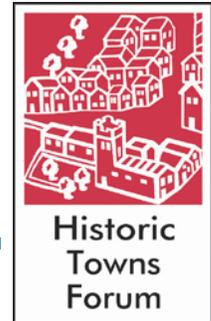


# Local Authority Skills' Summit – discussion forum



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**18 February 2014**

## **Digest of points**

In addition to the presentations [online](#) we covered several salient points during the discussions and have put them together here in order to formulate further plans for action.

The figures noted from the ALGAO and IHBC research were looked at in the presentations as a background to this floor session.

To begin the discussion session delegates were asked to note down where they felt there were existing gaps that could usefully be covered or explored:

- That there might be an urban archaeological/architectural skills gap
- There is a difficulty in finding and assessing good practice in heritage Management/planning policies etc – queries about if there is a body who does this as part of their core remit
- The archaeology gap could be mitigated to a degree by working with local communities by training them to help on digs – this could be brokered by remaining Council archaeologists – there are some good current examples
- While there is a great enthusiasm that could be harnessed among local residents has anyone undertaken a survey of the potential involvement of local businesses? Guidance on this and how to structure it would be helpful – is this within the remit of EH or ALGAO or other organisations?

This was followed by a detailed discussion around several of the issues, perceived and actual, as follows:

### What's the problem? Perception:

- There is no long-term view – perceived financial value appears to determine immediate wants and needs only, but how do we steward for the next 100 years vs monetary value? How do we justify current interventions against that?

- That the heritage sector as an elitist, negative burden/cost even though we often have to do more with less and conserve less of what is there
- We need to be flexible – there's a danger of undermining other objectives – we can still preserve heritage while being flexible.
- There is a perception that the problem is only internal and relevant to Local Authorities – that they are negative about the issues and are not concerned even where this is not the case
- That the gap is not relevant to the local economy – conservation is seen to be a luxury
- That there are more pressing concerns – such as climate change – that conservation is not sustainable
- Conservation can be perceived as anti-development and used to counter economic development
- Lack of availability of conservation officers to come out on site at crucial early stages leading to a perceived lack of pre-app advice and that conservation officers are an add-on and not a necessary part of the planning service – conversely applicants seem reasonably happy to pay for this service – some LAs charge a premium for this

#### What's the problem? Actuality:

- Bad publicity – press/popular view often portrays conservation officers as getting in the way of business – council members worried about bad publicity for business development
- Education of elected members/others about the importance of relevant skills
- Education of planning and other council officers – so the public facing officers give an informed message
- Cost and VAT may cause negativity in some cases
- Micro-focus (silo approach) in councils can isolate the conservation activity when it might be more successful if it is embedded more successfully across planning and other functions – a change in mindset could help (e.g. Winchester)
- Some Local Authorities are not now getting specialist advice re planning etc because of this gap
- Prejudice towards particular uses/buildings can blind councils/others to the advantages of well-planned developments
- LAs don't often get the chance to show what the added value of a development/conservation project can be – e.g. the supermarket in Buxton

- Rules and regulations are actually part of the solution – and developers know this – elected members/others are mistaken to think planners are the problem – developers realise that planners are an important part of the solution

Possible ways forward:

- New model English Heritage may be an opportunity in terms of training bodies
- Definite need to up-skill non-specialist staff (and this could free up specialist staff – HELM are looking at this) – business skills/commercial awareness is a necessary part of this
- Raise awareness of what the conservation needs/issues are (two birds with one training session)
- Training volunteers/the community – e.g. the High Peak BC project – good skills, good PR and gets the community inside the planning process
- CHIP (English Heritage) is a good example
- Lincolnshire held a programme across the county to engage young/unemployed people and to improve their CVs as well
- Identify similar organisations with similar training needs/aims/programmes – look at young people, e.g. The Prince's trust 'Get Into' programmes
- Grant funding for training would be helpful
- HLF training for communities
- English Heritage Sources for training
- Local Government Authority knowledge hub – EH development of historic environment hub – future potential for training?
- Young people ended skills but so also do mid-career people and people looking for career-progression
- Having strong advocates in the public eye – E.g. Loyd Grossman (THA); Griff Rhys-Jones (Civic Voice); Dan Snow (CBA)