

THE ARCHAEOLOGY FORUM

a grouping of independent bodies concerned with archaeology

Secretariat

Council for British Archaeology
St Mary's House
66 Bootham
York
YO30 7BZ

Tel 01904 671417; Fax 01904 671384

taf@britarch.ac.uk

Convenor

Institute for Archaeologists
University of Reading
SHES, Whiteknights
PO Box 227
Reading RG6 6AB

Tel 0118 378 6446; Fax 0118 378 6448

taf@archaeologists.net

Greg Clark MP
Minister for Decentralisation
Department for Communities and Local Government
Eland House
Bressenden Street
London
SW1E 5DU

contactus@communities.gsi.gov.uk
greg.clark@communities.gsi.gov.uk

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Dear Minister

LOCAL AUTHORITY HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SERVICES

As you will be aware, the Archaeology Forum is I very concerned about the vulnerability of local authority historic environment services in our current economic circumstances. Of particular interest to the Forum is the work of archaeology officers, who, in addition to their management of Historic Environment Records, their work with local communities and their strategic and plan-making duties, are also responsible for identifying development proposals that have archaeological consequences and for advising planners and developers on appropriate mitigation.

Almost all of the advice given by archaeological officers is concerned with undesignated heritage assets (which comprise 95%+ of the total resource). It includes agreeing with the applicant a programme of archaeological work to inform the planning decision, and when necessary scoping out the necessary programme of archaeological investigation, analysis, publication and archiving, to ensure that sites and buildings are not destroyed by approved development without being researched and recorded.

We are now learning of some local authorities that propose to dispense with any archaeological advice, which would leave them unable to fulfil their responsibilities under PPS5 and the draft Framework. One has expressed the view that stewardship of the historic environment 'might be considered a luxury'.

It is becoming apparent that PPS5 and the draft NPPF do not provide a clear enough, or strong enough, message to convey to some planning authorities their obligations to give informed consideration of applications that might unsustainably damage the historic environment, and to ensure that where the balance is in favour of development that significant assets to be destroyed are investigated and interpreted for public benefit. We are also concerned that that absence of expert advice will results in uncertainty and delays to the planning process where archaeological sites are affected, including costly delays to developments.

We therefore very much welcome the DCLG statement to the BBC today that ‘Residents rightly expect their council to maintain key services and to deliver their legal duties including heritage protection. National planning policy is clear about the importance of archaeology and our heritage assets.’ We believe that this statement should be issued in the form of a ‘Dear Chief Planning Officer’ letter so that authorities do not mistakenly assume that they can dispense with access to specialist archaeological and historic environment advice.

I do hope you will be able to act on this advice. Forum members are of course ready to assist your officers, should that be helpful.

Yours sincerely,



Peter Hinton
Convenor

Copies:

John Penrose MP, Minister for Tourism and Heritage
John Howell MP, PPS to Minister for Decentralisations
Steve Quartermain, Chief Planner

The Archaeology Forum's members are:

The Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers UK
The Council for British Archaeology
The Institute of Conservation
The Institute for Archaeologists
The National Trust
The National Trust for Scotland

Rescue: the British Archaeological Trust
The Society of Antiquaries of London
The Society of Antiquaries of Scotland
The Federation of Archaeological Managers and Employers
The Society of Museum Archaeologist