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Dear Cllr. Blamire,

I am sure you are aware that Lancashire County Council (LCC) are proposing to withdraw from the service level agreement which sees them deliver historic environment services to the 14 Lancashire district authorities, along with Cumbria County Council as of 1 April 2016. Although LCC have labelled these services, which include the provision of archaeological advice within the planning process, and the maintenance of the historic environment record (HER), as 'non-statutory' you will no doubt be acutely conscious of the adverse consequences in terms of fulfilling obligations under the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the potential for legal challenge that this decision is likely to have on the district authority.

I am writing to you on behalf of the Council for British Archaeology to in support of an alternate proposal which we believe would be beneficial for all stakeholders but which will require action to be taken to amend the current LCC proposals in order to delay the closure of the historic environment service for 12 months, allowing for the facilitation of discussions with relevant bodies and potential partners in pursuit of a sustainable alternate model.

## Current proposals

The shared Lancashire historic environment service provides specialist advice to the planning process and includes the maintenance of the HER – which is the database of known information on heritage assets in the county. These services are a requirement under the NPPF. The service provides a range of advice to assist development control (via pre-application consultation, screening of planning applications, and recommendation of planning conditions). They also contribute to appeals and public enquiries, community asset transfer, identifying regeneration opportunities, community asset transfer and neighbourhood planning, promote place-shaping. The HER is used to formulate advice and has a variety of users public and private users. The HER needs to be continually updated in order to reflect the changing nature of the historic environment as a result of new discoveries, designations, investigations, interpretations and changes in use, management or significance. Many of these services are subsidised by charges.

Appropriate archaeological assessment of planning applications reduces risk for developers, improves the quality of planning decisions and ensures protection of heritage assets (both in terms of setting of above ground assets and preservation or excavation of below ground). Specialist archaeological advice also levers in many thousands of pounds of developer funding which produces direct benefits in terms of knowledge of the county's past and yields objects which enrich museum collections both locally and nationally.

We believe that the proposals have the potential to be damaging for the following reasons:

- There is insufficient time before the decision is enacted to allow district planning authorities to make alternate arrangements to meet planning obligations under the NPPF (para. 169).
- The proposals will likely lead to some areas of the county becoming 'black holes' for archaeological advice in the short term, and an erosion of quality of advice in the long term.
- District-led options for delivery of these services will be more expensive proportionately
- Poor services will increase risk for developers and increase the likelihood that archaeology will be lost or damaged
- Archaeological discoveries made post-determination which were not adequately investigated open the possibility of legal challenge from developers
- There are no details of how the HER would be accessed or updated under the current proposals, and moving it to an alternate location would likely be extremely costly.
- Coupled with the threat of closure to many of the county's museums, it is currently unclear whether there will be archives capable of receiving archaeological archives produced as a result of excavations in the county.

The obligation to deliver these services falls ultimately on the local planning authority. As such the LCC plans put the Local District Councils in a very difficult position, with only weeks to put in place systems for archaeological advice which will be – at the very least – sufficient to cover the Council from the possibility of legal challenge. It is likely that the available options will be limited and proportionately expensive. This does not even begin to cover the range of extra services and public benefits which the current shared service provides which emergency interim arrangements would be unlikely to cover.

## Alternative option

We are urging LCC to rethink the current proposal and allow the service to continue to operate in its current form for 12 months, during which time discussions can be pursued with partners on alternative delivery models, possibly on a regional scale, which would deliver a similar level of service as currently operates and delivery cost benefits without such potentially damaging consequences. We also believe that this proposal would stand a strong chance of obtaining funding to assist in the transition to this new model. The Historic England Corporate Plan for 2015-2018 states that it is an objective to;

“Work with others to provide time-limited support for local authorities to develop new ways of delivering their heritage advice and services.”

# Council for British Archaeology

The CBA and our partners in the sector would strongly support any application for financial assistance in this regard. We hope that the opportunity for a proactive and positive solution is one which Lancaster City Council would support, given the current circumstances. If you would like to speak with us regarding these proposals we invite you please to do so. Obviously the time is short within which to secure a reprieve for the service which would allow us to pursue these alternate options, and we would appreciate if you could contact LCC to notify them of your interest in this possibility.

We are ready to assist in facilitating discussions on the proposals contained in this submission and hope that a 12 month reprieve for the historic environment service can be written in to the budget as it is finalised in the coming weeks. This is a modest cost for enabling the continuation of a high quality service and the promise of a long term solution which respects the history, heritage, culture and environment across county and district, and which will decrease risk and liability, and protect sustainable development and the historic environment.

Yours sincerely,



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