

A.3 Who manages HERs?

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A.3 Who manages HERs?#

Local authorities and most National Park authorities maintain records of the archaeological, built and natural environment. Specialist staff are employed to curate these records and also to provide specialist advice for land-use planning and public information services. Some major landowners, such as the National Trust and the Ministry of Defence, also maintain similar records, which are used to manage their landholdings for conservation, but not for development control purposes.

A.3.1 Local government tiers#

HERs and Listed Buildings Records may be maintained by county councils, unitary authorities or district councils, or by Trusts under service-level agreements or memoranda of understanding on their behalf. Where based within local authorities HERs are normally managed by the highest tier in local government, the county or unitary authority, although some districts have elected to manage their own HER. For economies of scale other authorities may choose joint arrangements to provide the recommended services (by buying in service from a neighbouring authority or trust, or combining resources to fund a joint service). Some Scottish HERs are maintained by organisations separate from local authorities, for example in Perth and Kinross and in Shetland. In Wales Unitary and National Park Authorities utilise the regional HERs of the Welsh Archaeological Trusts, and in some instances operate their own record systems using WAT HER data. Local authority historic environment services obtained from the WATs are supported directly with Welsh Government funding.

A.3.2 Local government departments#

Where they are held directly within local authorities, HERs often form part of the Planning, Environment and Economic Development Department or Directorate. Although the name of the grouping varies from authority to authority, the HER normally sits alongside records for listed buildings, ecology, rights of way and other aspects of countryside management. Some of these records have been combined to form integrated databases for the historic environment; examples include the Essex Historic Environment Record and the Staffordshire Environmental Planning Unit.

In some authorities, rather than being part of a planning department, the HER may form part of the Libraries, Museums and Leisure Services Directorate.

The location of the HER is significant. HER's in Planning departments sometimes struggle to support outreach work, as this is seen as a 'nice to have' add on. Conversely, those in Cultural departments are often able to develop their public-information-service and education role more actively. However, they may be less well placed to develop links with other environmental information systems, or even with Planning departments.

A.3.3 Staff#

All HERs should have qualified professional staff. HERs normally form part of a wider service for archaeology or the historic environment. These services vary in size considerably from one authority to another according to the extent of the area covered, resources available and whether or not

fieldworkers and historic buildings advisers are included within the service as well. In recognition of this variation, this manual refers to roles and responsibilities that require a staff resource within the service, rather than to actual posts.

Traditionally an HER staff have served two key roles, as an information manager responsible for developing the HER and providing information services; and as an adviser in a planning context providing information and advice for assessment of the implications of development proposals.

In recent years use of the record for pro-active management of the historic environment, though input to policy and initiatives such as agri-environment schemes has gained greater prominence.

Additionally, HERs are increasingly being developed for greater public benefit through programmes of outreach and promoting use of the records for research and education at all levels.

All of these roles need a clear allocation of time and resources. In particular, it is essential to ring-fence time to maintain and develop the HER information system against the pressures of responding to planning casework and agri-environment schemes - as both often have tight deadlines - as well as other enquiries.

Many HERs consider that separate posts are required to cover these roles, with the larger HERs having several posts with both an HER manager and HER assistants, sometimes with specific roles such as Outreach Officer and Historic Environment Countryside Adviser.