

## B.2 Forward planning for HERs

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## B.2 Forward planning for HERs#

All HERs change continuously, as the needs of last year are often not those of today, and tomorrow will be different again. There may be changes in the local management structure, opportunities for partnerships, projects or funding or developments in information technology and standards. Discoveries about the local historic environment will also bring new work programmes.

Preparing a forward plan helps HERs, large or small, to take stock, to understand the needs of their service and visualise plans for the future. It is an opportunity to discuss plans with management and gain approval from local councillors or governing bodies. This is particularly important now that there is increasing pressure from government for HERs to change and develop their research, education and outreach functions. The forward plan may need to integrate with wider services and strategic plans within the local authority, especially if it is to be distributed to councillors or senior management.

Forward plans help HERs to achieve value for money in improving the management of information resources and the quality of services offered. They also help to monitor progress and demonstrate achievement.

Part of forward planning might also involve a ?Succession Plan?. The audit specification ([English Heritage 2013](#)), assumes that its function is centred on ensuring that the necessary training programmes are in place to provide a consistent and uninterrupted HER service in the event of staff changes.

### B.2.1 Assessing performance#

Most HERs are based in local authorities which have been assessed by the Audit Commission in various ways over the years, but the last version of Comprehensive Area Assessments are now being abolished. From April 2015 the Audit Commission is closing and its functions are being divided between several organisations including the Audit Office.

HERs may find it more useful to be guided by professional benchmarks ([Chitty 2002](#)) and/or other frameworks, for example the Regional Research Frameworks where appropriate.

## Wales#

Since the introduction of the [Historic Environment \(Wales\) Act](#) in March 2016, the maintenance of Welsh HERs has become a statutory duty of Welsh Ministers. Wales has four regional HERs which are curated by the four Welsh Archaeological Trusts ([WATs](#)). The WATs are independent charitable trusts, part funded by the Welsh Government to provide regional archaeological services. Some additional financial support for services is provided by a number of the local authorities. Cadw and Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales (RCAHMW) monitor the provision of HER services on behalf of the Welsh Government. The HER Benchmarks ([Chitty 2002](#)) have been adapted for use in Wales.

## Scotland#

In Scotland local authorities are subject to best value review but no specific best value performance indicators have been developed for application to HERs.

### B.2.2 How can forward plans help?#

Forward plans help HERs to set out realistic programmes that reflect local priorities and also establish their own performance and efficiency targets. They also provide:

- **A sense of purpose:** forward planning encourages management and staff to establish a shared statement of purpose that can be used to present the HER and its services to the outside world. Forward plans help others to understand the HER's priorities and goals.
- **A sense of direction:** setting objectives that address needs identified by the HER helps to give a sense of direction. Work and resources can be planned and everyone can see how individual tasks help to achieve longer-term goals.
- **A sense of achievement:** reviewing the HERs achievements each year against its own objectives is one of the benefits of forward planning. Just as performance can be measured, so achievements can be reported.
- **Managing change:** introducing new procedures, technology or projects all involve commitment of staff time and resources. HERs can not afford to make mistakes or run out of resources or enthusiasm.

Preparing an action plan enables managers to assess the timescale, costs, methods, equipment, materials and staff required to introduce change successfully. Such plans assist when bidding for resources from local authorities, national agencies and other funding agencies. They also allow you to respond quickly and confidently when funds are made available at short notice (for example at the end of the financial year).

### B.2.3 What should be included in a forward plan?#

A forward plan is the end product of a process that should:

- Agree a mission statement that clearly states the HER's aims.
- Develop a future strategy for the HER based on these aims.
- Be aware of regional or national research frameworks and reference them where appropriate.
- Produce an objective assessment of the HER's strengths, weaknesses, any current shortcomings and any challenges ahead.
- Identify areas which need improved management or increased resources.

- Set work objectives for programme areas which help the HER to achieve its strategic aims over the period of the plan.
- Identify performance indicators against which achievements can be measured. Such indicators are normally qualitative, quantitative or time related.
- Identify any new developments or changes that require new resources or training.
- Set out realistic timetables and costings for programmes of work identifying methods, equipment, materials and staff resources required.

The completed forward plan should be carefully thought out and appropriate to the HER's needs. It should be approved and actively supported by both the HER's parent authority and staff working in or with the service.

## **B.2.4 The forward-planning process#**

The process of preparing a forward plan can be divided into stages

### **Taking stock#**

Take time to gain a thorough understanding of the HER's current strength or weaknesses. The [Historic Environment Records: Benchmarks for Good Practice \(Chitty 2002\)](#) suggests standards which all HER's should be working towards. How does your service compare against these benchmarks and other HERs? What factors have influenced services in the past? Are there any current requirements and needs?

List all activities or projects that are currently identified. Ask yourself why they are included in your programme and how important they are to present needs. [Panel 3](#) gives a self assessment checklist of standards for HER services based on the recommendations included in David Baker's [?SMR Assessment Report? \(Baker 1999a\)](#).

The EH sponsored HER Audits provide a method to take stock of an HER's resources (see later in this section).

### **Consult widely#**

For the plan to work it must have the support of both staff and management. Consult colleagues and give interested parties an opportunity to contribute, particularly where goals are shared with other departments, for example, extending public access to the HER may involve libraries or museums. Discuss plans with other HERs and take advantage of their experiences. Regional Research Frameworks, where they exist, provide a useful insight into the aspirations of the heritage community in the area and should be considered. Consult the appropriate national agencies, especially if you aim to include a nationally funded project in your programme.

### **Drafting the plan#**

On the basis of managers knowledge of the HER, the results of the self-assessment process and documents such as the [Benchmarks for Good Practice \(Chitty 2002\)](#) write down your vision for the future. You should be realistic and separate out achievable elements that most effectively deliver the HER's mission.

Break down your vision into programme areas and projects and identify resources required to deliver them.

## **Prioritise#**

Tasks must be prioritised. Generally those tasks which help to meet HER benchmarks or support current services should be tackled first, but be aware that factors such as changes in funding may result in a need to change priorities at short notice. Different funding sources can be targeted for specific aspects or types of work. Be flexible.

## **Choose the best approach#**

Do not assume that things always have to be done in the same way. New techniques may become available or requirements might change. This manual offers guidelines for HER working practices and may suggest some ideas that may be new to your HER. Each HER needs to work out its own detailed procedures to complete its work programmes.

## **Be realistic#**

Set goals and objectives that the HER can aim to achieve over a 3 to 5 year period. It is no good trying to create fully detailed monument records from a major compilation backlog if, for example the HER is not MIDAS compliant ([Lee 1998](#)) and staff resources are not in place.

The plan must include an assessment of the resources required and a strategy to put these in place. If the resources are unattainable, the plan must be revised. Think laterally about seeking funding, for instance, working with local groups to apply for Local Heritage Initiative and other lottery funded grants.

## **Set short-term goals#**

It is a good idea to set short-term goals and identify milestones against which achievements can be measured. This helps to maintain staff morale and provides useful information for promoting the HER within your service.

## **Consider any risks#**

Assess any risks involved in implementing your forward plan, particularly when making changes to current work practices or introducing new technology. Identifying risks means that you can plan additional measures to limit the likelihood of their occurrence. It is less risky to try to move forward than to stand still.

## **HER Audits#**

To assist in forward planning and benchmark compliance [Historic England](#) runs a programme of HER Audits. Audits are wide ranging and assess all parts of the HER including: content, compliance with standards, IT (hardware and software) resources (financial and staffing), usage (internal and external) and backlogs. The audit process is as follows:

1. HER contacts the The Heritage Information Partnerships team at Historic England expressing interest in conducting an Audit.
2. Historic England sends out the latest version of the Audit Specification.
3. The HER writes to Historic England requesting a grant to cover 50 per cent of the cost up to £1,500 and submits a brief project plan consisting of a timetable for data gathering and report writing with resources allocated.
4. Historic England pays a grant to the HER.
5. The HER carries out the audit, discussing progress with Historic England at agreed monitoring points and writes a report which it submits to Historic England.
6. Historic England comments on the report.

7. An optional post-audit meeting to discuss the recommendations and how they can be implemented takes place between the HER and Historic England.
8. Progress against the recommendations are assessed.
9. The Audit is reassessed after 5 years.

As well as assisting an HER in assessing itself against the benchmarks carrying out an audit itself satisfies benchmark 3.6.

In Wales an audit process has been agreed with The Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments in Wales and Cadw, and audits are carried out on a five year cycle.

There is no equivalent process in Scotland although Scotland's Historic Environment Audit is currently in progress. This will identify issues relevant to the health of the historic environment and the impact of resources used to manage and protect it. It is intended that the resulting document will be used to inform policy for Local Authorities as well as Historic Scotland, see <http://www.heritageaudit.org.uk/> for details.

### **B.2.5 Presenting the plan#**

The forward plan should be presented to local councillors or the HER's governing body for approval. Members may already be aware that the document is being prepared and the plan may be presented as a final draft or as a finished document.

Presenting the plan is a way of gaining support for the HER and for the programmes of work that you have proposed.

### **B.2.6 Monitoring progress and reviewing the plan#**

Your forward plan will establish objectives and performance indicators for the HER. Each year, the HER's performance will be monitored and achievements measured against the objectives set the previous year. Report your achievements to management and to either local councillors or the HER's governing body.

Progress against your forward plan should be kept under regular review. This is likely to happen at the end of each quarter. Reviewing the plan and progress against planned objectives highlights issues, unexpected changes in circumstances or new opportunities to be identified. The plan needs to be modified, but making changes does not invalidate the process; in fact having a forward plan should help reasoned decisions to be made and the unexpected managed.

Forward plans normally cover a 3 to 5 year period and are more detailed for the first year than for subsequent years. Such plans should be formally reviewed every year; this is likely to precede the annual budget round.

### **Useful websites#**

#### **England Regional Research frameworks**

<http://www.historicengland.org.uk/research/support-and-collaboration/research-resources/research-frameworks/>

[http://www.algao.org.uk/england/research\\_frameworks/](http://www.algao.org.uk/england/research_frameworks/)

East of England: <https://www.historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/revised-framework-east-of-england/>

East Midlands: <https://www.historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/east-midlands-heritage/>

North West: <http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/mol/collections/archaeology/arf/>

West Midlands: <http://http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/schools/iaa/departments/archaeology/research/wmrrfa/index.aspx>

## **Wales**

<http://www.archaeoleg.org.uk/index.html>

### **Panel 3: A self-assessment checklist of standards for HER services#**

**Self Assessment** This is a checklist of standards for HER services based on the recommendations included in David Baker's 'SMR Assessment Report?' and suggests that your service should be working towards meeting the following:

**Geographic and subject area coverage** Providing the primary source of information about the historic environment for a defined geographic area. Coverage of the historic environment by period and theme should be in accordance with a written collecting policy. Reaching agreements with adjacent Local and National Record holders to provide complementary information and advice services and in support of appropriate exchanges of information.

**Planning advisory services** Local Authority adoption of the HER for provision of archaeological services. Establishing links with Historic Buildings advisors in the local area and contributing to services for the built environment, Conservation Areas, Parks and Gardens. Developing links with Natural Environment advisors for the area.

**Public services** Providing a major source of information for understanding the local historic environment and enabling access to specialists and members of the general public. Developing a policy on access and charging. Developing outreach programmes including both remote access to HER databases and published opening hours for visitors. Establishing links with local Higher Education Institutions and researchers. Registering users of the HER. Regularly consulting users about the services offered.

**Finance** Identifying adequate budgets for staff, training, materials and equipment, information systems and IT support. Identifying funding for development projects.

**Staff** Establishing a permanent professional staff resource to provide the following specialisms within the service: HER information manager / professional archaeological / professional historic buildings advice / clerical support. The staffing ratio should be appropriate to the size of area, density of the resource and local development pressure.

**Training** Developing a recognised programme of training and continuous professional development for staff with appropriate guidance and training should be available for volunteers.

**Information Systems** Maintaining HER information in a database which complies with the MIDAS data standard and implements the Monument / Event / Archive / Management data model and INSCRIPTION, the national reference data set. Developing a Geographic Information System.

**Collections** Establishing a collecting policy for HER information and collections. Cataloguing collections of maps, aerial photographs, slides, books, reports and other reference materials in accordance with a documented collecting policy. Establishing procedures for depositing original documentary or digital archives with the appropriate Record Office, Museum or digital archive.

**Information capture** Developing standard documented requirements for data and archive deposited from: Field Survey reports / Excavation projects / Building recording. Maintaining regular programmes

of data input and routine procedures for checking data. Maintaining and keeping up to date recording guidelines for the HER.

**Security** Establishing and keeping up to date a disaster recovery plan for the HER. Maintaining routine procedures in place for backing up data and virus checking all information systems.