

Church Heritage Record – needs and options study

A 'needs and options' study for a 'Church Heritage Record' has been commissioned by the Council for the Care of Churches and the Cathedrals Fabric Commission for England. This preliminary feasibility study, to be carried out between September 1999 and March 2000, is being sponsored by the Church of England, DCMS and English Heritage. Its formal aims are:

- to analyse and assess the perceived needs of users for information about the Church's heritage in relation to issues of management, conservation, planning control, investigation, research, education and access;
- to assess how far the needs of users are being met by existing information systems – local and national, specialist and general – identifying strengths and weaknesses in current arrangements;

- to place this assessment within the wider context of current arrangements and trends for the management of information relating to all aspects of the historic environment;
- in the light of these studies to consider, evaluate and, as far as possible, cost a range of practicable options for meeting user requirements through improved management and enhancement of information about the Church's heritage.

This initiative follows widespread discussion two years ago, which confirmed a consensus about the need for widely available information on such a major component of the English historic environment. It also identified the logistical and financial problems associated with constructing a new large separate database. The broad approach now being adopted is based upon a realistic appreciation of uses, looking at the potential for existing as well as new systems to

accommodate the range of needs through organic growth.

The work is being done by two consultants with experience of both historic buildings and field archaeology. Before the end of 1999 they will be contacting a sample of user groups and managers of existing heritage information systems. They would be glad to hear from anyone who has views or information to contribute.

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