of underfunding

10.4.3 Around three-quarters (72%) of services have received budget cuts, according to survey respondents (data from 46 responding unique authorities). 45% of respondents also reported that they expected future cuts (with 27% anticipating no future cuts, and the same amount unsure).

10.4.4 Survey respondents noted a range of effects of budgetary restrictions. These included hiring freezes, posts being left vacant, a lack of time and funding to undertake training, cutting down on site visits, refusal to pay for PPE, and refusal to pay for ALGAO or ClfA membership.

10.4.5 These were reported to have increased stress and workload, increased backlog of work (e.g. HER tasks) and introduced delays in processing responses (e.g. to archaeological archive enquiries). Services have also reduced the range of services provided, specifically; the discontinuation of strategic work, reduced engagement and outreach, and an overall decrease in the quality of services provided. There was a clear psychological burden of these pressures on morale.

10.4.6 One focus group participant noted that their team had shrunk from 15 people in 2013 to three currently to cover a large unitary authority. This bare-bones team included one HER Officer and two development control officers. As well as losing capacity in core roles, the individual noted that many of the lost posts were undertaking proactive projects that improved or increased the value of historic environment services to the council and public, for example historic landscape

characterisation, farmstead studies, and work to improve conservation areas known to be at risk.

10.4.7 Several participants cited increased bureaucracy as a result of underfunding, especially requiring sign-off for any recruitment or spending by a Council committee, which can take months to authorise.

10.4.8 Hearteningly, there is considerable evidence to suggest that some services have been able to adapt to challenges and found ways to recruit when needed. In these cases, respondents cite receptive management and flexibility in adapting to needs.

Workload and staffing levels

10.4.9 Survey respondents provided a wide range of responses to questions about whether staffing was adequate for workload. This ranged from very small teams with adequate staffing, teams which had recently recruited after long periods of being understaffed and were now coping and teams who are unable to recruit. Overall, around half of respondents communicated some degree of understaffing. Of those that responded to say their staffing level was adequate, one third of these felt they were *“adequate but stretched”*.

10.4.10 A common theme was that services were coping, but only with day-to-day work. Additional responsibilities such as internal restructures and corporate initiatives were cited as challenging. Furthermore, wider functions of services were falling behind (e.g. HER backlog) or have been stopped.

10.4.11 As an example, one participant noted that there was no chance that they would even have capacity to prepare a funding bid for historic landscape characterisation or an urban survey project, despite the fact that these projects would make their day-to-day work easier.

10.4.12 Participants in another focus group discussed experiences of reduced opportunity for professionals to engage with students via external lectures and the vital importance of informal mentoring in job roles from colleagues (e.g. via the HER Forum).

10.4.13 This focus group also considered the issues of skills and recruitment specifically in relation to HER officers, noting trends towards the merging of roles so that HER Officers are also responsible for development management, or vice-versa. Another participant said a recent HER role also included archive responsibility. Others were concerned about the potential for further dilution of roles if local government reorganisation prompted the further splitting of HERs (see Section 10.3). Participants stressed the different skill sets required for these roles. HER officer roles, in participants' experience, had been difficult to fill in the past, with small numbers of qualified applications received. It was noted that GIS training was not delivered via most university courses in archaeology, and that participants were even unsure if most undergraduates were taught about what HERs are.

10.4.14 There was considerable evidence that many teams are suffering from increased workload, as well as reduced capacity. The growth in solar farms and wider NSIP pressures were explicitly mentioned as causes for this in many areas.

10.4.15 A GLAAS representative praised London's archaeological priority areas and approach to risk modelling as a tool that was helpful for managing increased workload by enabling triaging of cases.

10.4.16 Other proactive approaches to funding work were also reported. Some services had applied for grant funding from Historic England, National Heritage Lottery Fund (NHLF), local plan reserves funds, or other independent funders to complete local heritage lists, National Record of the Historic Environment (NRHE) data transfer, HER-focussed research projects, or list updates. Participants highlighted the need to articulate the benefit and target opportunities where they exist.

Recruitment challenges and succession planning

10.4.17 A majority of service providers (60%) who responded to the survey did not have problems with recruitment. A significant minority (35%) reported issues such as low numbers of applicants, low numbers of qualified applicants, and recruitment freezes. Others reported high staff turnover, and difficulties retaining experienced staff.

10.4.18 It was clear that recruitment freezes are increasingly common, with one survey respondent hopeful that that statutory HERs might strengthen the argument to hire a new HER officer, but another noting that their HER officer was lost in 2015 and cannot be replaced.

10.4.19 These issues were judged to be related to low pay comparative to the private sector, challenges getting people to relocate to unpopular or high-cost areas. High workload and short-term contracts were also considered to be factors leading to challenges, as well as to a high rate of turnover.

10.4.20 The Statutory HERs focus group noted a concern with succession planning, with one participant noting that their skeleton team had two of three members nearing retirement, with no resources to bring in a junior to begin the process of 'downloading' expertise and upskilling into the role.

10.4.21 The role of volunteers was also discussed, with one participant citing the invaluable (and lucky) progression of a volunteer into a full-time role as an HER officer, but another participant reporting that volunteering is increasingly difficult under new council systems (e.g. IT, hybrid working, etc).

10.4.22 There was also a strong suggestion that local archaeological societies were an excellent source of local expertise, with one participant suggesting they were an underused asset to curators, especially if long term post-holders in county archaeologist roles are replaced by people without deep understanding to the local area.

10.4.23 There was a general appreciation for the principle of work placements, with local authorities offering introductory training for staff working for commercial companies. It was generally perceived as a win-win in terms of adding temporary capacity, creating skills among future applicants, and helping commercial staff understand the process better, even if they return to employment in commercial companies. However, few had direct experience of hosting these placements, and others said that while they'd like to offer such schemes, they did not feel they had the time to put together the necessary work.

10.4.24 One local authority representative described looking into the possibility of creating Level 4 and Level 7 apprenticeships but were not able to get support from their authority for this due to a lack of ability to create a permanent post at the end of the training.

- 10.4.25 One authority described work to partner with universities to offer student excavations and dissertation options but did not believe that these partnerships had led to outcomes that were directly beneficial to the service in terms of increasing interest in local authority roles among students.
- 10.4.26 Some survey respondents noted a reliance upon temporary staff who are brought in to work on specific projects on fixed contracts. Some respondents and focus group participants noted that they rely on convincing management to make these staff made permanent.
- 10.4.27 The focus group noted that some authorities contract short term capacity via external consultants. One consultant archaeologist who had done such work for county councils noted their surprise that this costly approach was taken.
- 10.4.28 There was a general acceptance that larger teams enabled more opportunities for sustainable team management. One participant cited the ability to bring junior trainees in preparation of a senior post-holder retiring. Another cited fixed term HER assistants for specific projects and then aim to hold on to them. One participant's permanent role was delivered in this way. But others had wider concerns about the lack of across-the-board opportunities to bring in younger people and train them. At least two focus group participants were from services too small to legitimately bring in and train junior HER staff.
- 10.4.29 Larger services were also more likely to comment that they had succession planning under control and had a successful history of training up replacement staff within the service. They also reported benefits from being able to have entry-level posts of people who could be trained up without having an immediate burden of responsibility in more senior, or solo posts.

Brigading services

- 10.4.30 Several participants in the focus groups mentioned the benefits of being brigaded with other specialist services (e.g. ecology, flooding) within their authorities. These teams seemed to be positively regarded for the financial resilience and broadened base for internal advocacy within wider planning departments that they brought.
- 10.4.31 This was in contrast to the smaller number of services who were brigaded with non-planning related services, such as libraries and archives, which were more often referred to as not being beneficial to budgetary resilience.

Training and skills

- 10.4.32 While a small majority of survey respondent service providers indicated that they do not have issues relating to skills and training, a significant minority described issues resulting from lack of resources and time to access training. One respondent noted that they have had *"no training at all in my job"*.
- 10.4.33 Some considered that there was not training available in certain skills needs in their field (e.g. for HER officers) and some had the perception that Historic England's training offer for archaeologists had reduced in quality in recent years.
- 10.4.34 There were concerns discussed in focus group sessions that skills required for roles were not well understood by managers. This, in combination with poor pay structures comparative with private sector roles meant that hiring of people without the requisite skills or experience was a common issue. One participant cited hiring curators with no experience of EIA.

10.4.35 One participant noted that many of the most vital knowledge requirements was the local knowledge to understand the specificities of the local area, and that this was not something that a standard training course could simply be bought for.

10.4.36 One local authority representative, however, described proactive work that had been undertaken internally to categorise job roles into ‘families’ within the council, requiring skills mapping and re-writing job descriptions as a result. This was reported to have led to good understanding of what skills are needed for roles. A different local authority representative, however, reported that a similar activity in their authority had been mishandled, meaning that more standardised job descriptions were now in place, which did not contain sufficient specialist descriptions for historic environment skills.

Charging and cost recovery

10.4.37 Different approaches to charging were discussed by respondents and focus group participants. Several respondents noted pressure to be self-financing through fees. Respondents with experience in Greater London noted that their charging rates are known to be low and that they may have to address this in future.

10.4.38 Some participants reported that they were allowed to make a small operating surplus to fund specified business investments.

10.4.39 Survey respondents reflected on a concern that enhanced Heritage Gateway data may make charging less viable. This accords with some user sentiment that all data should be available for free via Gateway.

10.4.40 One respondent noted that their ‘risk averse’ council had dramatically curtailed their service’s ability to bring in external contracts that contributed a large amount to running costs. It was noted that the capacity and the knowledge was there, prior to cuts to the team, but that commercial thinking was not part of the authority’s approach.

Section 114 ‘bankruptcy’

10.4.41 Providers were asked their thoughts about Authorities affected by Section 114 ‘bankruptcy’ proceedings where authorities are forced to declare unlawful expenditure exceeding its income under the terms of the Local Government Finance Act 1988. Responses did not provide many detailed insights into specific cases or proactive preparations taken by respondents’ services. Instead, responses reflected on more general financial pressures in a context of wider precarious funding impacting all activities. Responses also indicated a lack of clarity on risks and impacts.

10.4.42 While some respondents considered that as a core service, planning should be unaffected, or that authorities would be ‘bailed out’ eventually, others recognised that risks affected the financial environment of all services. Other respondents noted that in threatened authorities, teams were being forced to cut back services, or freeze recruitment, to help stave off s.114 declaration.

10.4.43 Several respondents noted that their own authorities were dealing with s.114 proceedings or were close to invoking them. One noted that there was no information being passed down despite ongoing talks about serious budget cuts.

10.4.44 The general sense was one that because local authorities were commonly dealing with serious budgetary challenges, that many authorities would resort to delivering minimal statutory

services only. It was noted that while HERs may be able to derive some protection from provisions in the LURA, other services were vulnerable (particularly museums) and that all services are liable for cuts to bare bone services.

10.4.45 Some respondents suggested that there should be more proactive support from heritage sector bodies for threatened services. A lack of sector responses to existing bankruptcy cases from the sector was also noted.

Service Resilience Recommendations

10.4.46 Based on the survey responses and the focus group discussion, a number of recommendations have been created which are outlined below.

Service Resilience - Recommendation 1:

CiFA and ALGAO should update resources outlining the roles of historic environment services and ensure that these resources are available for advocates to utilise to make the case for staffing needs, funding and commercial opportunities.

Service Resilience - Recommendation 2:

CiFA should explore the potential to collect and promote good practice advice via CPD events. For example, to encourage further discussion of skills sharing and capacity-building, such as work placements between LPAs and CiFA Registered Organisations.

Service Resilience - Recommendation 3:

CiFA and ALGAO should work with members to map training needs and design career enrichment opportunities (e.g. CPD events, or training e-learning modules), potentially targeted at students and early career CiFA members. CiFA should consider whether the Accredited degree programme could specifically consider skills appropriate to local authority roles.

Service Resilience - Recommendation 4:

Sector bodies should consider potential to support apprenticeships, secondments, mentoring opportunities across professional local government networks, for example, by promoting case studies and seeking to maximise the potential of CPD resources established peer to peer resources such as HER Forum and Knowledge Hub.

10.5 Climate Change and Resilience

10.5.1 In the survey, 25 local authority archaeological services indicated that their team undertakes work on climate change and resilience across a range of projects including historic environment adaptation and green infrastructure projects. On an individual level, respondents have worked on a range of habitat conservation and creation initiatives including woodland creation, landscape recovery and rewilding projects amongst others. The full list of schemes can be found in the Challenges and Opportunities appendix.

10.5.2 With many local authority archaeological services working on or contributing to projects relating to climate change and resilience, a number of themes were identified by both the survey respondents and the focus group participants.

10.5.3 It should be noted that this section on climate change and resilience refers to natural and historic environment projects such as rewilding, woodland creation etc. The wider issue of the decarbonisation of the historic environment sector is not discussed here.

The question of guidance

- 10.5.4 The survey asked respondents what further guidance is needed to improve the capacity to provide Historic Environment advice on nature recovery and climate change mitigation projects. The responses were varied with one response indicating that *“there is a lot of good available guidance, the problem is the ability to achieve successful outcomes for the historic environment for certain types of activity which are on the side lines of regular planning”*. Other responses were of the opinion that while a certain amount of guidance exists, there is nothing specific available. One response thought that no further guidance is needed as the respondent saw no difference in considering archaeological impacts whether that is for commercial activity or for climate change projects. One response also made the point that additional guidance is essentially useless if the historic environment is not considered early enough in such projects.
- 10.5.5 The survey responses did include suggestions of what further guidance is needed with one response indicating that *“we need more case studies of good practice”* while another response raised the point that priorities need to be established through nationally agreed guidance. Other responses called for more site-specific guidance on the impacts of climate change/nature recovery projects with examples given such as the impact of tree roots on below-ground archaeological remains and how pond creation can impact the water table and therefore preservation of archaeological remains.
- 10.5.6 The question of guidance was further explored in the focus group discussion with participants agreeing with survey respondents that while broad guidance does exist, there is a lack of project specific guidance. Participants observed that natural environment colleagues tend to be highly focused on ecological goals, which can be to the detriment of the wider landscape. The point was made that archaeologists have a greater understanding of how landscapes change over time as a result of human action and this is something which could be used to complement nature recovery projects. Rewilding was given an example of how collaborative working could be beneficial; a number of rewilding projects are taking place, but what point in time should this rewilding reflect? It was suggested that any future guidance should be specific to different types of projects and sites and include the likely archaeological impacts and opportunities offered by such projects. Participants also pointed out that to be successful, future guidance should be a product of cross sector collaboration rather than developed in isolation.

Resourcing and use of evidence

- 10.5.7 Concerns relating to inadequate resourcing were raised in both the survey and the focus group discussion. This lack of resourcing within local authority archaeological services was raised as a barrier to providing meaningful engagement with large scale environmental projects. There is also a lack of funding both at the impact assessment level and beyond with one survey response noting that *“while advising local, independent organisations, they have often lacked the funding to commission the requested geophysical survey for example, and their proposals have therefore not happened.”*
- 10.5.8 Such concerns were also raised in relation to the use of palaeoenvironmental evidence with one survey respondent stating that one of their concerns is *“funding of full analysis of palaeoenvironmental cores with work stopping at assessment level.”*. In addition to this, focus group participants recognised the importance of palaeoenvironmental evidence as a powerful tool for informing climate change and nature recovery. However, it is not currently being used

as such due to barriers such as the high cost of specialist analysis, a shortage of skilled practitioners along with a limited capacity to translate technical findings into practical advice.

Collaboration and communication

10.5.9 Both the survey respondents and the focus group participants raised the need for closer integration and collaboration with natural environment colleagues. One survey response stated that there is *“too much silo working which ultimately stems from the top – Government should be encouraged to view them as more integrated concerns”*.

10.5.10 Within the focus group discussion, there was broad agreement that the most successful environmental projects are those that had early and sustained engagement from both sectors. While several participants had been involved in such projects, they recognised that such integration is not systematically implemented. Poor communication between the natural and historic environment sectors was raised as a key challenge which prevents more effective integration. One reason suggested for this poor communication is that there is a difference in terminology and timescales between the sectors with archaeologists thinking in longer time periods than ecologists.

10.5.11 One survey response thought that *“despite our best efforts, I think even our closest colleagues still misunderstand our role and underestimate the breadth and depth of what we consider the historic environment”*. The focus group participants agreed with this sentiment and suggested that it is imperative that we demonstrate the relevance of the historic environment through practical examples such as the use of shipwrecks as artificial reefs. It was suggested that collaboration improves significantly when the historic environment is perceived as part of the solution rather than as a constraint.

Skills and knowledge sharing

10.5.12 How we disseminate the results of archaeological assessments and project outcomes was also raised in the focus group discussion. Participants highlighted that there is very little opportunity for project teams to publish successful projects beyond traditional routes such as conference proceedings. It was stressed that mechanisms need to be created within the sector to enable individuals to more easily disseminate the results of their projects in more accessible and non-technical formats.

10.5.13 Participants suggested that a digital platform should be created and curated through partnership working with organisations from both the historic environment and natural environment sectors. Funding options should be explored to ensure that such a platform is sustainable and regularly updated. Such a platform would enable both sectors to crowd source examples of good practice and guidance which could then be made open access.

10.5.14 Focus group participants suggested cross sector training and knowledge sharing as a key method to improve collaboration and communication with natural environment colleagues. A session on the historic and natural environments was held at the ClfA conference⁶ in 2025 and was cited as a good example of how such knowledge sharing could work. The session included a series of scenarios which were approached from a nature recovery perspective with ecologists as well as archaeologists in attendance. Participants also suggested that historic

⁶ Archaeologists for a nature and climate positive future: [ClfA Conference 2025](#)

environment professionals should attend and/or present at ecological conferences and vice versa to enable this knowledge sharing.

10.5.15 In relation to increasing the skillsets of historic environment practitioners in this area, the point was made that teaching the natural environment in relation to the historic environment (and vice versa) could be incorporated into undergraduate degrees. This would help to embed the connectivity of the sectors at the early careers stage. Participants also suggested joint CPD workshops could be created and held as a partnership programme between organisations such as Natural England, Historic England and ClfA. Participants cautioned that any such training programme should be created as a joint strategy so that training sessions can be targeted at specific areas.

10.5.16 Participants also made the point that while training and skills/knowledge sharing is essential in this area, it is linked to policy and guidance. If policies relating to the natural and historic environments become more enforceable, this can create a more effective business case for training and knowledge sharing.

Demonstrating relevance

10.5.17 The participants discussed how, as a sector, we can demonstrate the relevance of the historic environment in the context of climate change and resilience. The point was made that there are shared narratives between the historic and natural environments; the historic environment can be used to describe past climate as well as what climate change could mean in the future. On a practical level, the historic environment can also be used to combat climate change e.g., the reuse of historic buildings in preference to demolition and new build. There are also examples of archaeological sites which can be used to aid nature recovery e.g. WWII pillboxes being adapted for habitat use. The co-creation of guidance and a central hub of resources would help to facilitate these joint narratives.

10.5.18 Participants also discussed public perception and engagement with the suggestion the historic environment, as a sector, could make the most of opportunities to ‘piggyback’ on natural environment campaigns. The point was made that the general public appear to respond well to joint narratives with an example given of an article about the Southwest Peatland Project in the Guardian which unexpectedly went viral. Joint narratives provide opportunities to demonstrate how the impact of climate on communities in the past relates to the day-to-day impacts of climate change on present-day communities. Linking both the natural and historic environments in this way as well as understanding the experiences of communities can help to instil a sense of value and connectivity.

10.5.19 Interestingly, when this topic was discussed in the second multi-topic focus group, participants advised caution with creating joint narratives due to certain current negative portrayals of nature and climate change issues – specifically relating to the costs of nature regulation in the planning system – both from politicians and in the media.

Climate Change and Resilience Recommendations

10.5.20 Based on the survey responses and the focus group discussion, a number of recommendations have been created which are outlined below.

Climate Change and Resilience - Recommendation 1:

Creation of guidance tailored to specific types of climate change mitigation, adaptation and nature recovery projects which includes consideration of likely archaeological impacts with practical options and case studies. This should be explored collaboratively between historic environment sector and natural environment sector bodies. This should reflect on existing guidance and projects in these areas including those related to peatland restoration, woodland creation, river restoration and coastal realignment.

Climate Change and Resilience - Recommendation 2:

Explore the creation of a joint training strategy collaboratively between historic environment and natural environment sector bodies. This should include CPD courses for historic environment and natural environment practitioners. It should also seek to embed the integration of the historic and natural environments within appropriate modules in undergraduate degrees.

Climate Change and Resilience - Recommendation 3:

Develop a collaborative project between historic environment and natural environment sector bodies to create and curate a centralised repository for guidance, case studies and examples of best practice. Funding options should be investigated to enable a long term and sustainable platform for these resources. The platform should be open access to facilitate knowledge sharing and allow resources to be uploaded by individuals (subject to a review process).

Climate Change and Resilience - Recommendation 4:

To encourage greater collaboration between historic environment and natural environment practitioners, partnership working between organisations such as ClfA, CBA, Historic England, ALGAO and Natural England should be increased. As part of this partnership working, it is recommended that ALGAO and Natural England should enter discussions relating to the challenges inherent in the existing application of schemes such as the formerly named Countryside Stewardship, Woodland SFI and Capital Grant applications.

Climate Change and Resilience - Recommendation 5:

Historic environment sector bodies should advocate for enforceable policy to embed historic environment in climate/nature recovery frameworks. This could be facilitated through the creation of strong partnerships between organisations such as ClfA, Historic England and Natural England (and others as appropriate).

10.6 Museums

10.6.1 The Challenges and Opportunities section of the survey included questions relating to museums which were answered by seven respondents. These questions principally related to the current non-statutory status of museums, the answers to which are detailed in the Challenges and Opportunities appendix.

10.6.2 While seven respondents is a statistically small sample, several themes were identified in the results which were echoed in the focus group discussion.

Statutory status of museums

10.6.3 Both survey respondents and focus group participants made the point that an element of protection would be granted to museums if they became statutory with one survey respondent noting *“it would have to be accompanied by secure funding to safeguard them in the longer term”*. As it is unlikely that museums will achieve statutory status in the near future, the focus group discussed if certain processes relating to museums could potentially be made statutory.

The point was made that current planning guidance is not clear enough in relation to archive deposition and is one area which could benefit from clearer provisions – either in statute, or in planning policy. Any such move to make archive deposition a statutory/explicit policy requirement would have to be accompanied by sufficient funding for both storage and staffing within museums. However, the question was raised as to where this funding could potentially come from. The point was made that this funding could be linked to development with the potential to access funding e.g. through S106.

- 10.6.4 Participants acknowledged that there are issues with making archive deposition statutory due to a significant number of museums no longer accepting archives. The discussion briefly touched on the current work being carried out on the potential for a National Centre for Archaeological Archives, which would act as a central repository for such orphaned archives. The consensus amongst participants was that such a repository would divorce archives from their local communities making them more difficult to access. Regional repositories were viewed as a more acceptable option although the point was raised that this is moving the problem rather than resolving it. Participants were of the view that only proper funding for museums will resolve the problem.

Inconsistency in deposition practices

- 10.6.5 Inconsistencies in deposition practices were raised in the focus group discussion which would not necessarily be resolved if deposition was made a statutory requirement. Participants pointed out that there is inconsistency in how commercial companies communicate and engage with museums. Some participants offered their experiences with regards to commercial companies with examples given of situations where archives have been split between collecting museums to reduce or avoid deposition fees.
- 10.6.6 Participants believed that these inconsistencies are compounded by the lack of archaeological curators within many museums. Non-archaeological specialists will be responsible for multiple collections outside their sphere of expertise and as such, may not be aware of the planning process in relating to archaeological archives. The point was raised that there is the potential for joint guidance to be produced by local authority archaeological services and museums, particularly in areas with more than one collecting museum. There are areas where this guidance is in place but again, there is an inconsistency in such integration across England.
- 10.6.7 As a tangent to this, participants raised concerns over the use of destructive analysis techniques on archives prior to deposition. These concerns relate to the lack of notification that such analysis techniques are taking place and lack of documentation. Participants would like to see better communication and the inclusion of sampling records in the archive documentation.

Better integration within the planning process

- 10.6.8 Participants discussed how museums could be better integrated within the planning process. The point was raised that there is currently a lack of enforcement for archive deposition with museums only being referred to minimally within Written Schemes of Investigations (WSI). Participants believed that more specific wording within WSIs with reference to engagement, the process for deposition etc. would lead to stronger enforcement. There was a general feeling that commercial companies see museums as an afterthought rather than integral to projects. If more specific wording relating to museums was required within WSIs, participants believed that this would encourage earlier engagement by companies. This wording could include

reference to adherence to policies of the collecting museum, any selection and retention policies which may be applied, reference to early communication with the collecting museum and where possible, reference to the transfer of title.

- 10.6.9 The participants also discussed processes with an example given of the Museum of Archaeology, Durham University. In this example, the museum has streamlined its deposition processes with the HER which are also linked with OASIS. While this has increased workload to a certain extent, the new processes have enabled the museum to be more efficient and stay connected within the planning process. The Museum of Archaeology at Durham University is by no means the only museum to operate such an integrated process but it does require capacity within workloads which not every museum is able to accommodate.

Public engagement

- 10.6.10 The discussion raised the point that public engagement is a specialism of museums, but this is not being utilised by commercial companies. Several participants gave anecdotal evidence of interesting sites being discovered within their collecting areas but not being informed until the archive was deposited. Early involvement by museums in projects could lead to joint outreach initiatives with the potential to access funding such as S106 agreements. Greater integration of museums within the planning process would help to facilitate companies in notifying the relevant museum in a timely manner.
- 10.6.11 While participants all agreed that such engagement would be ideal there are other considerations such as the limited resources available in many museums and the need to manage expectations of what can be achieved.

Mentoring and support

- 10.6.12 The discussion raised concerns over the lack of archaeological curators within many museums with participants showing an appetite for the setting up of a mentoring and support community. This community would draw on all elements of the sector to provide support for non-specialists working with archaeological collections in museums. The establishment of such a community would encourage working relationships between all aspects of the sector and potentially facilitate greater integration between museums, HERs and commercial companies.
- 10.6.13 Participants also expressed a hope for greater collaboration between the Museums Association, the Society for Museum Archaeology and ClfA as part of this community.

Museums Recommendations

- 10.6.14 Based on the focus group discussion, a number of recommendations have been created which are outlined below.
- 10.6.15 Organisations which are relevant to these recommendations are included below. However, it should be noted that some of those mentioned are voluntary organisations such as the Society for Museum Archaeology. Where these organisations are mentioned as potential partners, additional funding and capacity will be required to enable such partnerships to be developed.

Museums - Recommendation 1:

CIfA, ALGAO and SMA (and other relevant organisations) should carry out a consultation on the development of specific wording relating to museums and archives within WSIs. This wording could be standardised to provide a consistency across counties/regions. Additional information with local context e.g., a named museum for deposition could easily be added on a case-by-case basis.

Museums - Recommendation 2:

Greater integration of museums within the planning process would enable more efficient archive deposition practices and could lead to more effective and collaborative public engagement. To help facilitate this integration, communication between museums and other parts of the sector such as HERs and commercial companies/organisations will need to be improved. There are several ways this communication could be encouraged e.g., a museums takeover of a CIfA Tea Break event, a CIfA hosted session at the SMA annual conference (and vice versa), the inclusion of museums in the HER Forum annual meetings (where appropriate) and of HERs within museum conferences (such as the SMA annual conference). Training should also be considered as part of this integration to include how museums can utilise S106 funding along with more explicit reference to museums and archive deposition in planning guidance.

Museums - Recommendation 3:

There are number of museums who have developed and streamlined archive deposition processes which are linked with HERs and commercial companies (via OASIS). CIfA and the SMA should create resources to enable museums to develop their own such processes where they are not already in existence. These resources should include template workflows and practical case studies and examples.

Museums - Recommendation 4:

There is a requirement to strengthen standards around the use of specialist analysis techniques and archives. CIfA and SMA should work in partnership to review current standards and strengthen wording where appropriate.

Museums - Recommendation 5:

Develop a project to establish a mentoring network for non-specialists in museums. This project should be a collaboration between organisations such as CIfA, SMA, ALGAO and Historic England to link the different aspects of the sector. While it is anticipated that participation within a mentoring and support community is likely to be voluntary, it is recommended that funding options for this network should be explored. Formal funding would ensure that a permanent, digital platform could be developed and maintained to facilitate communication. Funding could also be allocated on a grant basis for individuals who may have expenses in relation to their mentoring and support work. It will also be necessary to ensure that any potential mentors within the network are suitably accredited and supported in this role.

Museums - Recommendation 6:

It is recognised that museums specialise in public engagement, something which is not currently utilised within the commercial archaeological sector. As discussed in Section 0, demonstrating public benefit is a key aspect of the planning process as it relates to the historic environment. Developing partnerships between commercial archaeological companies and museums would greatly enhance public engagement on a variety of projects. It is recommended that organisations such as the SMA, FAME and CIfA work together to develop a framework in which to develop such partnerships. Suggestions on how to improve communication between the different parts of the sector have been listed in Recommendation 1.

10.7 Public benefit and engagement

- 10.7.1 While the question of public benefit/engagement was not a specific topic within the survey, it appears as a recurring theme in responses across all of the Challenges and Opportunities questions. When discussing the government's proposed planning reform, users highlighted that revised planning regulations could present opportunities to strengthen public benefit and engagement. One respondent stated their belief that *"it could still be made even more explicit that developers should be engaging communities, and local authorities should be requiring this as standard in all schemes where it is appropriate"*.
- 10.7.2 The opportunity which revised planning regulations may present is also echoed in the survey responses by providers on this topic. One response highlighted that the proposed planning reforms present the sector with the chance to change its mindset in relation to the value of archaeology, particularly in relation to the current government's agenda on place/sense of place. The respondent also says, *"The whole way of working could change for the better with an emphasis on reporting for the wider public rather than just technical grey literature reports aimed at other archaeologists"*.
- 10.7.3 Public benefit and engagement are also themes which occur in responses by providers when discussing how statutory status may benefit HERs. If appropriate levels of funding and resources are provided as a result of statutory status, there is a belief amongst respondents that this will result in HERs *"flourishing as a knowledge base that is more widely shared with the public and recognised as a central resource for a broad range of audiences"*.

Demonstrating the value of public benefit and engagement

- 10.7.4 The question of value was a key topic of the focus group conversation, one which turned out to be multi-faceted. Many developers use specific frameworks to evaluate the social value of their developments such as The National TOMS Framework or the HACT Value Calculator⁷. ClfA and others are also working with National Highways on other ways of communicating public benefit good practice to client sector audiences on major infrastructure projects. The Social Value Engine at Worcestershire County Council was given as another example of a social value framework⁸. Such frameworks provide a structured approach to ensure projects create positive and measurable economic, social and environmental benefits for local communities. Utilising such frameworks would enable the historic environment sector to demonstrate its value more clearly to developers.
- 10.7.5 In order to develop such a framework specifically for the historic environment then we need to ask overarching questions such as how do we create value, who are we creating value for and how do we measure it? When asked about the question of value within the multi topic focus group, it was suggested that any such framework should have a multi-faceted approach so that the sector can demonstrate the value of the historic environment not just in terms of public benefit but also its value within construction and meeting government planning targets. It was also suggested within this discussion that at the core of this framework should sit a statement which clearly defines not just the value of archaeology and the historic environment but also clearly articulates the value of local authority archaeological services.

⁷ [Social Value Frameworks](#) (accessed 9th December 2025)

⁸ <https://socialvalueengine.com/> (accessed 9th December 2025)

- 10.7.6 Work on defining the value of archaeology is currently being carried out through the Culture and Heritage Capital Programme which is a programme run by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) which aims to establish a framework for calculating the value of cultural heritage assets. In addition to this, the recent UKRI Future Leaders Fellowship ‘Measuring, maximising and transforming public benefit from UK Government infrastructure investment in archaeology’ led by Dr Sadie Watson focussed on ensuring that public spending on archaeology for infrastructure projects leads to meaningful and relevant research and genuine community participation⁹. Any future work on developing a social value framework for the historic environment should complement this work.
- 10.7.7 As well as demonstrating the value of public engagement to developers, the point was raised that planning officers need to have a clear understanding of public engagement and benefit in relation to the historic environment. Planning conditions which employ vague language around public engagement make it more difficult to ensure that developers engage with this aspect beyond the bare minimum.
- 10.7.8 While planning conditions do need to be more specific, the discussion highlighted that a balance needs to be struck between making planning conditions more specific while at the same time ensuring that this specificity doesn’t stifle creativity. It was also pointed out that public engagement should take place with local communities on a co-creation basis with sustainable outcomes, rather than just as a means of fulfilling a planning obligation.
- 10.7.9 It should be noted that ClfA have developed a Toolkit for Public Engagement¹⁰ which can be used to provide specific detail despite the potentially vague wording of a planning condition. As well as providing guidance, it also includes practical suggestions to support archaeologists at all stages of a project.

Maximising the impact of research within developer funded archaeology

- 10.7.10 Linked with demonstrating the value of public engagement, it is also important that the sector considers the impact of research carried out within developer funded archaeology. If the sector seeks to maximise the impact of such research, the discussion pointed out that we first have to determine how impact should be measured.
- 10.7.11 This point is clearly demonstrated in the Public User Needs Survey 2 PUNS2 survey report¹¹ which highlights a lack of understanding about audiences and inadequate tracking methods for feedback and evaluation in archaeological practices. The conclusion reached in the report is that there is currently a lack of resources and capacity to evaluate the outputs of public engagement which is a significant concern (CBA and MOLA, 2025). The focus group discussion highlighted that any value framework should include a framework for evaluating impact and that it is important that only one such framework is produced. This will necessitate partnership working between key organisations such as the CBA, Historic England, ClfA, FAME, ALGAO, SMA amongst others. The point was also made that internal conversations need to be held within

⁹ <https://www.mola.org.uk/discoveries/research-projects/archaeology-and-public-benefit-ukri-future-leaders-fellowship> (accessed 10th December 2025)

¹⁰ [ClfA Toolkit for Public Engagement](#) (accessed 9th March 2026)

¹¹ <https://www.archaeologyuk.org/our-work/trowel-and-error.html>

companies and organisations about how public engagement can enhance their work, thereby allowing more effective conversations with developers.

10.7.12 In tandem with developing a combined framework, the point was made that it will be necessary for the sector to change its mindset around public engagement and benefit. One of the conclusions reached in the PUNS2 survey report is that there is a 'data first' focus which is dominant within the industry, one which risks archaeologists undervaluing their role in society and effectively remaining 'hidden' (CBA and MOLA, 2025). This point was echoed in the discussion with the suggestion that the sector needs to change its viewpoint and see its role more in storytelling, the creation of narratives and placemaking rather than just as mitigation.

10.7.13 In addition to this, the discussion also pointed out that the sector needs to collaborate more effectively, not just within the industry but also outside it and develop relationships with organisations that are experts in working with a particular audience. The suggestion was made that perhaps a sector-wide support network should be created to enable such collaborative working. This could potentially also help smaller companies and organisations to carry out more effective public engagement within their work.

Changing current methods of dissemination

10.7.14 The focus group discussed current methods of dissemination and how these could change to provide more meaningful engagement. A lot of public engagement takes the form of fieldwork, often excavation, and the point was raised that as a sector, we need to look at other methods of community engagement other than fieldwork. Linked with this, is the recognition that the benefits of public engagement go beyond education and knowledge creation and include positive impacts on physical and mental wellbeing.

10.7.15 The PUNS2 project carried out by the CBA and MOLA found that people want archaeological information that is up-to-date, readily available online and easily accessible. The survey found that how that archaeological information is consumed varies according to age group with younger groups preferring social media platforms while in person engagement and listening was highlighted by older groups as their preference. YouTube was cited as a leading platform across all groups with different social media platforms preferred by different age groups (CBA & MOLA, 2025).

10.7.16 One of the recommendations made in the PUNS2 report is that the sector should collaborate more effectively to develop more engaging and creative methods of dissemination. The discussion supported this point with suggestions that utilising outputs such as YouTube and TikTok videos or podcasts to make summary reports more interesting and engaging. Access to archaeological sites which have traditionally been inaccessible could be increased through technology such as drone fly throughs or virtual reality creating a more immersive experience. A suggestion was made during the discussion that a central repository of case studies and examples of best practice could be created to share knowledge and creativity within the sector. This suggestion led to the question of obsolete technology and how to ensure outputs remain sustainable in the long term.

10.7.17 In an effort to reframe this question, participants thought the sector should instead, concentrate on the process rather than just the outputs. If local communities are more actively involved in a co-creation process, it was pointed out that it won't always be clear what the outputs might be at the start of a project. If the sector focuses more on the process of public

engagement rather than the outputs, then we can continue to benefit from older case studies and examples of best practice.

- 10.7.18 Linked with this, the discussion also highlighted that public engagement is a key tenet of museums and as such, a joined-up approach should be developed to utilise this specialism. Communication between the different elements of the sector (commercial companies, museums, planning archaeologists and HERs) could be improved which would potentially help the sector deliver more effective public engagement and benefit within individual projects.

Regional Research Frameworks and local communities

- 10.7.19 The discussion also touched on Regional Research Frameworks and how community research interests could potentially align with them. The point was made during this discussion that research frameworks can be perceived as hierarchical with a 'top down' approach being taken when establishing research priorities for a given area. As a sector, we have to recognise that the research interests of a community may not always align with a research framework and we have to reconcile ourselves to that fact.

- 10.7.20 The question was asked within the discussion about how we can align what local communities want versus what archaeologists want? In response to this, it was suggested that perhaps research frameworks should be more of a 2-tier system with the research interests of communities established alongside academic priorities. Participants also pointed out that in order to do this, trust will need to be built between our sector and the communities that we want to engage with, perhaps utilising the neighbourhood planning process to do so.

- 10.7.21 It was suggested that perhaps our language around research questions is outdated; does it provide a barrier to making archaeology more accessible? Such a suggestion appears to be supported by the PUNS2 survey report which concluded that there are concerns that archaeological information is inaccessible due to the use of technical terminology and lack of inclusivity (CBA and MOLA, 2025).

- 10.7.22 The discussion also raised the point that communities are interested in what is local to them and perhaps research frameworks should be reorganised to recognise the local value of archaeological sites rather than what is nationally or regionally significant. This was illustrated in the discussion by using the example of an Iron Age settlement; such sites may be well documented within a region and as such, are not a research priority for archaeologists. However, a local community may want to research the Iron Age settlement site which is local to their area even though there may be no new information to be gained.

- 10.7.23 As seen in other focus groups, underpinning all these points lies the fundamental issue of funding and resources within local authority archaeological services. A lack of funding and resources means that many of these services are only able to carry out essential work and don't have the capacity to fully participate in public engagement either as a team or in relation to the planning process. More funding and resources would enable development control archaeologists and HERs to create the capacity to more fully engage with this work.

Public Value: Recommendations

- 10.7.24 Based on the survey responses and the focus group discussion, a number of recommendations have been created which are outlined below.

Public Value - Recommendation 1:

Support the current work being undertaken on how the historic environment provides value (social, economic etc.) Explore the creation of a value framework for archaeological projects which also includes a structure for assessing impact. This work should be carried out as a partnership between key stakeholders such as CBA, Historic England, ClfA, FAME and ALGAO.

Public Value - Recommendation 2:

The sector should advocate for more specific wording in planning conditions relating to public engagement and public benefit. Linked with this is the need for guidance/training for planning officers to enable understanding of public benefit and engagement in the historic environment. This should be developed in partnership with planning officer associations such as the Planning Officer's Society, Royal Town Planning Institute.

It is recommended that the ClfA Toolkit for Public Engagement should be made a requirement of all planning-led public engagement. Such a requirement would ensure that local museums are included as partners at an early stage within a project.

In addition, work to ensure that client audiences are less likely to resist such conditions should also be undertaken.

Public Value - Recommendation 3:

Create a central repository of successful public engagement and public benefit projects. This should focus on examples of best practice in terms of the process rather than the output and should also include examples of best practice of collaborative working with organisations outside of the sector. These resources could be included as part of the ClfA Toolkit for Public Engagement.

Public Value - Recommendation 4:

Encourage the sharing of knowledge and best practice, troubleshooting etc. through existing groups such as the ClfA Community Archaeology Special Interest Group. These groups and discussions should be promoted through organisations such as ClfA.

11.0 ClfA Standard for Archaeological Advice by Historic Environment Services

- 11.0.1 As part of a programme of reviewing ClfA Standards and Guidance, this project will draw upon the analysis of local authority archaeology service models in the AGLAO report and Stage 2 user feedback to examine whether different local authority archaeological service models are equally capable of meeting the existing standard and guidance, and whether changes to the content of the Standard and Guidance might be recommended. This would be a timely opportunity as ClfA is in the process of reviewing and updating its current suite of Standard and Guidance documents.
- 11.0.2 The ClfA Standard and guidance for archaeological advice by historic environment services was originally published in 2012, following lengthy consultation. It was developed in partnership with ALGAO UK and with funding from Historic England (then English Heritage), Historic Environment Scotland (then Historic Scotland) and Cadw. There have been minor updates since its publication but no thorough review. It was developed against a backdrop, and partly in response to, threats to local authority historic environment services and changes within the planning framework. A significant driver for the work was the need to clearly define and articulate an effective historic environment service in the face of local government cuts and outsourcing. As such, it was intended as much as an advocacy document for local authority historic environment services as a standard to measure them against.
- 11.0.3 ClfA is currently undertaking a major overhaul of its Standards and Guidance, based on an updated structure of universal standards and universal higher-level guidance that are applicable to all archaeologists regardless of where they work. Over time, this will be supported with detailed, jurisdiction-specific guidance for local implementation, reflecting differences across the UK planning regimes and also recognising that ClfA members work globally. Detailed guidance may be produced by ClfA, in collaboration with relevant organisations or by others in sector and signposted from the ClfA website.
- 11.0.4 The opportunity was identified as part of this project to collect feedback on the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Advice* and to assess whether the service delivery model impacted on ability to meet the Standard.
- 11.0.5 Fifty-four survey responses were received to the questions relating to the use of the Standard and guidance covering at least 41 different local authorities, one national agency and one national park authority. A small number of respondents identified the type of authority (e.g. unitary, county council) but not its name. The respondents covered a range of service models including unitary authorities, county, district and city councils and combined services. Responses covered archaeological planning services, historic environment record (HER), museum services and 'other', although archaeological planning services were the most common.
- 11.0.6 The survey asked respondents whether they were aware of the Standard and guidance for archaeological advice by historic environment services, whether they used it and, if so, to what extent they were able to comply with it. It also collected feedback on how it was used and whether respondents felt that it needed to be updated.

- 11.0.7 Ten respondents were unaware or unsure if they were aware of the Standard and guidance for archaeological advice by historic environment services. Thirty respondents were aware of the Standard but did not use it or were unaware if they used it.
- 11.0.8 There were some individual peculiarities or potential errors within the responses: one respondent was unsure if they were aware of the Standard but responded 'yes' to the question about whether they used it and another respondent who was unaware of the Standard and did not use it responded 'yes' to the question about whether it needed updating. There was no clear correlation between type of service and awareness, use or perceived compliance with the Standard. Awareness and use were more common among archaeological planning service respondents than those working within an HER or museum service. Although the survey did not collect information about whether respondents were ClfA members or not, the variation in awareness and use is likely to be reflective of the respondents' levels of interaction with ClfA.
- 11.0.9 Twenty-three respondents reported that they used the Standard and guidance for archaeological advice by historic environment services, representing at least seventeen different authorities. Almost all reported that they were able to meet the Standard while many noted challenges in following all aspects of the guidance. The extent to which respondents were actively using the Standard and guidance varied significantly. Most described it's use as a set of high-level principles underpinning policy or their own more detailed, authority specific guidance while a few reported that they referenced the Standard in documentation but did not describe any other use. Of the small number actively engaging with the document, one respondent reported using the Standard and guidance to benchmark their service, while others reported actively using it to communicate and justify decisions or as a useful refresher to ensure they were working in accordance with good practice.
- 11.0.10 Of those that reported they used the Standard and guidance for archaeological advice by historic environment services, six felt it needed updating, six responded that it didn't and 11 were unsure or did not respond. Slightly more respondents who reported that they did not use the Standard indicated that it needed to be updated. Overall, equal numbers of respondents working in archaeological planning services and HERs felt that the Standard needed updating, with references to changes needed in light of updated HER guidance/manual and if/when statutory status for HERs is implemented. A small number noted some very specific areas of concern in the guidance.
- 11.0.11 From the survey responses, we can conclude that different local authority archaeological service models are equally capable of compliance with the Standard and of following the guidance. The role of the respondent (i.e. planning advice, HER or museum service) is more likely to impact on the extent to which they are aware of, and use, the guidance. We might also surmise that whether the respondent is professionally accredited by ClfA or not also has an impact on levels of awareness and, potentially, use. It was clear that for a significant number of respondents, the Standard and accompanying guidance is seen as a useful document to underpin authority-specific policy and guidance, to benchmark service provision and individual good practice and to support communication of planning decisions and the application of professional judgement. However, a smaller number of responses reflected concerns about the role of ClfA in setting standards for local authority archaeologists, negative perceptions around

ClfA membership and a view that the ClfA Standard reflected a 'minimum quality standard' which their own guidance exceeded.

- 11.0.12 Although responses showed no consensus on the need for an update, the revision and reformatting of the Standard and guidance for archaeological advice by historic environment services will provide an opportunity to re-engage with historic environment advisory service providers. As well as promoting the value of a universal professional standard for the provision of archaeological advice, it will be important to highlight the documents use as an advocacy tool in as the sector navigates another period of change, reform and reorganisation within local government and the planning framework in England.

12.0 Project Conclusions

- 12.0.1 Several conclusions can be drawn from both the survey data and subsequent discussions.
- 12.0.2 In designing this research, the project team recognised the potential for feedback from users to be unfairly critical of local authority services. While a small number of survey respondents could be said to fall into this category, the majority of respondents provided constructive feedback.
- 12.0.3 As outlined in 9.4, a large number of the survey responses were positive in nature with appreciation of local authority historic environment services frequently expressed. Users clearly appreciate the work of HERs, archaeological planning teams and museum services with many praising the work of individual members of staff. Whilst expressing frustration with numerous aspects of these services, there is an overall consensus among respondents that many of the issues raised in both the survey and in subsequent discussions is as a result of chronic underfunding of local authorities over a number of decades.
- 12.0.4 The relatively high number of responses to the survey does seem to demonstrate that there is an appetite in the sector to provide feedback on a range of topics relating to Local Authority Historic Environment Services. This could be seen as an indication that some form of formal mechanism should be considered to assist in providing more regular feedback on these services.
- 12.0.5 As outlined in 9.0, the data highlights several recurring themes principally around the subjects of consistency, communication and service charges. These are themes which have been identified by the sector through previous work and discussions and are not unique to this project. The fact that these themes have consistently been identified indicates that there are likely real underpinning issues, whether structural, or specific to individual services which need to be addressed by the sector in some way.
- 12.0.6 It is recognised that resolving these issues is not something that can be done through a one-size-fits-all national endeavour. Individual differences between how individual services have been established, structured and managed are the most influential factors. However, the recommendations outlined in 9.5, shows that there are aspects of these causes which could be addressed, at least in part, through better communication, training and advocacy. This is where many of the recommendations in this project are focused. Such work will involve a concerted effort by key stakeholders within the sector but may help to foster understanding, trust and transparency between local authority historic environment services and their users and encourage good practice to spread more widely.
- 12.0.7 The project has highlighted that the sector is still siloed in some ways, this is particularly evident in museum services with many of the focus group participants expressing their disappointment that museums are considered as an afterthought in many commercial archaeological projects. While efforts have been made to link HERs, museums and commercial companies, principally through the use of OASIS¹², it is evident that there is still a gap which needs to be bridged.

¹² <https://oasis.ac.uk/>

Recommendations for how links between these elements of the sector could be made have been outlined in 10.6.14.

- 12.0.8 As outlined in 9.1, many survey responses highlight standardisation as an issue, particularly in relation to HERs and the data held by them. It is not always clear exactly what is meant by standardisation although there are clues. What is clear, perhaps, is that there is a general lack of understanding amongst users about how HERs are structured and what national standards are adhered to by HERs. With some exceptions, the role and function of HERs is not taught in entry level training courses which may help explain why there is an apparent lack of understanding of them. On a national level, there is a lack of communication between HERs and the wider sector with HER news and developments more likely to be promoted through siloed platforms such as the HER Forum. Recommendation 3 outlined in 9.5, lists several ways in which this communication could be improved with relatively little effort.
- 12.0.9 Finally, as described in 6.5.8, the results of this project broadly correspond to the conclusions reached by the ALGAO 2022 report *Delivery Models for Local Authority Archaeology*¹³. The survey data shows that, from a user's perspective, that there is a wide variety of performance across all service model types with no single type offered as the ideal model.
- 12.0.10 Both projects highlighted that there are significant issues relating to funding and under-resourcing with local authorities. Funding and resourcing are the key to resolving many of the issues discussed in this report, a conclusion which is also reached in the ALGAO 2022 report. Interestingly, the theme of public benefit is a recurring one in both projects with the recognition that there is an urgent requirement for the sector to more adequately demonstrate public benefit beyond the publication of grey literature reports.

¹³ <https://landward.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Understanding-Models-for-the-Delivery-of-Archaeological-Services.pdf>

13.0 Project Recommendations

13.0.1 A series of recommendations relating to different topics have been outlined through this report. These recommendations have been summarised and then categorised according to four key headings:

- Advocacy
- Strategic
- Training
- Communication

13.0.2 The recommendations have been summarised in the sections below.

13.1 Advocacy Recommendations

Advocacy Recommendation 1:

Explore more partnerships working between key stakeholders both within and outside the sector. Examples of these key stakeholders include ClfA, Historic England, ALGAO, CBA, FAME, SMA and Natural England.

Advocacy Recommendation 2:

Develop advocacy resources in three key areas:

- Local authority service development including support for unitarisation and positive outcomes.
- Local authority historic environment roles to provide an evidence base for use by local authority services when submitting business cases for increased staffing, funding and retention of services.
- The roles and value provided by archaeological advisory services, and additional value that could be unlocked through investment.

Advocacy Recommendation 3:

The sector should increase advocacy for policy changes relating to three key areas:

- Implementation of statutory HER provisions.
- Embedding the historic environment in climate change/nature recovery frameworks.
- Stronger wording within planning legislation relating to public benefit.
- Stronger wording within planning conditions relating to archive deposition and museums.

13.2 Strategic Recommendations

Strategic Recommendation 1:

A local government network should be established within ClfA to facilitate communication, training and strategic partnership working between service providers and users.

Strategic Recommendation 2:

A strategic review should be carried out by ClfA and ALGAO to investigate consistency in service delivery and provision. This review should also investigate further perceptions of inconsistency held by users of historic environment services.

Strategic Recommendation 3:

In partnership with key stakeholders, support the development and creation of a public value framework for archaeological projects.

Strategic Recommendation 4:

Through the local government network in ClfA (see strategic recommendation 1), develop tailored guidance in partnership with Natural England to cover specific types of climate change and nature recovery projects.

Strategic Recommendation 5:

In partnership with the SMA, ClfA should conduct a strategic review of standards relating to specialist analysis techniques applied to archaeological archives.

13.3 Training Recommendations

Training Recommendation 1:

ClfA and ALGAO should work in partnership to conduct a skills mapping exercise for local government historic environment services. This skills mapping should identify current skillsets and skill gaps within both HERs and archaeological advisory services. This skills mapping should inform any formal training strategy in these areas.

Training Recommendation 2:

ClfA and ALGAO should explore the potential to support apprenticeships and secondments as a method of increasing and sharing skills within local authority historic environment services and the wider sector.

Training Recommendation 3:

In partnership with Natural England, ClfA and ALGAO should develop a joint training strategy to increase skills relating to the historic and natural environments. This strategy should make provision for training both on the impacts of climate change/nature recovery projects on the historic environment and the benefits of the historic environment to such projects.

Training Recommendation 4:

A centralised repository of resources should be developed in partnership with key stakeholders. These resources should include case studies and best practice guidance for:

- Streamlining archive deposition processes within museums.
- The historic environment within climate change/nature recovery projects.
- Public benefit and engagement in historic environment projects.

Training Recommendation 5:

The sector should explore and develop mentoring networks to provide support and skills/knowledge sharing in four key areas:

- Public benefit and engagement
- Museums (particularly those without an archaeological specialist)
- Climate change and resilience (cross-sector)
- Local government historic environment services (particularly staff in challenging roles)

13.4 Communication Recommendations

Communication Recommendation 1:

Greater communication between different elements of the sector should be facilitated through key stakeholders. This increase in communication could be facilitated through:

- ClfA tea breaks
- Special editions of The Archaeologist to cover different topics
- ClfA news bulletins
- Conference sessions (both within the sector and third-party conferences)