

Dear Sir,

## **Heritage Protection for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century White Paper**

I write on behalf of the National Council on Archives (NCA) to respond to the proposals set out in the White Paper ***Heritage Protection for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century***. The NCA was established in 1988 to bring together the major bodies and organisations, including service providers, users, depositors and policy makers, across the UK concerned with archives and their use. It aims to develop consensus on matters of mutual concern and provide an authoritative common voice for the archival community.

NCA welcomes the proposals set out in the Paper which recognise the significance and value of the historic environment in the cultural life of the nation and the role which it can play in promoting engagement and participation and in supporting sustainable communities. Simplification of the designation process, combined with greater transparency about how it works can only be welcomed.

NCA's main concern in responding to this consultation is to draw attention to the key role which archives play as a source of information for the interpretation and understanding of the heritage assets which the White Paper aims to protect. Without archives it is often difficult or impossible to have a proper appreciation of the development of landscapes, buildings and other monuments, since they explain the background to the environment's development, the people involved, the historical context, the design and build (where appropriate) and the resultant ramifications. The role of archives needs to be recognised in setting national priorities (para 1.2.12 and 13), in the consultation process (para 1.2.24-27) and informing appeals (para 1.2.32-34). In developing the *Historic Asset Register* (para 1.2.17 and Annex 1), NCA would strongly recommend that the process and the resulting record should include clear and specific reference to relevant archival sources, as well as to archaeological, architectural and secondary printed sources.

### ***Historic environment services at the local level***

The NCA fully agrees with the White Paper's emphasis on the value of heritage in local priorities (para 1.4.1-4). It also supports proposals to improve training capacity building and support to local authorities to access information on the historical environment at local level (paras 1.4.11-13), but would urge that the contribution and role of archivists be recognised in the development of cross-disciplinary working. The NCA would be very keen to participate in the further development of the HELM programme (para 1.4.15) to develop awareness of the role of archives. Local authority archivists would also potentially benefit from participation in HELM when new training is rolled out as proposed in the White Paper.

### ***Access to information***

The NCA welcomes the proposal for a new statutory duty for local authorities to maintain or have access to a Heritage Environment Register (paras 1.4.19-24). It notes the proposal in para 1.4.23 that reference collections should be

available for public consultation. Archive services have considerable expertise in providing secure access to information and we would like to see local authorities urged to consider whether arrangements can be made for the joint provision of public access to archives and HER data, which would make most effective use of existing resources.

The NCA does not have specific comments to make in relation to the three questions posed, except insofar as our general points apply.

***Conclusion***

The vision of the White Paper for a simpler and more accessible designation system is very welcome. The archive sector has much to contribute to this vision and is keen both to participate and be identified as a contributor to the vital process of protecting the historic environment.

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Pepler  
Chair  
The National Council on Archives