



Historic England

Stronger Performance of Local Planning Authorities Supported Through an Increase in Planning Fees Historic England Consultation Response

Historic England is the Government's statutory adviser on all matters relating to the historic environment in England. We are a non-departmental public body established under the National Heritage Act 1983 and sponsored by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). We champion and protect England's historic places, providing expert advice to local planning authorities, developers, owners and communities to help ensure our historic environment is properly understood, enjoyed and cared for.

We welcome the opportunity to submit a response to this consultation.

Section 1: Planning Fees

Increasing Planning Fees: General

Historic England agrees that adequately resourced local planning authorities (LPAs), both in terms of capacity and capability, are crucial to an effective planning system, delivering high quality sustainable development for local communities. This is especially important as LPAs transition to new ways of working in response to the proposed planning reforms in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill (LURB). We, therefore, understand the rationale behind the proposal to increase planning fees.

An important function of the planning system is the protection of the historic environment. This contributes positively to the quality and distinctiveness of local places, regeneration and investment, environmental sustainability, as well as pride in place and well-being.

Any proposals around resourcing of LPAs must recognise the vital contribution that specialist heritage staff (conservation officers, archaeologists, etc.) make towards delivering sustainable development and achieving the government's objectives around delivering beautiful and prosperous places. Proposals around increasing capacity and improving capability at LPA level must therefore encompass the role of heritage specialists, alongside those of policy and development management planners, urban designers, and landscape architects, etc.

The proposals seek to address the shortfall between the current expenditure of local authorities on planning, and the income generated from planning fees. However, our evidence on the levels of specialist heritage staff at local authority level show a long-term decline over a sustained period.¹ It would therefore be beneficial for

¹ Historic England et al. 2021. Series 2 Issue 1: Report on Local Authority Resources 2020.

consideration to be given to benchmark spending against an appropriate, rather than current, level of sector capacity and resourcing.

The consultation document cites feedback that an absence of adequate resources and capability is a significant cause for the underperformance of the planning application service. A decline in public sector planning resourcing over the last decade is well-documented,² but our research also shows a longer-term decline in public sector heritage specialists.

Between 2006 and 2018, the number of conservation and archaeological specialists has reduced by a third (by 283.4 full time equivalent (FTE) and 142.5 FTE, respectively). Since 2018, this data has been collected using a different methodology making direct comparative analysis difficult: however, analysis suggests that this gradual decline in heritage specialists is continuing. The numbers of specialists do not necessarily show the full picture, in that those leaving the profession often take with them a wealth of experience, knowledge and judgement. Resources are needed to address not just the number of heritage specialists but to ensure that capability and capacity is refreshed and replenished.

Insufficient access to historic environment expertise may lead to delays in processing applications, uncertainties in decision-making, increased risk of legal challenge, and shortfalls in enforcement. It also risks adversely affecting the delivery of good quality design and place-shaping, as heritage expertise is critical to ensuring that developments respond to local character and history. Delivery of other targets, such as net zero, are also placed at risk if adequate technical conservation advice is not readily available.

Question 4. Are there any other application types or planning services which are not currently charged for but should require a fee or for which the current fee level or structure is inadequate?

There is the potential to explore charging for other planning related services, subject to further detailed consideration and public consultation.

As noted in the consultation document, there may be the possibility of charging for assessment of sites at allocation stage; where the site is being promoted by a particular developer/landowner, and where there would be significant costs and risks associated with site assessment that it might be unreasonable for the LPA to bear. Obviously, as with other planning fees, it must be clear that the assessment of any site would be independent of any fee paid.

The proposed replacement of Strategic Environmental Assessments and Environmental Impact Assessments with Environmental Outcome Reports, in the LURB, suggests an increased role for monitoring. The details of monitoring is subject to further consideration, but there may be opportunities for cost recovery for monitoring (site visits, etc.). Such charging might be an added incentive to ensure that adverse effects are avoided to reduce the burden on mitigation/monitoring. However, punitive charging could result in unintended consequences, such as the underreporting of adverse effects and mitigation.

² e.g. RTPI, 2019. [The UK Planning Profession in 2019](#).

There are also some services for which charging would be inappropriate, such as Listed Building Consent (LBC).

LBC is required for works that affect the special architectural or historic interest (i.e. significance) of a listed building under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, additional to any planning permissions which might be required. There is currently no fee for an application for LBC, although there is a cost to the applicant in preparing the application and to the LPA in assessing it. Where there is an associated planning application those costs are often reduced as the same information can be used for both.

Owners of historic buildings are important custodians of the nation's heritage, and it is important that they are not disincentivised to fulfil their duties. Introducing a fee for an LBC would appear to unduly penalise owners of listed buildings when they wanted to make changes to their building. It would potentially be a disincentive to ownership of listed buildings and might also have the unintended consequence of increasing unauthorised works to listed buildings, through owners seeking to avoid an additional cost.

It is important that owners of listed buildings can make appropriate adaptations to their buildings in response to climate change, and the introduction of a fee for LBC (where LBC is needed) would run counter to that aspiration.

Question 7. Do you consider that the additional income arising from the proposed fee increase should be ringfenced for spending within the local authority planning department?

Yes, we agree with the ringfencing of the proposed fee increase for spending within LPAs. However, any ringfenced funding will need to include adequate provision for heritage specialists, such as conservation and archaeological officers. Although they are not always within planning departments, they form an integral part of the planning services provided by LPAs and are essential in delivering timely advice and shaping places and proposals to the benefit of local communities.

It is unclear from the proposals whether the intention is to ringfence only the uplift from the increase in planning fees, or whether all planning fees generated by an LPA would be ringfenced for planning purposes.

Section 2: Local planning authority capacity and capability

Question 11. What do you consider to be the greatest skills and expertise gaps within local planning authorities?

The increasing emphasis on design quality, codes and measurable outcomes means that LPAs are likely to need to increase capacity and capability in those areas. The move to a more digitally based planning system will require a different skillset at LPA level. Similarly, the increased recognition of the role of planning in addressing climate change and achieving net zero is likely to require an increase in skills in those areas, across different disciplines.

As noted, there has been a significant drop in heritage specialists at LPA level and where those leaving the profession are replaced there is often a net loss of experience. Addressing heritage capacity, skills and expertise gaps will be important in supporting the new planning system and in improving outcomes from the planning system. There are important interfaces between the historic environment and the design and climate change agendas, where additional capability may be needed for specialist heritage staff in those areas.

We are constantly reviewing and updating our training offer, aimed at supporting both heritage specialists and planners to address skills gaps, and are already in discussion with DLUHC in support of future skills strategies. For example, we have just launched our Heritage for Planners: Essentials Programme on our new learning platform³.

Concentrating on skills and expertise relating to management of the historic environment, Historic England conducts an annual Training Needs Analysis (TNA) survey with our target audience, primarily local authority roles but also other providers of historic environment related advice and decision-making. Further information on the findings of the 2020-2022 surveys is included in Appendix 1.

Question 12. In addition to increasing planning fees, in what other ways could the Government support greater capacity and capability within local planning departments and pathways into the profession?

Question 13. How do you suggest we encourage people from under-represented groups, including women and ethnic minority groups, to become planning professionals?

Encouraging greater involvement and inclusivity in planning will require an understanding of what engagement and capacity/capability building is currently in place, and what is working and what is not.⁴ Seeing if lessons can be learnt from other engagement drives (e.g. STEM science) may also be beneficial.

To be inclusive, new ways of thinking will be needed. In this regard, Historic England's Heritage Counts research may be a useful lens for engagement as it provides annual evidence on the value of heritage to our economy, society and environment, and helps show how intertwined it is in people's everyday lives. New cultural capital ways of thinking about the historic environment (e.g. benefit flows) may also offer a more inclusive approach.

The UK planning system seeks to conserve our historic environment because it is an irreplaceable resource that contributes to our quality of life (e.g. delivers public benefits). A key contribution that it makes, is enabling and furthering our understanding of the past and, consequently, public participation is often secured by a planning condition. During a development project, this engagement can range from online talks to practical involvement, while post-completion engagement materials such as publications or onsite interpretation are commonplace. This work, alongside initiatives such as the Young Archaeologists Club, helps to raise the profile of the sector and draw in a variety of audiences. This interest can be captured and

³ [Historic England Learning Platform \(vimeo.com\)](https://www.vimeo.com/611111111)

⁴ Historic England's 2019 [The Historic Environment 2019: an Overview](#) provides a summary of some of the engagement and capacity initiatives undertaken by the heritage sector in recent years.

amplified by popular TV programmes (as an example) and there is an opportunity to translate such interest into pathways into planning and heritage professions.

However, a greater emphasis on youth engagement is critical, especially in the absence of archaeology, conservation, and planning in secondary and further education, as this is when key subject choices that determine career pathways are made. Research has shown that 16–24 year-olds are underrepresented in terms of engagement with heritage.⁵ Such engagement will also help instil an understanding of the positive public benefits that heritage can bring e.g. on climate change issues. To improve capacity and inclusivity, we need to readdress this by increasing opportunities for sector engagement and providing relevant careers advice in schools and colleges.

Additionally, higher education archaeological departments are declining as students opt for more financially rewarding subjects that better warrant the cost of study. Therefore, increased funding for alternative pathways into the sector, such as apprenticeships, are important; especially as they will also improve social representation. Apprenticeships can also offer opportunities to upskill existing planning staff, allowing them to advance their careers, and develop specialisms in the historic environment.

Historic England has been providing Historic Environment Advice Assistant (HEAA) apprenticeships within the planning sector since 2019. However, we are aware that some LPAs have had difficulties accessing local authority funding to take on HEAA apprentices. Difficulties can also be faced by those who have completed apprenticeships, as job vacancies do not necessarily recognise and welcome applicants from these alternative training routes. A more coordinated and holistic approach to inclusivity across the sector, would help overcome some of these barriers.

Section 3: Local Planning Authority Performance

Question 17. Do you consider that any of the proposed quantitative metrics should not be included?

The metrics for quality of decision-making (B1 to B3) are not a measure of all decisions, but only those applications that are refused (and subsequently won or lost on appeal). Around 80% of planning applications are approved, but there is no metric (within B) to measure the quality of those outcomes.

It would be beneficial if the metrics relating to planning enforcement (E1 to E3) include one, or more, on the quality of outcome or of the effectiveness of the council enforcement service, which would encourage LPAs to be more proactive in fulfilling their enforcement duties. Enforcement activity is essential in maintaining public confidence in the planning system, but it is important that thinking around capacity and capability at LPA level encompasses enforcement.

Finally, the metric that measures the planning committee performance (F2) focuses exclusively on those decisions refused (against officer recommendation but subsequently allowed at appeal). It does not address the cases that may be

⁵ [Historic Environment Forum, Heritage 2020.](#)

approved at planning committee against officer recommendation, nor the quality of the outcomes of applications approved in line with officer recommendation. The focus of F2 may have the unintended consequence of encouraging committees to be overly cautious in their decision-making and not going against officer recommendations, where there are legitimate reasons to do so.

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Appendix 1: Historic England Training Analysis Needs Survey findings 2020-2022

This additional information is provided in response to: *Question 11: what do you consider to be the greatest skills and expertise gaps within local planning authorities?*

Historic England conducts an annual Training Needs Analysis (TNA) survey with our target audience, primarily local authorities but also other providers of historic environment related advice and decision-making.

Our 2020 and 2021 TNA surveys focused broadly on skills and knowledge needs for historic environment management. It found that the demand was consistently highest for training at a 'high' or 'expert' level in:

- Assessing significance.
- Heritage protection - legislation and policy.
- Assessing or writing heritage impact assessments.

There was also high demand for all levels of expertise in:

- Development management.
- Buildings history.
- Heritage at risk.
- Buildings conservation.

And for 'introductory' level training in:

- Archaeological science.
- post-excavation and publication.
- Field archaeology techniques.
- Geographic Information Systems & data/information management.

The surveys also identified **Climate Change** and **Design** as areas of increasing demand.

Taking a more function-based approach, the 2022 survey analysed the activities local authority respondents engaged in most. These activities were:

- Assessments of significance and impact
- The determination of planning applications related to non-designated heritage assets.

Related to this, the most common competency concerns were identifying significance for built heritage and multiple/overlapping heritage assets.

There was a significant focus on climate change in the 2022 survey. It found that 29% of local authority respondents had an environmental element to their current workload. The most common case work was for homeowner/domestic scale changes, particularly, changes to windows and the addition of solar panels. Other climate change related training needs were identified in:

- Domestic change: Windows, Solar Panels, Insulation, Sustainable heating solutions.
- Weighing public benefit v harm in relation to retrofitting and wider climate change impact.
- Climate change related adaptation and loss.
- Climate Change the impact on World Heritage Sites.
- Environment Impact Assessments.
- Understanding the Environment Act and its historic environment implications.
- Biodiversity net gain and nature recovery.