

Historic Environment Records

Current position

A historic environment record (HER) stores and provides access to systematically organised information about the historic environment in a given area. It is maintained and updated for public benefit in accordance with national and international standards and guidance.

HERs in Wales are sources of — and signposts to — information relating to landscapes, buildings, sites and finds spanning more than 200,000 years of human activity. Records may include archaeological sites, buried remains, chance finds, excavations, significant landscape areas, buildings and standing monuments.

HERs are not permanent archives, but pull information together and direct users to in-depth resources elsewhere. The information held in HER databases and collections thus provides a starting point for:

- supporting the conservation, management and protection of the historic environment;
- informing strategic planning and development management decisions;
- supporting heritage-led regeneration; and
- supporting fieldwork and research into the historic environment.

The HERs also act as important primary sources of information for local communities about their local heritage.

There are currently four regional HERs that together provide comprehensive coverage of the whole of Wales:

- Clwyd-Powys HER
- Dyfed HER
- Glamorgan-Gwent HER
- Gwynedd HER.

The corresponding Welsh Archaeological Trusts (WATs), which were established in the 1970s, created the regional HERs and have kept them up to date.

The Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers-UK (ALGAO-UK), has developed a set of benchmarks/standards for HERs in the UK. With appropriate changes and updates, agreed with Cadw and the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales (RCAHMW), these have been adopted in Wales by the four WATs and ALGAO-Cymru. In 2010, Cadw asked the RCAHMW to commission an independent audit of the four regional HERs to test them against the first-level benchmark of these standards. They were all found to meet the appropriate standard, although in some cases concerns were expressed about the level of dedicated staff resource that was available for the upkeep of the record.

Preparation of the draft statutory guidance, *Managing Historic Environment Records in Wales*, included a review and update of the standards and benchmarks for HERs

in Wales to account for changes in national data management standards and the requirements of the historic environment legislation. The review was led by the RCAHMW in consultation with key stakeholders including the WATs. An audit of the four regional HERs against these benchmarks is currently underway, managed by the RCAHMW and due to be completed by the end of June 2015.

Current funding arrangements for the HERs

As detailed in the Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) for the Bill, the Welsh Government provides the main funding for the HERs in the form of an annual grant of £120,000 to the WATs for maintenance and management.

Cadw gives the WATs an additional sum of around £30,000 per annum to support public enquiries services for the HERs. The LPAs occasionally commission small projects or provide small grants for the enhancement of HERs in their areas.

The RCAHMW currently assist the Welsh Ministers in the consideration of the requests from the Welsh Archaeological Trusts for these grants. They also advise the Welsh Ministers on the expenditure against a programme of work that is agreed in advance of each financial year. This monitoring provides assurance that the HERs continue to meet current expectations and standards and, when required, advice on appropriate programmes for improvement.

The WATs raise some additional revenue through fee charging for commercial access to the HERs — this is on a ‘cost recovery’ basis and is designed to cover officer costs and materials, photocopying, etc. Each of the WATs has a fee-charging policy that is published on their website.

Engagement and consultation

In 2013, following its inquiry into the Welsh Government’s historic environment policy, the Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee recommended that the status of the Welsh HERs should be strengthened and that they should be placed on a statutory basis.

Historic environment stakeholders, particularly from the archaeological community, have also called for statutory HERs across the UK. We are in a better position in Wales to introduce such a measure partly because of the unique system of regional HERs provided by the WATs and the current funding arrangements.

In the consultation, *The future of the past*, there was strong support for placing the HERs on a more stable footing. In order to take this forward, there has been a long and constructive dialogue with the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), the WATs and RCAHMW about the practical implementation of the proposal for statutory HERs.

Duty on local planning authorities

The Bill has been drafted to specify that ‘each local planning authority must create and keep up to date a historic environment record’ (section 33(1)).

It is felt that the LPAs are the most appropriate recipients of this duty. They are the principal users of the HERs, routinely drawing upon them to inform their local development plans and their determinations of planning applications. They are also best placed to identify the importance of historic assets and to monitor change within their area. By placing this duty on LPAs, it will encourage them to acknowledge the central importance of the HERs to the intelligent and sustainable management of the Welsh historic environment.

The WATs would be unable to assume the statutory duty for the HERs directly due to their status as charitable trusts.

The Bill includes specific provisions (section 35) to allow a local planning authority to make arrangements for the discharge of that duty by a third party. Two or more local authorities may also jointly arrange for the discharge of the duty.

The expectation is that Welsh local planning authorities will continue their current arrangements with the WATs for the provision of HER services. The WLGA has indicated that authorities are likely to adopt this approach, and has not expressed any significant reservations about the imposition of the duty on that basis.

Reliance on the expertise and resources of the existing HERs, delivered by the WATs, will be the most cost-effective means of delivering the requisite information and advice to local planning authorities and other HER users. The continued regional delivery of HER services will allow sufficient resources to be made available for the employment of dedicated HER officers to take responsibility for the maintenance and interpretation of the records.

Central funding of the WATs will eliminate the need for 25 separate negotiations between the LPAs and the WATs.

However, should any local planning authorities decide not to use the WATs to create and maintain the HERs, they would receive their proportion of the funding.

Prior to entering into joint arrangements or entrusting the discharge of their duties to another person, the local planning authorities concerned must seek the approval of the Welsh Ministers (section 35 of the Bill). The purpose of this provision is to satisfy the Welsh Ministers that the arrangements are adequate to meet the standards and benchmarks set out in the statutory guidance.

HER standards and staffing

Section 36 of the Bill allows the Welsh Ministers to issue statutory guidance for the HERs. Draft guidance, which includes benchmarks and standards for the HERs, has been published so that it can be considered alongside the Bill. This guidance will be amended in light of any changes to the Bill during scrutiny and then released for full public consultation.

The guidance will require that the data held in HERs meet recognised national standards for historic environment records (as defined by the MIDAS Heritage

compliance profile).

The 2015 audit which is being undertaken by the RCAHMMW is intended to review the quality and content of the HERs. It will be followed by the development of a five-year enhancement plan for each HER, intended to address any identified shortcomings. This will include discussions with key stakeholders including local authorities.

In the future, the RCAHMMW will monitor the standards and service levels of all HERs, regardless of their management arrangements on behalf of the Welsh Government. It will coordinate and validate audits on a five-year cycle to review data quality, evidence performance and identify any needs for enhancement.

Under current funding arrangements, the WATs only have part-time officers to curate the HERs. To meet the data and service standards that will be placed on the statutory HERs, each HER will have to employ one full-time officer with appropriate qualifications and experience to manage an extended range of historic environment information resources.

The additional funding that will be required to support this change in staffing is set out in the RIA. It is estimated that each WAT will need to receive an additional £20,000 per annum to permit the employment of a full-time HER officer.