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14 January 2016

RE: Proposals to cease provision Lancashire Historic Environment services.

Dear Cllr Mein,

We are writing to you personally, in addition to responding to the public consultation on the proposed budget cuts in Lancashire, to express our concern about the proposals to cease all function of the Lancashire historic environment services as of 31 March 2016 and close a number of the county's museums. We accept and understand the difficult position the Council is in with regards to its budget and understand that difficult decisions must be made. However, in the case of the historic environment service, we believe that there are other solutions which are available which would be beneficial to the council's budget and avoid the potentially catastrophic effects on the historic environment across the county which are likely to be caused by the current proposals. Our response briefly outlines why we believe that the Council should hold off on the decision to close the historic environment service while other options are explored. We would also be willing to support a temporary closure of a number of museums across the region if the Council commits to a thorough process of examination of options for a county museums trust.

The Chartered Institute for Archaeologists

The Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) is the leading professional body representing archaeologists working in the UK and overseas. We promote high professional standards and strong ethics in archaeological practice, to maximise the benefits that archaeologists bring to society, and provide a self-regulatory quality assurance framework for the sector and those it serves.

CIfA has over 3,150 members and more than 70 registered practices across the United Kingdom. Its members work in all branches of the discipline: heritage management, planning advice, excavation, finds and environmental study, buildings recording, underwater and aerial

archaeology, museums, conservation, survey, research and development, teaching and liaison with the community, industry and the commercial and financial sectors.

Impacts of the proposal to withdraw historic environment services

Despite being labelled as ‘non-statutory’ planning activity in the Council’s budget proposals, protecting the historic environment is one of the twelve core elements of national planning policy and is necessary to the fulfilment of obligations to ensure sustainable development through the planning system. It is therefore an obligation, ultimately of the local planning authority, to provide specialist archaeological advice on planning applications and maintain an up to date historic environment record.

The National Planning Policy Framework p.169 states that:

“Local planning authorities should have up-to-date evidence about the historic environment in their area and use it to assess the significance of heritage assets and the contribution they make to their environment. They should also use it to predict the likelihood that currently unidentified heritage assets, particularly sites of historic and archaeological interest, will be discovered in the future. Local planning authorities should either maintain or have access to a historic environment record.”

For archaeological advice services, the most common and effective model for delivering on this obligation in many areas of the country, has been to share services at a county level. This has been the case in Lancashire for many years.

Withdrawing these services means that district planning authorities will be required to come to other arrangements to employ archaeological advice. This may be by sharing posts across multiple districts, or by buying in outside advice from consultants. However, given the short timescale set out in the current proposals it is unlikely that other effective models will be able to be immediately found to deliver a quality service at a similar cost. We fully expect that many districts within the county will become ‘black-holes’ for archaeology and the in the long term, if the proposals go ahead, the standard of archaeological protection, value for money, and public benefit produced, will decline.

The Council aims to save £108,000 in the financial year from these proposals. This is a comparatively small amount for the scale of benefits which the service currently enables; from public access to advice and the facilitation of community activity and local archaeological projects, to sustainable and appropriately mitigated development which reveals the county’s history and produces exciting archaeological material which forms parts of local and national museum collections. The service also helps to lever in many thousands of pounds of developer funding to explore the historic environment and directly contributes to public benefits arising from development. Some of the £108,000 saving will be off-set at a district level by increased expenditure on consultants fees which will be necessary for district authorities to pay for if they wish to prevent legal

challenges arising due to poor planning decisions in the interim period caused by the proposals.

A better option

We believe that a better option would be delay the decision to close the service by 12 months, during which time a sustainable model for future delivery of the service could be explored with local and regional partners, with assistance and facilitation provided by the historic environment sector. We believe that there are potentials for Lancashire to lead the way, nationally, in developing a more resilient model for historic environment services across, drawing on proposals which the archaeological sector have been exploring for a number of years. Options include pursuing a regional-scale shared service model with neighbouring authorities in the North West and enhancing income generation from charging and commercial services. Critically, by engaging in this process, it may be possible to obtain funding to facilitate transition to a new model which will prevent the potentially damaging implications of the current proposals, and create long term financial benefits. For example, 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.”

CIfA therefore implore the council to review the current proposal to cut these services imminently, in order to allow an opportunity to explore these potentials. Historic environment services provide large benefits for a proportionately small cost, and have clear potential for financial savings in the medium term frame which could provide a sustainable future and have a considerable chance to obtain pump-prime funding to do so.

CIfA are happy to assist in the process of developing sustainable delivery models with Lancashire County Council and would strongly support an- appropriate bid for funding to Historic England which helped to preserve the current service in the county in the short term and create a more cost-effective and sustainable model in the medium and long term.

Museum closures

CIfA also wish to see vibrant and successful local museums remain open, wherever possible. Local museums produce many public benefits; as a key part of local tourist offers, as an educational resource, and for the community benefits they provide from acting as focal points for local identity, pride, and sense of place which they are strongly associated with in the minds of local people. In Lancashire specifically, many of the museums proposed for closure provide evidence of Lancashire’s unique heritage from prehistory to industrial. The value of these sites to local identity should not be underestimated, and the value to the Council of strongly supporting these values as a mark of pride is one which should be defended as far as is possible.

However, we understand that temporary museum closures are sometimes necessary in pressing financial situations. Temporarily closing museums does damage public benefits and

creates issues for research access and the storage of collections. However, such closures do not create immediate and irreversible damaging effects on the historic environment. Temporary closures can sometimes be justifiable if doing so helps to facilitate processes of achieving improvements to services which may be necessary to secure long-term sustainable futures.

As such, ClfA would support such a move for temporary closures where it was part of a clear Council commitment to improve museum provision across the county – including exploration of alternate options for delivery, for example, via a new museums trust. However, at present this commitment has not been made and we request that the Council shares its plans with us and other sector partners so that we might advise.

Concluding remarks

We hope that the evidence provided here is given serious consideration over the coming weeks and is explicitly raised at upcoming Cabinet and Council debates. If the decision goes ahead to cease providing historic environment services it will be much harder to assure continuing provision of services and obtain financial support to assist in delivering a sustainable future for heritage in the county. ClfA are committed to assisting the County and District councils in any way possible to develop further the ideas proposed in this response and we would be pleased to discuss the opportunities in greater detail.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Hinton', written in a cursive style.

Peter Hinton BA FSA FRSA MCIFA MIAM
Chief Executive