**A.8 The future**

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*An Assessment of SMRs in England* ([Baker 1999a](#)), *Scotland* ([Baker 1999b](#)) and *Wales* (Baker unpublished) has shown that their development has been uneven and often on an ad hoc basis. However, more recent research such as the ["SMR Content and Computing Survey" (Newman 2002)](#), has shown that the situation is improving. The government HER consultation results, *HER Benchmarks for Good Practice* ([Chitty 2002](#)) and *Resource needs for SMRs and UADs to reach the first stage benchmarks* [(Baker, Chitty and Edwards 2004)](#) (relating to England) have shown a way forward for future continued improvement in the key areas described below.

## A.8.1 Strategic development and co-ordination[#](#)

Recent years have seen much greater co-operation between the key national organisations with an interest in the development of [HERs](#) ([Historic England](#), [ALGAO](#), [RCAHMW](#), [RCAHMS](#), [Historic Environment Scotland](#), [IHBC](#), [DCMS](#) and [MLA](#)) since RCHME, ALGAO and English Heritage (prior to transfer to Historic England) signed a co-operation statement containing agreed key principles governing [SMR](#) development in 1998 ([RCHME, ALGAO and English Heritage 1998](#)). The statement set out a shared vision of a national network of heritage records maintained to common standards and accessible to a wide variety of users. Since 1998, this partnership has underpinned a number of projects, including the SMR assessment ([Baker 1999a](#)), and preparation of a framework document for the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) to guide bids from HERs for funding, recently updated as [? Unlocking Our Past' (English Heritage and ALGAO 2005)](#) .

Following the Baker report ([Baker 1999a](#)) ALGAO produced a strategy for HERs ([ALGAO 2000](#)) which set out the Association's intention to work with the national partners to:

- Develop national standards for the compilation of HERs and other heritage records.
- Encourage research into the development of a country-wide network of heritage information systems.
- Build relationships between the historic environment and the wider environmental fields.
- Find resources to address backlogs and to broaden the coverage of HERs to encompass the historic environment as a whole.

In England, [Historic England](#), ALGAO, IHBC, DCMS and MLA meet regularly in an HER Working Party which has taken the lead in such initiatives as the first edition of this manual as well as its revision, in the *Benchmarks for Good Practice* ([Chitty 2002](#)), *Resource needs for SMRs and UADs to reach the first stage benchmarks* [(Baker, Chitty and Edwards 2004)](#) and a framework document for Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) support for HER Outreach, ["Unlocking Britain's Past" (HLF 1999)](#) and ["Unlocking Our Past" (English Heritage and ALGAO 2005)](#). The challenge for the future is for the partners to successfully influence both national and local government to provide greater stability and increased resources to support the further development of HERs.

Similarly partnership in Wales between [Cadw](#), RCAHMW, [NMGW](#) and the [WATs](#) has led to the ["Strategic Framework for Historic Environment Records in Wales" (Cadw et al 2005)](#).

In 2003 the Scottish SMRs and the RCAHMS agreed a [Co-operation Statement (published in 2005)](#) which sets out their aim to work together in a number of areas: liaison, on-line resources, user feedback and analysis, workshops and training, joint services, education and tourism and research. ([www.rcahms.gov.uk](http://www.rcahms.gov.uk))

In 2014 the Scottish SMR Forum published Scotland?s Historic Environment Data Strategy ([the SHED Strategy](#)). The strategy is a sector-wide initiative to improve access to information about Scotland?s historic environment. The key aim is to work in partnership in order to protect, promote and enhance Scotland?s historic environment through coordinated activity to improve the data, and the associated systems and processes. The partnership includes HERs, government agencies, non-government organisations (NGOs), and academic institutions, but also supports the public?s involvement in the care and enjoyment of the historic environment through better records.

In the last few years (2019), Historic England has been leading the sector in the HIAS (Heritage Information Access Strategy) process. This aims to streamline and improve information flows for the sector, and this has a significant element involving HER's.

## A.8.2 Data standards[#](#)

There is now a widespread acceptance of the importance of data standards and three key platforms for this, the event-monument-source data model, the high level [MIDAS Heritage](#) ([FISH 2012](#)) standard and the national reference data terminology lists ([INSCRIPTION](#)) have already been agreed by HERs, [Historic England](#) and NMRW. MIDAS and INSCRIPTION have also been adopted as data standards in Scotland. These high level standards are available on the web site for use by any HERs.

These standards have and will inevitably develop in the light of practical experience and in response to new areas. A forum for discussing developments in data standards is already in place, the [Forum on Information Standards in Heritage (FISH)](#); its work and that of other standard-setting groups will continue. Challenges for the future will include developing standards for archaeological spatial data, an aspect currently being addressed and working towards common standards for heritage information across the UK. (See [B.6](#), [E.4](#))

## A.8.3 Research frameworks[#](#)

Many archaeologists have long recognised the need for a framework for regional archaeological research and responded positively to the English Heritage recommendation for the publication of [research frameworks](#). These documents provide a structure within which decisions can be taken on the protection, management and recording of the archaeological resource at local levels and relate national strategies to those needs. Recent examples are the archaeological research frameworks for East Anglia ([Glazebrook 1997](#); [Brown and Glazebrook 2000](#)) and the Greater Thames Estuary ([Williams and Brown 1999](#)) which provide an assessment of the archaeological resource of these regions and highlight areas where HER enhancements or links between neighbouring HERs need to be developed. In 2005 English Heritage published a national Research Framework ([English Heritage 2005a](#); [English Heritage 2005c](#)). Wales is similarly engaged in producing a national framework and the current statement can be seen at [http://www.archaeoleg.org.uk/index.html](http://www.archaeoleg.org.uk/index.html).

In 2012 the Scottish Archaeological Research Framework ([ScARF](#)) was launched by the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, with funding from Historic Scotland. ScARF provides a national research framework, divided up into sections mostly by period, but with a few sections based on themes. The work was overseen by nine specialist panels under co-chairmen, providing open discussion and contributions from the wider sector. ScARF is presented online as a wiki, with a view to it being a live document that is updated over time.

## A.8.4 Access and education[#]

Until recently, apart from a few pioneering HERs, most had limited resources to devote to widening use of their records. Since the Heritage Lottery Fund published a framework document ["Unlocking Britain's Past" (HLF 1999)](#) updated as ["Unlocking Our Past" (English Heritage and ALGAO 2005)](#) to guide HER bids with an emphasis on outreach, education and access projects the position has changed. Several HERs in England including Cheshire, Essex, Durham, Herefordshire, Kent, Northumberland, Somerset, and Warwickshire have been successful in securing HLF funding for such projects. Some HERs have also been able to take advantage of other government initiatives, such as the [New Opportunities Fund(NOF)](#) and the New Libraries Network. All these should enable greater public access to HERs, both directly through the provision of office space and computer access and remotely via libraries, record offices and the internet. The exciting and innovative projects that are now being developed should result in a broader awareness of HERs and their importance. Public interest and enthusiasm for the historic environment and conservation, partially developed through popular television programmes, is also being harnessed to develop a two-way flow of information between HERs and local people with an interest in learning more about, and recording, their local historic environment.

## A.8.5 Wider perspectives[#]

In recent years, at a national and international level, a number of initiatives have been developed to co-ordinate information systems and services for archaeological and architectural conservation. One example is the Historic Environment Information Resources Network, or HEIRNET, a consortium of UK bodies seeking to facilitate common standards and support communications links between information systems relating to the historic environment. A report, ["HEIRNET: Users and their Uses of HEIRs" (Grant 2002)](#) prepared for this consortium on the increasing numbers of Historic Environment Information Resources (HEIRS) (see [http://www.britarch.ac.uk/HEIRNET](http://www.britarch.ac.uk/HEIRNET)) recommended that:

- a central register of HEIRs should be created and supported by the community of information systems, which has now been created at [http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/heirnet/index.cfm](http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/heirnet/index.cfm)
- a technical advisory facility should be established to help projects to use data standards and data structures that assist inter-operability and to bring research results to wider audiences
- funding agencies should take concerted action to ensure that the creators of information systems incorporate accessibility and inter-operability.

Another example is [SHINE](#), the Selected Heritage Inventory for Natural England, which provides a single methodology that allows HERs to input data from their local record into a single nationally consistent dataset. SHINE represents an important step forward in managing the historic environment in rural England, ensuring that features that are manageable under agri-environment schemes are mapped to consistent national standards, promoting positive, appropriate management of the historic environment in close partnership with Natural England and English Heritage.

Such moves are timely and may help archaeologists improve their input to the new regional organisations recently set up by government (such as regional development agencies, regional cultural consortia). The developing regional structure in England provides an opportunity for establishing improved arrangements for the protection and enhancement of the historic environment through closer co-operation and the development of partnerships between local-authority archaeologists and others with a concern for the historic environment. At the international level there is also a growing trend towards co-operation, both in terms of the creation of international standards such as the [Comité International pour la Documentation (CIDOC)](#), and through joint projects funded for example by the various European Community schemes.

## A.8.6 From SMRs to HERs: evolution or revolution?[#](#)

In 2009, English Heritage carried out a point-in-time survey of SMRs/HERS, looking at how SMRs were moving into HERs and the different work that was being carried out. Although many HERs have now moved beyond this, the case studies contained in this publication will still have relevance to some HERs.

The publication can be found at: [http://www.historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/smr-to-her-local-authority-case-studies/](http://www.historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/smr-to-her-local-authority-case-studies/)

Another suite of case studies was funded by English Heritage and undertaken between March 2010 and March 2011, as part of Government led Heritage Protection Reform. These case studies were specifically intended to address areas where future work was needed. These projects were grouped as HER21, with the intention of developing HERs for the 21st century.

More information on this and copies of the case studies can be found here: [http://www.historicengland.org.uk/advice/technical-advice/information-management/support-for-hers/](http://www.historicengland.org.uk/advice/technical-advice/information-management/support-for-hers/).