B.4 Defining the HER

B.4 Defining the HER[#]

In his assessment report, David Baker recommended that HERs should be all-inclusive of subject and period for archaeology and preferably for all aspects of the historic environment for a defined geographic area ([Baker 1999a](#)). This is endorsed in *Benchmarks for Good Practice* which for the 1st stage states that "the record should be inclusive of subject and period for all archaeology terrestrial and maritime" and should "provide comprehensive coverage for statutory and non-statutory designated historic places". It also states that a "written policy setting out the scope, geographical coverage and content" is required ([Chitty, 2002, p.6 benchmarks 2.1 and 2.2](#)). Looking beyond this broad-brush statement, HER managers are recommended to set out the scope and content of their record in their recording guidelines and to have a collecting and disposal policy for archive material. The publication of the *Hedgerow Regulations* ([DoE 1997](#)) underlined the need for a clear statement of what data and other information comprises a local HER.

B.4.1 Recording policy (see also [D.2](#))[#]

HERs are recommended to prepare a recording policy that covers the following areas:

Geographic area[#]

HERs normally cover the geographic area administered by a particular local authority. In some areas, a number of HERs may operate, each offering services to different tiers of local government or to National Park authorities. The recording policy for each HER should state the geographic area covered and any arrangements for exchanging or sharing data with neighbouring records.HERs normally cover the geographic area administered by a particular local authority. In some areas, a number of HERs may operate, each offering services to different tiers of local government or to National Park authorities. The recording policy for each HER should state the geographic area covered and any arrangements for exchanging or sharing data with neighbouring records.

Particular care may be required in defining the geographical extent of the HER with respect to submerged areas:

- Non-tidal waters such as rivers above their tidal limit, canals, lakes and so on clearly fall within the local authority and are subject to town and country planning. It is recommended that the

recording policy makes it plain that the HER includes all archaeological material in non-tidal waters.

- Tidal waters within the area of the local authority include areas that are submerged at high tide. In general terms, the boundary of local authorities is at low water. All of the intertidal area - between low water and high water - falls within a local authority even though it is 'marine'in character and is submerged for much of the time. Also, some areas that are below low water may fall within the local authority because the boundary cuts across tidal waters, such as at the mouth of a river or estuary. It is important to check the local authority boundary at the coast to see whether it encompasses areas below low water. The recording policy should make it clear that the HER encompasses the whole area within the local authority, whether it is above or below low water.
- Tidal waters outside the limit of the local authority include all those areas seaward of the low water mark or any other place where the boundary extends across the sea. Although these areas are outside the local authority, there are several strong reasons for including these areas within the scope of the HER: to inform plan-making and decision-taking at the coast; to inform other local authority activities and interests with respect to tourism, coastal zone management, shoreline management, flooding, fisheries and marine conservation; and to engage with local community interest in marine heritage. Accordingly, a seamless approach is advocated such that the recording policy extends the HER to a defined limit seaward of the local authority boundary. Many HERs encompass the whole of the Inshore Region, to the limit of the UK Territorial Sea (12 nautical miles, which is about 22 km).

Subject Coverage[#](#)

The period and scope of coverage varies from one HER to another. Some collect information about archaeological sites up to 1700 while others provide comprehensive coverage for all aspects of the archaeological and built environment. To meet benchmark 2.1 of *Benchmarks for Good Practice* ([Chitty, 2002](#)) the latter is required. A recording policy should set out the period and topic themes that are covered by the record and may make reference to research framework documents for the area or region. This policy will provide the framework for planning enhancements to the HER's information content and needs to be kept under review as new subject areas are considered for inclusion. For example, the scope of the recording policy may need to be extended if HER managers decide to begin recording Cold War defensive sites (as some already do).

Monument coverage in submerged areas should be entirely consistent with terrestrial coverage. The remains of vessels such as wrecks and hulks, air crash sites, features and deposits relating to submerged prehistory, and finds and reports arising from the different legal and voluntary frameworks applicable to discoveries at sea may all require particular attention.

Recording policies may also identify other organisations (or departments) which are maintaining information about aspects of the historic environment that complements the information recorded by the HER, and any arrangements that are in place for sharing or exchanging data.

Sourcing of Information (see also [D.3](#))[#](#)

HERs hold information collected from a range of organisations including contracting field units, local societies, museums and national bodies. The recording policy might contain a list of the principal organisations from whom the HER collects information and include guidelines for deposit of material/ information with an HER, for example a deposit licence.

Information Systems[#](#)

HERs maintain databases and GIS to hold information relating to their area of interest. Where a GIS system is used it should be extended to the limits of the maritime record. The recording policy

might contain a list of the databases and information systems which the HER maintains and the data standards with which these comply. The policy might also make reference to digital information resources which the HER accesses on the corporate intranet (for example spatial layers curated by other departments) or resources mounted on the intranet.

B.4.2 Updating the recording policy[#](#)

It is important to keep the HER?s recording policy under regular review. From time to time new categories of information or source materials will be offered to the HER. A local society or other organization may propose to undertake some research into a subject area which lies outside the HER's current sphere of interest. In this event, the HER manager will need to decide whether to extend the recording policy to include the material or to refer the researcher to a more appropriate record. For example, many HERs collect information about sites dating up until the end of World War II. If a local society were to propose a survey of 20th-century street furniture, the HER manager would need to decide whether to extend the collecting policy or not. The HER may be offered collections that require special storage conditions and it is important to decide whether it is possible to provide suitable arrangements. If the HER can offer appropriate storage the collecting policy will need to be revised. If the HER cannot then the collection should be transferred to an appropriate museum, archive or digital archive.

B.4.3 Disposals[#](#)

Some HERs may hold information that do not meet the criteria set out in their recording policy. Similarly HERs are not normally equipped to hold original paper, photographic, digital archives or archaeological finds. HER managers are recommended to identify appropriate repositories for inappropriate information and original materials in a collection and disposals section within the recording policy. This should set out the steps that the HER will take to find an appropriate alternative repository for this material, for example documents will normally be deposited at the local records office and finds, with any associated archive material, at local museums. Suitable and accessible repositories should be identified for a maritime archive. HERs generally hold reference collections of secondary sources but often include primary materials such as site-visit forms, letters, reports and photographic materials. Signposts should be maintained to external archives holding data pertaining to monuments and events via the sources records in the HER. In cases where local government boundaries have changed, HERs may need to consider their policy on the transfer of information and archives relating to adjacent geographical areas or new local authorities within their area.

Figure 3: Information management cycle

B.4.4 Inclusion of archaeological science data in HERs[#](#)

Introduction[#](#)

Until recently archaeological science data have been entered sporadically and patchily on many HERs. Now that, hopefully, archaeological science has an increasingly routine role in archaeological interventions, it is important to try to record the data retrieved in as systematic and standardised a manner as possible to be used in development controls as well as in research.

Archaeological science covers scientific dating (including radiocarbon, dendrochronology, archaeomagnetic, OSL), conservation of objects, techniques such as residues, isotopes and DNA analyses and all aspects of environmental archaeology (soils, plants, animals). Geophysics is not considered here as it is thought (perhaps wrongly) that it is already satisfactorily recorded in the HERs.

A working group was formed in 2003 to investigate how to enter the archaeological science data and what to enter. At the end of three working sessions a number of recommendations have been identified but other topics are still under discussion. An e-conference on the subject was held in January 2005 and is summarised at the end of this section.

Potential Recommendations#

The potential recommendations relate to four main areas: where on the HER database should the data be entered, the level of details of the data, the mechanism for ensuring that the information reaches the HER officer and the implementation of these recommendations.

1. Where data should be recorded: It was agreed that the data should be entered in the event area or its equivalent under a general field called object type (artefact/ecofact). The terms (for example pot, mammal remains) in this field are crucial of course and have been the subject of most of the working group?s discussions. They have been based as far as possible on existing lists of terms (see below).

2. The level of details: a number of fields have been identified which are suitable for all the object types. These are

- Material,
- State (modification of state) for example preservation,
- Assemblage size,
- Period
- Investigative technique
- Recovery method
- Storage location
- Reference
- Notes

Panel 4 shows examples of the use of these proposed fields to record archaeological science data in an HER. These fields are not necessarily going to be together but the table offers a good summary of what is intended. \

Panel 4 Examples of fields to use to record archaeological science data in an HER. #

As well as those fields in the table below, also include fields for 'Assemblage size' and 'Period'.

Object type (Artefact/ Ecofact)	Material	State (preservation)	Investigative technique	Recovery method	Storage location	Reference	Notes

						Link to the full report	Exceptional occurrences or other detail
(Soils & sediments + LUT:) Colluvium, Alluvium, Buried soil, Estuarine, Aeolian etc	Tephra Peat, Ash, Sand, Gravel		Particle size, Ph, Soil phosphorus, Loss on ignition, Magnetic susceptibility, Micromorphology	(Specialist samples +LUT) Blocks, Bulk, Kubenya tins			
(Vertebrates + LUT:) Human remains, Large mammals, Small mammals, Bird, Fish, Amphibian, Reptiles	Bone, Antler, Teeth, Ivory, Skin, Hair, Feathers, Egg shells	Charred, Mineralised	Xradiography, Isotope, Ancient biomolecules	Hand, Bulk, Sieving	Specialist?s shelf, Museum, Archaeological unit		
(Invertebrates + LUT:) Insects, Mites, Ostracods, Molluscs land, Molluscs freshwater, Molluscs marine	Shell, Body parts	Waterlogged, Charred, Mineralised		Monoliths, Bulk, Spot, Column, auger			
(Plants + LUT:)Plant macro remains, Moss, Wood, Pollen, Phytoliths, Spores	Grains, Chaff, Seeds, Roots, Leaves, Buds	Waterlogged, Charred, Mineralised, Worked		Monoliths, Bulk, Hand, Flotation, Dry sieving			
(Vessels + LUT) Amphorae, Pot, Dish	Pottery, Glass, Copper alloy, Iron						
(Clothing +LUT) Pins, Belt, Pouch	Textile, Leather, Copper alloy, Iron	Waterlogged, Charred, Mineralised					
(Construction objects +LUT) Tessarae, Bricks, Tiles	Clay						

(Writing objects + LUT) Stylus, Tablet	Waterlogged, Charred, Mineralised						

3. Mechanism for ensuring that the information reaches the HER officer: Three steps have been identified for the information to get from the field to the HER:

1. the curator?s brief or specifications (or the standards document referred to for specifications) will include an additional sentence requiring that specialists fill the fields identified above.
2. the contractor commissions specialists as usual including this requirement which becomes part of the specialist?s report. Then the contractor includes the specialist?s report in the site report and send this to the HER as usual.
3. the HER officer is able to enter the data fairly swiftly.

4. Implementation: The recommendations above including the thesauri and lists of terms to be used are included here in a preliminary form and are the subject of an annex to MIDAS (Lee 1998) and will be included in the next edition MIDAS Heritage: The UK Historic Environment Information Standard (FISH 2012). They will also be advertised at a future HER forum and other meetings.

Topics still under discussion#

Agreements on the four subjects above were arrived at relatively swiftly but the main preoccupations of the working group have since centred round the terminology of certain aspects, especially the environmental terms. Following the principle that no duplication of effort should be made, it was strongly suggested that instead of building a list of terms ourselves, the Environmental Archaeology Bibliography (EAB) terminology should be used. However, the list of terms and symbols used by that bibliography was too cumbersome for our purpose and above all, it was pointed out that, terms of different kinds were used together and that it was important, for instance, to keep the material in a separate field from the object. This principle is already reflected in the table above but discussion on the environmental terms is till on going. Members of the workgroup, Gill Campbell and Edmund Lee, in consultation with various subject specialists have worked out a scheme for these terms (see links on the FISH files below).

Investigative techniques, especially in relation to conservation matters is another area still under discussion and becoming more so as a result of the e-conference (see below).

Other topics#

Other topics have also been discussed such as the thorny question of the backlog which some members of the working group, keen on offering the best standards, did not think was immediately relevant. However, the backlog is of great importance to the individual HERs and an example from Worcestershire of a fairly low cost way of dealing with it was welcome (see details in the links below). The addition of fields and/or modules on individual HERs has been considered but was deemed to be a topic that can be dealt with once the basic premises have been established.

e-conference summary#

An e-conference to act as consultation with the interested parties took place on the FISH website in January 2005, and covered the following topics:

- Findings from the three workshops
- The role of the curator
- Example from Worcestershire
- Example from Surrey

- Thesaurus for environmental terminology
- Thesaurus for conservation
- Presentation of an annex to MIDAS and incorporation in MIDAS Heritage

The discussion can be seen in the archives of the site on Jiscmail: go to jiscmail@jiscmail.ac.uk and write: get fish.catalog in the message part to get the archives. The supporting papers are in the file store for the site at: http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/files/FISH/.

Most of the discussion and comment was supportive of the proposals. Conservation issues attracted a significant level of comment and it is now clear that no single existing list of terms will be suitable to accommodate the investigative conservation requirements as well as the names of the objects. It has been suggested that merging the British Museum and the MDA thesauri would be desirable.

The e-conference ended with a proposal by Edmund Lee for an annex in current version of MIDAS which will be followed by the inclusion of recommendations for the archaeological science data in *MIDAS Heritage*.

Direct link to the relevant files in the FISH file store:

https://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/filearea.cgi?LMGT1=FISH&f=/Archaeological_Science

With examples from Worcestershire, Victoria Bryant and Liz Pearson

Example for Surrey, Lucy Farr

Environmental terminology, Gill Campbell

http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/eab_eh_2004/

Conservation. Ian Panter
www.mda.org.uk/bmmat/matintro.htm

MIDAS annex. Edmund Lee