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## HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT – A NEW APPROACH

**Responsible  
Officer**

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### Summary

This report describes the new approach to the management of Shropshire's heritage assets (listed buildings, scheduled ancient monuments etc.) outlined by English Heritage in draft Planning Policy Statement 15 and draft Best Practice Guidance for Local Heritage Assets and how Shropshire Council is responding to these new requirements.

### Recommendation

A. That the contents of this report be noted.

## REPORT

### Introduction

1. Shropshire is renowned for the high quality of its built and natural environment, which is a significant factor in attracting visitors and inward investment into the County. In many areas such as South Shropshire, tourism is the single largest contributor to the local economy with visitors citing heritage as the main attractor. Shropshire Council is charged with safeguarding the many historic buildings and sites, which comprise the County's heritage, and working with partner organisations to attract funding to assist individuals and communities with heritage led regeneration projects. Shropshire has one of the largest portfolios of heritage assets of any authority in Great Britain with:-

- Almost 7000 Listed Buildings;
- 441 Scheduled Ancient Monuments;

- 123 Conservation Areas;
- 36 registered Parks and Gardens;
- 1 registered Battlefield;
- In addition approximately 10% of Shropshire's bridges are listed as being of special architectural or historic interest.

In the latest English Heritage Register of Heritage at Risk some

- 59 monuments;
- 34 buildings; and
- 3 parks and gardens

in the County are considered at risk and in need of urgent attention.

2. The creation of the unitary authority has brought together the conservation officers of the former District Councils and the archaeology service of the County Council to form the Historic Environment Team, set within the overall Environment Service of Development Services Directorate. The team, led by Colin Richards as Historic Environment Manager, is a multi-disciplinary team, which includes 9 conservation officers and 5 archaeologists. Each officer has a range of conservation skills and often a specialism such as architectural history, building technology, architectural design, historic interiors etc. and whilst there is a notional allocation of area responsibility within the team, there is a flexibility of approach to ensure the best possible advice can be given across the county.
3. Three of the archaeologists are heavily committed to maintaining the statutory Historic Environment Record for both Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin. This contains over 29,000 records and forms the foundation of our knowledge of both above and below ground remains. Another provides archaeological advice on planning applications in both Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin. The final member of the archaeology team targets ancient monuments at risk and helps the landowners secure funding under the higher-level countryside stewardship scheme for appropriate management work. External funding has been secured from English Heritage and Telford and Wrekin Council to carry out this work.

## **A New Approach**

### Government and English Heritage Policy

4. English Heritage are moving towards delegating to Shropshire Council as much responsibility for the care and conservation of Shropshire's heritage assets as is tenable having regard to the limitations of staff resources. It encourages the compilation of clear, comprehensive and current information relating to local heritage assets and the consolidation of these assets as a local list, which would be a material consideration in the assessment of

planning applications. The 2007 Government white paper *Heritage Protection for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* emphasises the important role that local authorities have in helping communities to identify and manage aspects of their local heritage. Historic environment staff will be in the vanguard of this work assisting interested groups and individuals to identify heritage assets and facilitating access to records held by the Council.

5. In the past conservation has often been seen as a regulatory adjunct to development control, providing specialist advice on listed building and conservation area applications and also managing dedicated schemes of grant aid. Today, as we evolve the Development Management approach, and in the future there will be increasing recognition of the role of historic environment staff as catalysts for coordination of the many services and facilities that can be provided by a local authority within heritage led regeneration and redevelopment schemes.
6. English Heritage, as evidenced by documents such as “Constructive Conservation” and the latest consultation draft- Planning Policy Statement 15: Planning for the Historic Environment, have rationalised the administration of works affecting listed buildings and ancient monuments by integrating their designation under one regime of “deemed heritage assets”.

#### Development Management Approach

7. Greater emphasis is given to the importance of pre-application planning and discussion where conservation staff are required to evaluate the significance of the heritage asset, identifying areas where every effort should be made to conserve historic fabric and form but also, importantly, to identify areas where change may occur in an appropriate manner. This should in turn help owners and managers of sites and buildings to produce design proposals, which accord with the policies and ethos of the Council. The intention is to reduce the amount of subjectivity inherent in planning/listed building control. This reflects the development management philosophy, which is contrary to the restrictive “preservation culture” of previous practice.
8. Whilst this approach will provide a more detailed and useful analysis for property owners and building professionals, it places increased demands on historic environment staff who may be expected to attend a greater number of site visits and meetings as a project develops. The objective of such an approach is to establish clear values at the outset of negotiations and to encourage the historic environment to be considered as an asset, which can be positively exploited and not regarded as a barrier to development. Historic Environment staff will be expected to liaise with specialist interest community groups and national amenity organisations as part of the consultation advice to property owners and designers in order to avoid conflict later in the planning process.

#### Sustainability

9. A key issue in the assessment of proposals for change is sustainability. This may take the form of an audit of materials used, of energy conservation, or of the impact of alteration on the durability of historic fabric. Historic

environment staff will therefore be required to acquire new skills in sustainable construction technology so that they can both assess and advise customers on how existing buildings may be adapted to meet the challenges of climate change and the need to conserve precious energy resources. This is likely to become a significant role for Shropshire Council as some 60% of Shropshire's housing stock is pre 1945 and owners can reasonably expect to improve insulation in line with contemporary standards, so avoiding a blighting of older properties. Officers will need to develop even greater skills in project negotiations to ensure that "improvements" do not compromise the special interest of, especially, listed buildings or create conditions where, for example, fungal or beetle attack may thrive.

### Assisting Corporate Historic Assets

10. The new historic environment team seeks to embrace the best practice developed within the former authorities and also extend this to become a proactive enabling service. Unification of the service provides the opportunity for management and technical advice to be available to other service areas of the Council particularly as the authority is responsible for a significant number of its own heritage assets. This is already taking place where staff are providing training workshops for colleagues in Highways and Community Services regarding the use of traditional lime mortars and renders. Initial feedback suggests training will result in the saving of thousands of pounds in avoiding remedial work due to erroneous specifications. It is intended that as this capability develops partnership working will be explored with other agencies such as Natural England and some of the major landowners within the County.

### Wider Community Role

11. In order to raise awareness and understanding of conservation issues and historic building repair, historic environment staff will continue to be involved in providing and delivering course programmes at Acton Scott Historic Working Farm, appearing on heritage related television programmes and providing lecture and workshop tuition to community based groups across Shropshire. In particular training in traditional building craft skills will be provided in partnership with local educational institutions and as part of European lifelong learning programmes in order to support the capability of local building professionals to undertake repairs and alterations to heritage assets in an appropriate manner. Existing links with communities in Romania and other parts of Europe will continue to be developed as part of our development programme for staff and local craftsmen. However, this will be dependent on securing external funding.

### **Conclusion**

12. The amalgamation of the conservation officers and archaeologists into a single team within the new Council could not have come at a better time for Shropshire. The changes in the English Heritage approach to the management of heritage assets and their expectations of local authorities provide a template for the Directorate and the team's transformation agenda. Our customers, especially owners of heritage assets, have welcomed the

moves away from restrictive regulation towards the management of change in the historic environment through a constructive conservation approach. However, it must be recognised that these changes cannot all be achieved in an instant but through a planned evolution that embeds the new culture of the organisation.

**List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)**

**Human Rights Act Appraisal**

The recommendations contained in this report are compatible with the provisions of the Human Rights act 1998.

**Environmental Appraisal**

There are no direct implications arising from this report.

**Risk Management Appraisal**

There are no direct implications arising from this report.

**Community / Consultations Appraisal**

As contained in the report

**Cabinet Member:**

**Local Member**

**Appendix**

None