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National Collection of Archaeological Archives Operating Model

Museum and Research Institution Needs

Manda Forster, Samantha Paul, Jenny Durrant

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Summary

This document has been produced as the final report for the Historic England (HE) funded project, ‘National Collection of Archaeological Archives Operating Model: Museum and Research Institution Needs’. The principal aim of the project is to assist with the testing of the business model for a national store and collection of archaeological archives, focusing on the requirements of museum and research institutions. The purpose of the document is to outline the results of the study, providing background information and context, an outline of possible operational models, and to present consultation results and outline the recommendations of the project team. A supporting document has been submitted to Historic England containing detailed consultation data, that is not for public circulation, but which forms part of the project archive.

Acknowledgements

The authors and Historic England to the representatives of the museum and research community for their invaluable input throughout the project. Their contributions have been instrumental in the success of this endeavour. Front cover image: A corridor in a large heritage store, photograph Duncan H Brown, © Historic England.

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Executive summary

The principal aim of the project was to provide sector wide response to the development of a national collection of archaeological archives, adding understanding of the needs to key users, stakeholders and partners for such an entity. Through outlining options for an organisational structure able to effectively support and integrate the proposed national collection into England's archaeological infrastructure, the project has engaged key audiences to undertake detailed analysis.

The two-month process of consultation with museum professionals, researchers and relevant stakeholders gathered substantial consultation feedback responding to four key aims:

1. What are the benefits/opportunities and concerns/challenges identified by current repositories/museums on the concept of a National Collection?
2. What level of accessibility, either virtually or physically, to archives in a central store might be required for those museums which would originally have held this material locally? As well as defining considerations, the implications of this should be quantified.
3. What level of research access might be sought by universities and other research institutions of a national collection, on-site, and off-site? What would the advantages or disadvantages of such a model be?
4. What are the pros and cons of different business/operating models for running such a National Collection?

Project consultation has provided general support for the idea and ambitions presented by the concept of a national collection, with key benefits seen as the positive impact of a coherent approach and recognition that something needs to be done to urgently address the current situation. However, there is palpable caution and concern around implementation, in terms of unintended impacts on heritage jobs, function and infrastructure, as well clarification of purpose. Whilst, proposals are necessarily vague at this stage, consultation revealed fundamental concerns around the intention and remit of a national collection, for which a collective and collaborative approach is called for.

With regards to the set up and functions of a national collection, consultation confirmed that the idea has many benefits, and a number of positive themes are evident in both museums and researcher feedback. Of primary importance is the cultural value of

archaeology, and its importance is the recognition of archaeological archives as a research resource, and for its inherent benefits to society. The concept provides an opportunity to develop standards whilst building on existing professional guidelines and ethics, further developing a network of expertise around archaeological collections in museums of all size, governance, location, and varieties of inhouse staff or volunteers. In addition, the concept could support better integration of professional sectors of planning, commercial, museum, and research archaeology, and stimulate meaningful collaboration with local communities and the public. Finally, making archaeological collections more discoverable and accessible, especially via the provision of a searchable, centralised, digital datastore which is interoperable with other collections and heritage information was seen as potentially transformational.

A major challenge to address is the potential for negative impact on current museums, including loss of income which may undermine the functioning of the museum or its governing body, and / or lead to further pressure on heritage jobs. Areas of concern include practical considerations around ownership, access and undermining regional processes, identity, and decision-making. Public access to and engagement with archaeology, as currently offered by regional and local museums, could also be negatively impacted, exacerbated by negative public and stakeholder perceptions of a centralised resource threatening regional identity. Many of the concerns and fears which resonate within the consultation feedback, could be allayed as more detail can be added to the proposals in future. It should be noted that the current fiscal climate, particularly in relation to local government funding and pressures felt within the museums sector, needs to be acknowledged as part of future discussions.

Analysis of consultation feedback demonstrates that, rather than establishing a strong case for a single operational option, there are pros and cons relevant to all the models discussed. An operational model able to benefit from national leadership and research profile, with the ability to facilitate collaborative cross-sector working at regional and sectoral levels, and secure sustainable income through a combination of commercial fees and fundraising, would combine the strengths of all options and address some of the more fundamental weaknesses.

The report concludes that the proposed national collection for archaeological archives presents a huge opportunity to address a substantial and critical issue in England’s archaeological sector and support the nation’s regional museums and repositories. It is felt that the substantial and understandable concerns over the potential impacts on the existing museum ecosystem can be addressed through in-depth and cross sector consideration of more detailed proposals. Provision of a joined-up and well-articulated

approach to England's archaeological archives should be a key ambition underpinning future development.

1 Introduction

This document is the final report for the project: *National Collection of Archaeological Archives Operating Model: Museum and Research Institution Needs*. Its purpose is to outline the project methodology and results, describing how the project team has addressed the following questions:

- What are the benefits/opportunities and concerns/challenges identified by current repositories/museums on the concept of a National Collection?
- What level of accessibility, either virtually or physically, to archives in a central store might be required for those museums which would originally have held this material locally? As well as defining considerations, the implications of this should be quantified.
- What level of research access might be sought by universities and other research institutions of a national collection, on-site, and off-site? What would the advantages or disadvantages of such a model be?
- What are the pros and cons of different business/operating models for running such a National Collection?

The principal aim of the project is to provide sector wide response to the development of a national collection of archaeological archives, adding understanding of the needs to key users, stakeholders and partners for such an entity. Through outlining options for an organisational structure able to effectively support and integrate the proposed national collection into England's archaeological infrastructure, the project has engaged key audiences to undertake detailed analysis. A SWOT analysis of different operating models undertaken with key audience groups provides consideration of each operating model option, discussing implications for fundamental areas such as ownership, charging and access to archive collections. In addition, the project had gathered evidence from museum and research institution interests to understand the benefits/opportunities, concerns/challenges identified by museums and research communities, as well as investigating levels of access and practical considerations required for research and other purposes.

This document details the results of the consultation and subsequent analysis. The report presents and summarises the results of the data gathering and sector consultation, and provides recommendations and key considerations for the development of the proposed national collection of archaeological archives.

2 Project aims, objectives and methodology

Aims and objectives

The principal aims and objectives for the project are:

1. What are the benefits/opportunities and concerns/challenges identified by current repositories/museums on the concept of a National Collection?
    a. What are the key characteristics and considerations of museums / repositories which currently collect, hold, or access archaeological collections?
    b. What are the key areas which might influence or impact the relationship between museums and a national centre? For example, this will consider curatorial responsibility, legal ownership, carbon footprint, potential for strategic research and more.
    c. What are the benefits/opportunities presented by the NCAA, and what are the concerns/challenges, as identified through consultation with a sample of repositories and museums (minimum 20 museums / repositories consulted)?
    d. How might the establishment of the NCAA impact existing holdings and future archives, as well as organisations that are no longer able to collect developer funded archaeological archives?
2. What level of accessibility, either virtually or physically, to archives in a central store might be required for those museums which would originally have held this material locally?
    a. Through consultation with at least 20 museums, can we define a range of access considerations for museums/repositories across the UK, of different institutional make-up (e.g. county, district, town)?
    b. How might museums/repositories which are current closed / open for archives transfer and access archives?
    c. How can the implications of accessibility needs be quantified?
3. What level of research access might be sought by universities and other research institutions of a national collection, on-site, and off-site? What would the advantages or disadvantages of such a model be?

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a. What types of institutions are potential research users of the NCAA and what are key characteristics? What is the range of institutions in terms of type, disciplinary interest and institution type, location, size etc?

b. What practical issues might influence how researchers access the national collection? This might consider space and facilities, transport and distribution of materials to off-site research facilities, among other factors.

c. Through consultation with at least 10 universities and other relevant bodies, what is the research potential of a national collection for those institutions undertaking archaeological research, heritage science and other directly cognate disciplines?

4. What are the pros and cons of different business/operating models for running such a National Collection?

a. What different business or operating models could the NCAA adopt? For example, an adjunct to an existing public body (such as a National museum, or an Arm's Length Body such as Historic England), a separate Charitable Trust, a quasi-commercial model, a Research Institution operated by a university, or independently funded by UKRI.

b. What are the impacts of different approaches to running the NCAA on fundamental areas, such as title /ownership, charging and accessibly of materials?

c. What does a SWOT analysis of differing business operating models reveal about the pros and cons of each type?

Project methodology

Key workstreams for the delivery of this project have included:

a. Communication and engagement strategy

b. Operating model scenarios (Section 5)

c. Audiences and stakeholders (Section 4)

d. Sector consultation; museums, researchers, and stakeholders (Sections 5 - 7)

e. Report and recommendations (this report; Sections 8 and 9)

During initial setup, a communications plan identified the nature of engagement and information dissemination, highlighting the focus, purpose and audience. The

communications plan was used to update the HE Advisory Group about engagement throughout the project, helping identify any issues (such as audience engagement) and adapt as required. All communications were delivered digitally, and documents presented in accessible PDF format. Any information which is principally presented in a web format, including this report, has been reviewed for accessibility issues.

A risk assessment was provided during project initiation and has been maintained throughout delivery. No real change to project methods were required, although – because of the short project timeline – an online survey was adopted to facilitate response from consultation groups unable to attend an interview or workshop. Due to a lack of availability in the timeframe, the roundtable workshop for researchers was cancelled and the few booked attendees were instead interviewed directly.

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3 Project background

Previous work

The success of development-led archaeology since the early 1990s has led to a major increase in the quantity of archaeological material in museum stores across the country and many museums are becoming unable to accept new finds. This project is the latest in a series of research and consolation projects looking at the issue of archaeological archives commencing with the Society of Museum Archaeologists *Archaeological Archives and Museums 2012* project (Edwards, 2013). The 21st Century Challenges in Archaeology reported the sector wide consensus that new repositories for archaeological archives were needed at a national or regional scale (Wills, 2018 p10) and identified a series of tasks and outcomes that needed to be addressed in order to 'solve the archives problem.'

In 2018, as a result of the Mendoza Review of museums in England, a sector wide plan was put in place to find a sustainable future for archaeological collections recovered from excavations in England, including excavation records and pottery, tile, bone and metal objects. The Future for Archaeological Archives Programme (FAAP) is a programme of linked actions and projects intended to result in a consistent, sustainable approach to the creation, compilation, transfer and curation of archaeological archives.

These research reports have led to a series of projects aiming to address a specific aspect of archaeological archiving:

- CIfA Selection Toolkit (Chartered Institute for Archaeologists 2019)
- Guide to managing digital archives by DigVentures (DigVentures 2019 - current)
- Survey of Fees for the Transfer of Archaeological Archives in England (Vincent 2019)
- CIfA Toolkit for Specialist Reporting (Chartered Institute for Archaeologists 2020)
- SMA Standards and Guidance in the Care of Archaeology Collections (Boyle and Rawden 2020)
- CIfA project to develop an agreed definition for 'Negative Site Archives' (Paul 2021)
- Arts Council England / Historic England project looking into Options for Sustainable Archaeological Archives (Carroll et al 2021)
- Historic England Project investigating Options for Costing Models for the Transfer of Archaeological archives (Paul and Forster 2024).

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Previous recommendations

This project has been directly informed by previous work delivered within the Future for Archaeological Archives Programme. Recommendations made within the ACE / HE funded Options for Archaeological Archives project aimed to address the capacity challenge, as well as facilitate access to heritage and maximise public benefit from archaeology – a key need identified from the results of previous work and throughout the project's consultation activities. The OSAA 2020 research suggested that, to create the desired sustainable future for archaeological archives, an ambitious and robust response must look beyond capacity and encompass both accessibility and benefit (Carroll et al 2021). To this end, the project proposed the creation of a national collection of archaeological archives which would provide:

A national, sustainable archaeological archive which guarantees public benefit through being discoverable and accessible, facilitating new stories of our shared past through the continuing use and reuse of resources created by archaeological processes, equally accessible to researchers, educators, curators and the public and providing a seamless interface between data, archive materials, organisations and communities.

Key components of a national collection could incorporate a single online catalogue, a set of standards for preparation, deposition, curation and access, a Collections Policy which links to national and regional research frameworks, and to the CIfA Selection Toolkit, and a dedicated team, including expert staff and a network of regional archives advisers to manage the collection and build vital connections and relationships between archive creators, curators and users (see Carroll et al 2021).

In addition, an investigation into cost models for a national collection (HE9108, Paul and Forster 2023) concluded that, whilst various options demonstrated potential to sustainably support the collection, any business model should endeavour to:

- reflect the overall impact of development on archaeological work, and enhance the public benefit of cultural heritage through curation, dissemination and access of archaeological archives.
- be based on a proportional fee which is identified, ring-fenced and secured during project delivery.
- make sufficient contribution to generate a sustainable model for curation and access, including the skills needed for to facilitate this.
- support the existing public repository network and potential increases in capacity and access to archaeological archives in England.

The current research and consultation builds on previous project results and recommendations to assist with the testing of the business model for a national store and collection of archaeological archives, focusing on the requirements of museum and research institutions.

4 Project audiences

Project stakeholders

Project stakeholders include a range of sector organisations, bodies and groups, many of which provide essential knowledge and experience as well as an important link to target audience groups. The Archaeological Archives Forum (AAF) and Historic England's advisory board for the Future for Archaeological Archives Programme (FAAP) brings together representatives from across the sector to discuss issues relating to archaeological archives, and will act as a key conduit for wider project communications. The list below includes project stakeholders, indicating which have representatives on the FAAP and AAF.

Table 1: Project stakeholders and their representation on the Archaeological Archives Forum (AAF) and Future for Archaeological Archives Programme (FAAP) panels.

Stakeholders	**FAAP**	**AAF**
Archaeology Data Service (ADS)	-	✔
Arts Council England (ACE)	✔	✔
Association of Local Government Archaeology Officers (ALGAO)	✔	✔
British Museum	✔	-
Cadw	-	✔
Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA)	✔	✔
Collections Trust	✔	-
Council for British Archaeology (CBA)	-	✔
Digital Preservation Coalition	-	✔
English Heritage	-	✔
Federation of Archaeological Managers and Employers (FAME)	✔	✔
Historic England (HE)	✔	✔
Historic Environment Scotland (HES)	-	✔
HS2	✔	-
Institute for Conservation (ICON)	-	✔
National Highways	✔	-
National Trust	✔	✔
Northern Ireland - Historic Environment Division	-	✔
RCAHMW	-	✔
Receiver of Wreck	✔	-
Society for Museum Archaeology (SMA)	✔	✔
University Archaeology UK (UAUK)	-	✔
UK Research and Innovation (UKRI)	-	-

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Stakeholder map and users of a national collection

Through the course of the project, a stakeholder map has been developed to help visualise audiences, interfaces and users of the proposed national collection (see Figure 1). This canvas shows audiences within two main stakeholder groups:

- Collection interfaces, including projects, professional standards, collections and sector policy, and other stakeholders
    - Interface bodies and data holders
    - Interface projects and initiatives
    - Other influencers
    - Advisory and standards
- Collection partners, users and beneficiaries
    - Archive creators
    - Museums & repositories
    - Universities and researchers
    - Volunteers and the public

This visual map of potential stakeholders for the proposed collection, has facilitated the process of consultation, highlighting both key audiences for inclusion in this phase of consultation as well as summarising the potential impact and reach of the collection.

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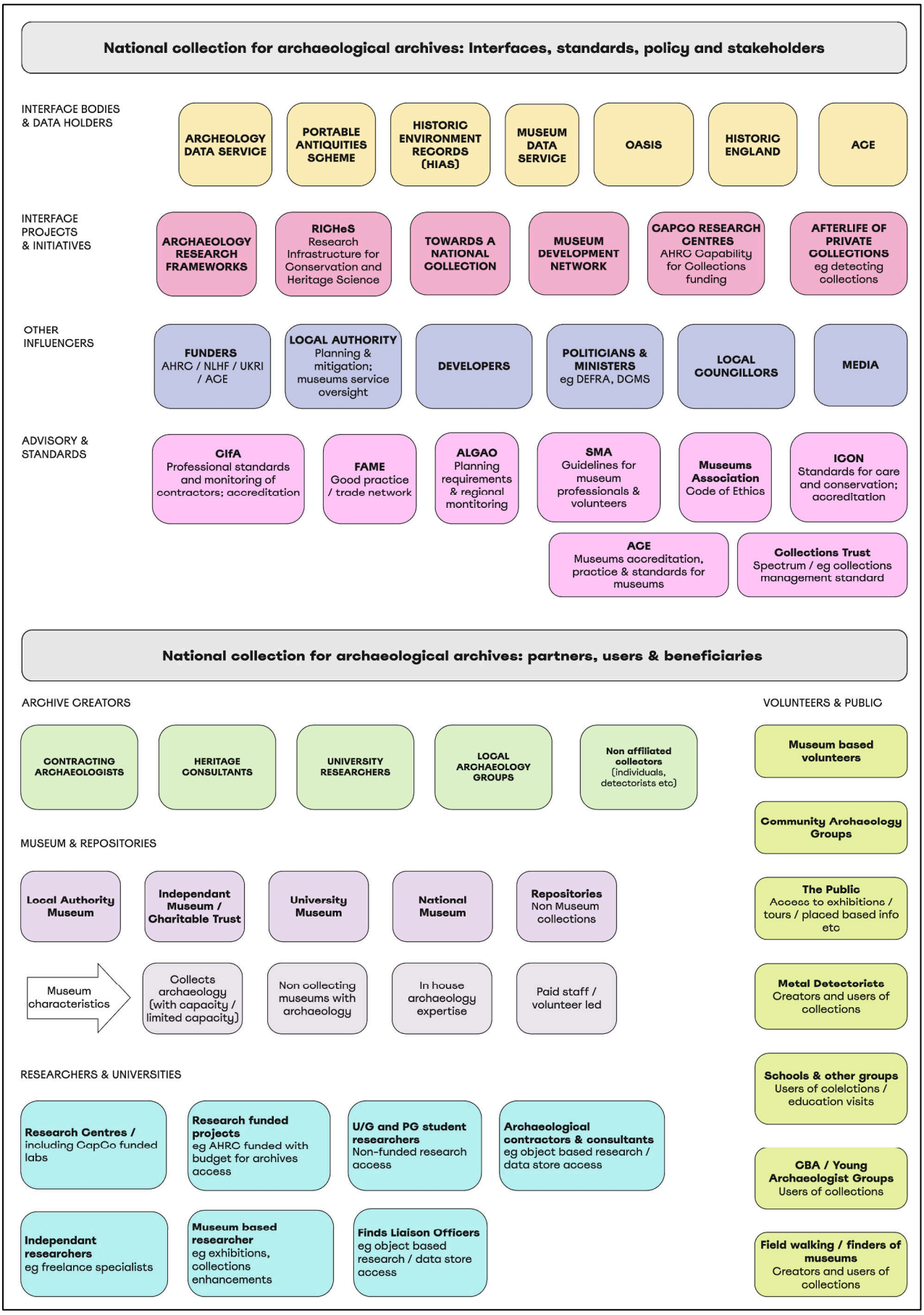
Figure 1: Stakeholder map



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Consultation audiences

The target audiences for this project, as defined by the brief (HE 2023) are: 1) museums and repositories, and 2) researchers and research communities. These audiences have been central to the project consultation, in particular exploring specific characteristics of different operational models and any practical or cultural considerations which might impact how different types of bodies and individuals will interface with the proposed national collection. For example, these have included:

- For repositories and museums: curatorial responsibility, legal ownership, carbon footprint, potential for strategic research and more (see Aim 1); archive accessibility (Aim 2).
- For researchers: space and facilities, transport, and distribution of materials to off-site research facilities, among other factors (see Aim 3).

Within the two target user groups, a series of specific characteristics were identified to help refine a list of suitable contacts for the consultation to take place (see Figure 1 and Table 2). A third group included in the consultation, broadly defined as ‘other stakeholders’ includes bodies and organisations identified through stakeholder mapping and desk-based research. These were included to inform understanding and practical insights into the example operating models explored, providing key knowledge to examples to support the rapid SWOT analysis and discussion workshop discussed below (Section 5).

A long list of possible consultees was informed through discussion with the project HE Advisory Group, from existing contacts gathered during previous project stages, stakeholder mapping and from the results of a recent survey of museums and collecting bodies delivered by HE. The final group of individuals and organisations contacted is provided in Table 3, noting that some contacts wished to remain anonymous. Communications were often direct, but wider dissemination was supported SMA, UAUK and CIfA. Overall, of 95 contacted, 61 individuals or organisations responded to the consultation in some form, either as one-to-one interviews (44) or through an online survey (17). The results of consultation are presented in Sections 6 and 7 below. User audiences were also invited to take part in the online discussion workshop, attended by 13 museum professionals (affiliations not recorded) to inform SWOT analysis of each of the operational models.

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Principal project audiences and characteristics

Museums

Currently collect archaeological archives. Additional characteristics; museums with capacity for future depositions and those with limited capacity.
No longer collect archaeological archives. Additional characteristics; museums with in-house archaeology expertise, and those with no current archaeology expertise.
Museums that have never collected archaeological archives
Areas where no archaeological archive repository exists

Researchers

University departments / project teams with an interest in archaeological data or other related disciplines
Other potential researchers / archive users, including individual researchers and finds experts, and contracting organisations

Stakeholders

Other stakeholders; including funding organisations, other collecting bodies, sector bodies and forums.

Project consultees

Museums

Beaminster Museum, Dorset
Birmingham Museums Trust
Brighton and Hove Museums
Cambridgeshire County Council *
Corinium in Cirencester
Dean Heritage Centre *
Dorset Museum
Durham University Museum
English Heritage (NE)
Gloucester City Museum *
Gloucestershire County Council *
Hampshire Cultural Trust *
Herefordshire Museum Resource and Learning Centre
Keswick Museum and art Gallery*
Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust
Leicester CC Museums
Museum in the Park, Stroud
Museum of London

Museums Worcestershire
Northamptonshire ARC
Oxfordshire Museum Service
Peterborough Museum and Art Gallery *
Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter
Royal Cornwall Museum *
Shakespeare Birthplace Trust
Slough Museum, Berkshire*
Tewkesbury Museum*
The Herbert Art Gallery and Museum, Coventry
The Wilson, Cheltenham
Tullie Museum, Carlisle
Tyne & Wear Archives *
Warwickshire Museum Service
Wolverhampton and Walsall LPA
Museum Survey responders 1-7
Anonymous 1-3

Researchers

Beaminster Museum (as a research institution)
University of Birmingham (1 & 2)
University of Bradford *
University of Bristol
University of Cambridge
University of Exeter (1 & 2)
University of Central Lancashire *
University Central London *
University of Leicester (1-3)
University of Newcastle *
University of Oxford *
University of York
Devon Archaeological Society *
Headland Archaeology
Historic England
Land of Oak and Iron
Newcastle University
Oxford Archaeology
Researcher surveys responders 2-9

Stakeholders

Archaeology Data Service (ADS)
Association of Independent Museums (AIM) *
Collections Trust
Council for British Archaeology (CBA)
Institute of Conservation Archaeology Group (ICON)
National Heritage Science Forum
National Trust
Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS)
Postal Museum
Rob Shaw Fundraising
South Downs National Park
The National Archives
Towards a National Collection
University Archaeology UK (UAUK)
UK Research & Innovation (UKRI)
Anonymous 1 & 2

*Denotes the institution was contacted but did not engage with the consultation

5 Operational models to support a National Collection

Introduction

A series of operating scenarios and exemplars were outlined to describe how different models could support national collection. These were used principally to discuss proposals meaningfully with consultation audiences (Aims 1, 3) and understand the pros and cons highlighted through consultation for different running models (Aim 4).

Five operational models were outlined and, where possible, investigated further through consultation with stakeholder and case example bodies that function in a similar manner. Each scenario included consideration of fundamental elements for the transfer and curation of archives, such as (among others), longevity and risk, title and ownership, revenue streams, access to funding and resources, user accessibility and any special requirements of the model. In addition to case examples organisations, selected stakeholders were also interviewed to explore operational models, project interfaces and potential of the proposed national collection. This section provides a summary of operational models and discusses operational characteristics, supported by selected feedback from stakeholders. Additional consultation from users around perspectives on operational models is included in audience consultation sections below (Sections 6 and 7).

The operational models explored include:

- Option 1 > Adjunct to an existing public body (such as a national museum, or an Arm's Length Body such as Historic England)
- Option 2 > Independent Charitable Trust
- Option 3 > Research Institution operated by a university
- Option 4 > Quasi-commercial / commercial, mixed funding model
- Option 5 > Research Institution independently funded by UKRI

Option 1 – Adjunct to an Arm's Length Body

Operational model description

A non-departmental public body or Arm's Length Body (ALB) which is not a government department, and has a distinct legal personality separate from the Crown. Employees are not civil servants. As with executive agencies, a non-departmental public body will operate within strategic frameworks set by ministers.

The national collection could either be adjunct to an existing ALB, or a separate body.

Suitable host ALBs might be Historic England (portfolio including archaeology / historic environment) or Arts Council England (portfolio covering museums and collections) or a museum body, such as Science Museum Group or British Museum.

Examples

Heritage / museum based ALBs: Historic England, Arts Council England, British Library, British Museum, Science Museum Group, National Archives.

The following ALBs are non-departmental public bodies, with descriptions taken from the government website:

Historic England (DCMS) is ‘the government’s statutory adviser on the historic environment, championing historic places and helping people to understand, value and care for them.’

Arts Council England (DCMS) ‘champions, develops and invests in artistic and cultural experiences to enrich people’s lives’.

Science Museum Group (DCMS) is ‘devoted to the history and contemporary practice of science, medicine, technology, industry and media’.

The National Archives is a non-ministerial department, and ‘the official archive and publisher for the UK government and for England and Wales. It is the guardian of some of our most iconic national documents, dating back over 1,000 years.

Characteristics

Public bodies have duties set out in legislation, with statutory expectations of what they deliver.

Framework agreements are negotiated between the relevant department and the body, which sets out their governance. This explains the purpose and responsibilities of the organisation, its legal basis and how it should work with its sponsoring department, including the information it should regularly provide to that department. Framework agreements also set out the degree of operational independence of the body, how performance targets will be set, and what will happen if they are not met.

Funding will include direct grant-in-aid from the relevant department, which can be supplemented by other income. This might include revenue from grant funding, endowment funds, fees and commercial services – depending on the financial set-up put in place.

Variations

As mentioned above, there is potential for a standalone ALB option - which would operate under a government department (e.g. DCMS) rather than sit within an existing ALB. It

should be noted that current Government Policy is not to set up new ALBs, ‘except as a last resort, and as such it should not be assumed that approval will be given for such an entity in any but the most exceptional circumstances.’ (Cabinet Office – Public Bodies Handbook – Part 2). Setting up a new ALB requires meeting at least of the Government’s ‘three tests’, which broadly require demonstration of necessary technical function, need for absolute political impartiality and / or delivery independent of ministers (ibid).

National collection as an ALB / adjunct to ALB

Operating as an adjunct to an existing ALB would mean the national collection would be developed within that ALB’s existing operating model.

As such, its functions would need to align with the existing statutory expectations and framework agreement of the relevant ALB or would require changes within that framework agreement.

Funding would fall within the agreed budget of the relevant ALB but would allow additional restricted and unrestricted income to be raised. As some ALBs are also Independent Research Organisations, infrastructure funding to support development and resources around a new function within the ALB could potentially be funded by UKRI.

Of the examples given above, the Science Museum Group (SMG) has an embedded collections centre. SMG comprises five museums and the National Collections Centre (NCC), with one enterprise trading company. In this sense the NCC sits adjunct to / within the SMG, which is an ALB.

Option 2 – Independent Charitable Trust

Operational model description

A charitable trust is established for a charitable purpose that is for public benefit, e.g. relevant to NCAA would be advancement of and access to cultural heritage. The Charitable Trust functions within the remit of an agreed governing document.

Examples

Many museums function under the operational model of a Charitable Trust, although often that model can be shared with a larger body, such as a local authority or university.

Independent examples include The Postal Museum and York Museums Trust.

The Postal Museum is a charitable company, with two subsidiary trading companies, and two charitable trusts – the main one being the Postal Heritage Trust. To protect its archive, the Postal Museum has a second trust which is directly responsible for the collection – this means that if the trading bodies or heritage trust fail, the collection itself cannot be sold.

York Museums Trust also includes a company limited by guarantee with trading elements. Both charitable trusts benefit from being ACE National Portfolio Organisations.

Characteristics

Independent body with charitable purpose. A trust will have a group of people who govern and direct it, the Trustees, who share ultimate responsibility for it. Trustees will ensure public benefit purposes are carried out, will make sure the charity complies with its governing documents and charity / other law requirements, and ensure the charity is accountable.

Charitable trusts enjoy a number of benefits including exemption from income tax, capital gains tax and stamp duty. They are also entitled to 80% relief on business rates. Additional gift aid can be claimed on donations made, and gifts made are exempt from inheritance and capital gains tax.

Charitable trusts are exempt from the rule against perpetuities which applies to other trusts – this means property can be given for an indefinite period to a charitable purpose trust.

Variations

A Charitable Trust could sit within or be aligned to another body, such as a university, covered by other operating models.

National collection as a Charitable Trust

Under this model, the national collection would be an Independent Charitable Trust, and not adjunct to a larger body e.g. a university.

Funding would be raised in line with the charitable purposes of the Trust, and governance would function through a Board of Trustees.

The Charitable Trust would need to set up a trading subsidiary to enable revenue to be raised outside of charitable activities (e.g. archive transfer fees from development / research funding).

As a registered charity, a Trust would be eligible to apply to grant making bodies to support development, although funding would need to allow for investment in infrastructure and resources to support set-up. As a new and independent Charitable Trust, with no track record, a consortium or a partnership approach could facilitate early investment.

Option 3 – University based body

Operational model description

A research institution set up within a university environment, with staff, assets and resources being embedded into the university infrastructure.

Examples

The Archaeology Data Service (ADS) provides a similar example in terms of collection policy, ability to charge for trans-fer fees, and the link to archaeology from development.

The ADS is financed through a combination of project funding and a depositor-charging policy, as well ongoing support from AHRC as part of UKRI's digital research services. It is governed by a management committee made up of representatives of key stakeholders, funders, and users. The role of the management committee is to monitor progress and ensure that the ADS continues to work towards its strategic goals. Members of the ADS management committee serve in a purely advisory capacity and have no legal liability.

The long-term preservation of the data archived by ADS is underwritten by the University of York and the University's Library and Archives.

The Museum Data Service, initiated by The Collections Trust and partners, is also being developed within a university environment (Leicester).

Characteristics

Self-contained organisation within a university department.
Ability to access research funding and grants, including infrastructure funding (e.g. UKRI / AHRC).

Variations

There is potential for a university-hosted body to also be set up as a Charitable Trust and have subsidiary trading options.

National collection as a University hosted body.

Not-for-profit organisation hosted by a university, collection managed and operated under the auspices of the University.

Option 4 – Commercial model

Operational model description

Operating as a commercial enterprise or business, this would require the NCAA to raise revenue from collection accessions and archive and research access.

A commercial model would not prevent an ability to raise additional funding from grants or amenity societies, but would demand commercialisation of archive use and provision of paid services, over and above the other models.

Examples

There are no easy comparable examples for a commercially operated collection, especially within the heritage sector.

DeepStore provides an example of a storage facility which has a fully commercial business model, does include collections from museums, and acts as the primary storage facility for at least one local authority archaeology collection. DeepStore is operated by Compass Minerals, who have run the production facility of Winsford rock salt mines. Over a century of mining has left a void under the countryside that features consistent temperature and humidity levels and is naturally free from the dangers of ultraviolet light, vermin or flooding. In 1998, DeepStore was established as a unique storage space, and today provides a home for art and heritage collections, including those in the collections of The National Archives and Cambridge County Council archaeological archives. DeepStore is a commercial storage facility and does not operate as a collection or publicly accessible archive.

Characteristics

A business model would need to operate from commercial revenue, and not benefit from charitable or grant aid. For an archaeological collection, potential income could be generated from:

- Archive accession fees (transfer fees for development funded archaeology, museum transfers, etc)
- Storage fees for non-deposited materials (e.g. shelf space, cf. DeepStore model)
- Charges to access to collections (datastore fee, bench fees, loan fees, research access, education access)
- In-person experiences (education, café, retail, events, site rental)
- Sale of digital content (tours, virtual exhibitions, subscribers to digital perks)

Variations

All models have the ability to act in some way as trading bodies with enterprise purposes. In this sense, a commercial or enterprise function is likely to form part of most model options.

National collection as a commercial model

All operating model options assume archive transfer will be supported in some way, such as from fees or contributions from development-led archaeology. This represents investment in public benefit from development, balancing the impact of a given development on an archaeological site or landscape with public benefit. Whilst other models assume that access to both the collection datastore and archive would be open to

some extent, the commercial model would need to leverage revenue from end users at all levels (e.g. from individuals to organisations).

As such, in addition to archive transfer fees, revenue would need to be raised from the end user at the point of access, including e.g. use of the index, access to collections for research and education, use of facilities and equipment service charges. Store of materials in a controlled environment, could offer an additional revenue stream as a specialist storage facility for archaeological and other archives. Retail and visitors would also be potential avenues of income, modelling the monetisation of in-person experiences in the museum sector.

Option 5 – Research body

Operational model description

Research body set up outside of a university environment, with direct funding support from UKRI, and an aim to develop as a sustainable model.

Examples

Whilst independent research bodies set up from UKRI or similar funding are not prevalent, some recent initiatives have shared characteristics, or demonstrate the potential support and funding which are currently available.

RICHeS (Research Infrastructure for Conservation and Heritage Science) – a network of facilities, collections and expertise in conservation and heritage science that will secure the UK's reputation for excellence in the field, further capability in the sector and promote collaboration at a national and international level.

NERC (Natural Environment Research Council) – a small collection directly funded by UKRI.

NHM (Natural History Museum) – although the NHM is an existing ALB, UKRI investment in this digitisation programme provides an example of support for efficiencies and new pathways to research which can be made possible by aggregating collections in one place, and ensuring that they're properly rationalised, linked up and searchable.

Characteristics

Self-contained organisation with the ability to access research funding and grants, including infrastructure funding (e.g. UKRI / AHRC).

This model capitalises on the UK governments ambitions to be a global research leader and support for development of research infrastructure. From 2022 to 2025, UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) plans to invest a total of £481 million into a portfolio of research and innovation infrastructure investments to maintain the UK’s position as a research and innovation superpower.

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Variations

There is an option for other operational models to gain Research Organisation status through UKRI, which would make them eligible for research funding.

National collection as a UKRI funded institute

Not-for-profit research organisation managing collections for public benefit and research access. A requirement of UKRI would be that the collections are openly accessible, free of charge to researchers and end users.

Stakeholder perspectives on operational models

A number of stakeholders have been interviewed during the project, providing a response to the nature of possible operating models from the perspective of interface projects, forums and bodies, rather than users. In addition, members of University Archaeology UK (UAUK) were consulted during two online meetings, and some general feedback is included in the following sections. Some individual stakeholders requested that they remain anonymous, and their anonymised responses are included with others and collated here under a series of key themes. Stakeholders who took part in one-to-one interviews include:

- Rebecca Bailey, Historic Environment Scotland (Towards a National Collection)
- Nicky Garland, Archaeology Data Service
- Katie Green, Archaeology Data Service
- Tish Jayanetti, Postal Museum
- Michael Lewis, Portable Antiquities Scheme
- Caroline Peach, on behalf of the National Heritage Science Forum
- Neil Redfern, Council for British Archaeology
- Rob Shaw, Rob Shaw Fundraising
- Chris Taft, Postal Museum

Additional feedback on operational models from user audiences (museums and researchers) is included in the sections below (6 and 7). A SWOT analysis informed by all consultation elements is included at the end of this section (Section 5). Stakeholder feedback around more general themes is also incorporated into the relevant user feedback groups (Sections 6 and 7).

General perspectives on potential of developing a national collection

Interviewees offered a range of insights into the value of developing a national collection, especially in terms of realising the research potential of archaeological collections.

Commentators noted both the inherent significance of the collection in addressing the current difficulty in delivering large scale and impactful research initiatives, and exploring possibilities for their own organisations to benefit from the proposed new body (such as for the National Trust, Portable Antiquities Scheme and National Heritage Science Forum). The suggestion that the concept needed to articulate more fully what was meant by 'national collection', especially in recognising existing collections within local and regional museums, is a key point that resonates with the user consultation (see Sections 6 and 7). In addition, advantages and timeliness in terms of current needs are also noted, such as supporting Regional Research Frameworks or a National Archaeology Strategy, training and entry into the sector, bridging the gap between local and regional perspectives, and community based and private collections.

Archaeological archives in turn in terms of kind of the research is really underexploited, and that is about access and understanding them, isn't it really? Making that case that this is an untapped resource could be really useful for archaeological science. So I like the idea of the NCAA having a research focus – because otherwise, why are we actually holding this stuff? And where do you start with it? (Michael Lewis, Portable Antiquities Scheme)

Yes, anything that makes it clearer where research resources are housed and how you can access them is a good thing. From my sense of the scale of the issue and managing archaeological archives, there quite often isn't the space within the Regional Museum context. So, an offer of somewhere else that has capacity to look after things would be a good thing, and hopefully being part of a network for those that do have the resource and capacity to manage these archives on their own would help make better use of those resources as well. (Caroline Peach, on behalf of the National Science Heritage Forum)

I can certainly see the value in it and I can certainly see our interest in it, because we have the same storage and capacity issues, and whilst we have that side of us that is more a museum that goes through acquisition processes for certain collection items, archaeology has always felt 'other' to that and difficult because the acquisition process is different… I can see the relevance of the national collection and how we might see it as part of the part of the solution to what we want to do. (Anonymous, Stakeholder Interview, ID_S05)

I can see the value in bridging the gap and balancing that place specific and provenance and ownership at a local level, with the value that comes from the connections between certain artefact types or object types and themes – so then creating the space in which that those connections can 25 be explored through that kind of National Archive venue. Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. (Anonymous, Stakeholder Interview, ID_S05)

On the face of it a fantastic idea. But underneath there is an iceberg of issues and interconnected dependencies that possibly doesn't actually make it look like such a

wonderful idea, especially if they are not resolved adequately. (Neil Redfern, Council for British Archaeology)

I like the idea of a national depository or store. However, I don't necessarily support the idea that this national depository is a 'national collection'. We don't actually need to build a national collection - it's already there as constituted by our network or regional and local museums – this needs to be articulated properly. It needs to drive a collective solution. (Neil Redfern, Council for British Archaeology)

Wouldn't it be amazing for archaeology, if we could start answering big questions around landscape change through collections? We just can't do that at the moment. If we could bring together collections, HER data, and answer some bigger questions around climate, around landscaping, environmental change around how people capitalised on resources. At the moment, it's only happening in a very piecemeal way. And the thing I think a National Collection Centre could help with is that idea of setting a big overarching research framework that then local frameworks, regional frameworks can feed off. (Anonymous, Stakeholder Interview, ID_S20)

There are actually many new beginnings about that idea of it [a national collection] being the basis of training for a future workforce, or the basis of some cutting-edge research. It's the basis of some really significant public engagement. Suddenly it flips the dial on how archives are perceived, doesn't it? Suddenly archives are providing something that is fulfilling a really useful, contemporary, relevant purpose. (Anonymous, Stakeholder Interview, ID_S20)

This is where things could become really exciting, there's huge potential for a citizen science project looking at some of those big old collections. And so that's why you can't, in my mind, create a store and say it's the national collection and forget everything else that's already been collected. (Neil Redfern, Council for British Archaeology)

General perspectives on challenges in developing a national collection

Stakeholder interviews offered a range of responses around the challenges and impacts of a national collection. These included consideration of the fundamental question around collection and retention of archaeological archives in terms of being a sustainable model, the size of the challenge, and potential impacts on the existing archaeological ecosystem.

It sounds workable to me, from our perspective, the more the benefits can be shown to be spread around the UK, the better it sounds from a treasury perspective. So, it helps us if there's demonstrable benefit from this program for regional museums… it would be, for UKRI, a major delivery risk if it looked like by setting up a central collection store and

archaeological archive storage centre, we were putting at risk heritage jobs and other parts of the ecosystem. (UKRI)

There really needs to be a lot of thought about how we create the interrelationship of organisations. So actually think about how we make the very best of our local museums, because they have always done local archaeology better than anyone. So how do we have a place where we can create stories that aren't just based on the content of what we found, but actually on what the material can tell us about the past? (Neil Redfern, Council for British Archaeology)

Another important point is that it's not always the new material that is a problem – we have robust collection and disposal policies and statements of significance and research potential for these. It is all the older material collected before PPG16 that was deposited without any assessment that needs addressing. If this project progresses, a robust collection research strategy is absolutely needed, not just for stuff going into this new building, because to some degree, we already know what's going to go into that building. But for all of the material in our existing collections that has not been assessed or consider for its research potential. (Neil Redfern, Council for British Archaeology)

There are obviously some fundamental questions at the beginning about what is the aim? I mean, obviously, archaeologists are brought up to collect and keep everything, and they put it in a public archive, which I don't think it's sustainable. I'm not saying it's a bad idea. But I'm just saying, you know, the amount of material culture that's been created in this world is just, it's massive, isn't it? What your project is envisaging is that we have a joint view that's shared by us all. Whereas the reality is, everybody's thinking about things in terms of their own particular problems, aren't they? (Michael Lewis, Portable Antiquities Scheme)

I personally would have thought that quite a lot of it comes down to whatever the robustness of the financial situation is. It can be a huge benefit to be part of a larger organization, but then you can also be at the whim of decision making that is not entirely within your control as an entity. (Caroline Peach, on behalf of the National Heritage Science Forum)

It is an enormous project. One major benefit is that is not doing what anybody else is doing – and nobody wants to do that work. Need to consider not becoming too big to fail, but too important to fail. We're aiming to make the our own project too strategically important to fail. That's the key, I think, to the sustainability. (Anonymous, Stakeholder Interview, ID_S19)

General perspectives on models for developing a national collection

On approaches to the business model for a new national collection, key general considerations offered by stakeholders were its long-term sustainability, the tension

between national perspectives versus local and regional or community needs, as well as a desire for access to be open and free for users.

I would have thought that the underlying imperative of everything the national collection would be doing is that the model has to be sustainable and recognise that collections come in in perpetuity. On the face of it, I would swerve around some of your options! For example, I think an independent charity sounds vulnerable. And commercial or at least entirely commercial sounds problematic. Collections need long term views, but it is a long-term commitment that is really difficult to get. (Rebecca Bailey, Historic Environment Scotland)

For me, the really key thing is language, and then having a really good understanding of potential and strategy to unlock the value of what is being put together. And really the most detailed mapping of organisations and stakeholders in that conversation. So all those interdependencies can be worked out. I know there are people who have always said when stuff is found "Oh, that's so important, it needs to go to some national collection". And I think that is the worst disenfranchisement we can ever have. However, a dispersed national model could be quite powerful, but what I'm really interested in then, is how do local groups societies, metal detectors and individual collectors and relate to that conversation. (Neil Redfern, Council for British Archaeology)

When we were looking at RICHES, we did look at these options – such as whether to host within or go on your own, and whether it was something should be virtually coordinated and distributed in delivery, or something with walls and a front door. And there was quite a lot of support for the walls and front door idea from, in particular at that stage, the Research Council - because then it's a 'thing'. What we've gone for is what the community wanted – which is the distributed model. Because that was seen to deliver against all sorts of things like evening up geographical capability and providing access to physical resources. But it's still going to be coordinated by a place and an office. (Caroline Peach, on behalf of the National Heritage Science Forum)

I think the main requirements from our perspective would be that the collections are openly accessible, free of charge to researchers and end users. I don't know about the statutory fitting of a new organisation set up for that purpose. It's not an avenue that we've explored before, although I know other councils have more experience in setting up from scratch research institutes, and as independent entities. So that will be somewhere where we could learn from other councils. (UKRI)

I like the idea of a national store, but I only see that working from one perspective. For example, if it is badged under 'The National Archaeological Collection', what then is the totality of the archaeological material in England? What is the value and research strategy around that? And where do we need to do that? And then what is the strategy for display

and dissemination? There needs to be a robust research strategy for all material, we need to understand the totality of what that is, we need to understand what part of this material actually needs the greatest input right now in terms of understanding what it is. I think there is a really important process of looking at it from that perspective. (Neil Redfern, Council for British Archaeology)

Option 1 - Adjunct to an Arm's Length Body

Responses form stakeholders highlighted both the opportunities and challenges of the Arm's Length Body operating model, although all stakeholder consultees felt it was a workable model which offered benefits. Being based within an existing ALB can be seen as an opportunity for providing an existing profile as well as expertise and infrastructure. However, a newly formed ALB brings with it the ability to transcend existing sectoral silos and presents a powerful statement. Identified challenges were linked to issues of bureaucratic administration, working within large and less agile structures, and the potential for contradictory needs and leadership from relevant government departments.

In terms of working within an existing ALB, I guess it's about piggybacking on success, isn't it? (Rebecca Bailey, Historic Environment Scotland)

In the long term, it could try and get IRO status, which is a different route of funding, but that wouldn't be quick because you have to establish your research track record and your research income. On that basis, it's whether you want to be a research body or whether you want to be a provider of collections to research. And of course, within Historic England, you've got that access already. Because there's a lot more money going into IROs than there used to be, through infrastructure, and the IROs are real positive deliverers of benefit. (Rebecca Bailey, Historic Environment Scotland)

Setting up as a new ALB depends on political appetite - that would give it its own profile, I think. Which is important if you want to draw people to it, isn't it and it wouldn't then get subsumed into other people's agendas. What I observe in terms of structures and how things work is that personal connections or areas that you work in create silos – e.g. such as the HEI landscape / national museums landscape / university & museums landscapes, and so something that that is able to transcend those kind of slightly sectoral silos is useful. (Caroline Peach, on behalf of the National Heritage Science Forum)

As you know the way that the FLO network is set up is that there's a central grant that covers most costs that come through the British Museum which is actually DCMS money, and then they're all employed locally within a local organisation… I would think that would be a great model, where you've got someone who's employed locally, within a host partner who is seen as a lead and the benefit for that local partner, is that they would probably get more of this person than any others locally, and would also be seen as a centre of excellence. (Michael Lewis, Portable Antiquities Scheme)

Having worked for somewhere as huge as the Science Museum Group, I would be cautious about becoming part of an existing ALB or large body for various reasons. For example, they're not nimble but can be incredibly slow moving and hugely bureaucratic. They do have huge and impressive fundraising machines that are very effective, but there's the problem then of internal competition for external funds, and a whole issue of sequencing – different parts of a body are not seen as a separate entity. (Rob Shaw, Rob Shaw Fundraising)

The challenge with the ALBs is… would you need to work or operate between different departments (such as DCMS or DEFRA). And the variation between tension and collaboration is huge – and can change on the turn of a coin. For example, I'm paid by DEFRA, but a lot of my deliverables are answerable to DCMS in terms of policy and the ALBs that I operate with. And that's what can flip… it's going to be a challenge to ensure those top level conversations that are feeding out of some of these interdepartmental MOUs are really solid, and also how the ALBs themselves are functioning and in dialogue. So how far is Historic England and Arts Council able to collaborate jointly on a National Collection Centre. (Anonymous, Stakeholder Interview, ID_S20)

Option 2 – Independent Charitable Trust

Almost all consulted stakeholders commented on the ability of any Charitable Trust to set up trading and enterprise elements (e.g. The Postal Museum) or become established as an Independent Research Organisation (e.g. National Trust) to increase opportunities for revenue. This comment is relevant to almost all the proposed operational models but is perhaps most visible within this example. Some felt that the Trust model was vulnerable, especially considering the need to manage long term commitment to storage and access to a level expected for a national collection. Others highlighted challenges in terms of adapting to novel concepts within a constitutional framework. However, potential advantages were signposted in terms of access to funding from grant making bodies and individual donors aligned to the collection's charitable objectives.

I think there's a huge number of advantages of having that Independent Charitable Trust model. Obviously, it offers greater protection to the material being looked after and is not at the whim of other priorities of a different organisation in terms of their organization's funding. Our pricing model is that we actually have two charities and two trading companies. So we have the main charity which is Postal Heritage Trust, which is the primary charity that pays everyone's wages and delivers the main operations and objectives. We then have two trading companies, one called Postal Heritage Trading Ltd, which sells tickets manages the marketing and retail offer, then one called Postal Services Ltd and that manages the relationship with Royal Mail Post Office and the management of the archive. The fourth entity is one that most people have never even heard of, is the Postal Heritage Collections Trust, and that exists only to own the collection that does

nothing else but own the collection. So, if anything goes wrong with the Heritage Trust, they couldn't ever sell the collection to pay off debt. (Chris Taft, The Postal Museum)

I've been really impressed with our board… they are very much advocates of the museum, but we know that they really want us to succeed and not just for the obvious reasons in terms of their significant responsibility as board members, but there's a genuine desire for it. Our board contribute in a variety of different ways very positively - I don't feel that there are any egos at the table, if that makes sense. And I think real terms that our Board has helped us to get to where we've got to, and overall that structure, I think, has helped us helps us greatly. (Tish Jayanetti, The Postal Museum)

As an independent charity, not part of an ALB, just feels very vulnerable. For example, Trusts suffered badly through COVID and had to access individual / small pockets of funding to grow again. Collections don't work like that, you need long-term sustainable commitment to their storage or access, even if you can't do any more than that. They have to be safe and they have to be secure in the long term. (Rebecca Bailey, Historic Environment Scotland)

Being a charitable trust is a fairly onerous model, and the governance requirements are pretty heavy going as well as the accountancy requirement. At the same time though, being a trust, first and foremost, would give you pretty much carte blanche on just about every single major grant making body out there. And would be a very easy message to communicate to potential individual donors as well, e.g. that we are a charitable organisation with a charitable objective. So you could talk about major donors or legacies and all that kind of thing - it's a very straightforward model to communicate. (Rob Shaw, Rob Shaw Fundraising)

There might be those big organisations / sector leaders who might be really interested, so beyond the archive fees being paid for by development, you could also attract supporting partners or founding members, e.g. of a founder's circle of the new National Collection. If you have the CEO of one of those major companies on like the Project Steering Group or wherever, delivering that message as a sector that 'this is our role, and this is what we should be doing' can be supporting those smaller companies and leading the way in making it an acceptable part of that business. It's not mad, but it is massive! (Rob Shaw, Rob Shaw Fundraising)

Option 3 – University hosted body

The existing profile and legitimising impact of working within a university environment were felt to be key advantages of this model. As well as external visibility and brand, the infrastructure and resources that a university host could offer were seen as beneficial, as was the ability to access research funding at both UK and European levels. The perceived big disadvantage was vulnerability to change, especially in terms of securing long term

storage and access to a physical collection. Discussion with members of the University Archaeology UK group (UAUK) highlighted the possibility of a consortium solution rather than a single institution, noting the need for national leadership and national funding.

I can immediately comment on being hosted within a university environment – and the fact that it will provide infrastructure, HR, IT services, things like that, which has significant advantages. ADS is fully embedded within the archaeology department within York, so we're a sub-cost centre of archaeology. However, from a long-term perspective being university hosted can be risky as, if you are not funded any longer, they may literally just cut their losses. Even UKRI can't provide indefinite funding beyond setting up a project as they work on a government funding pattern, so they tend to look at five-year periods. (Katie Green, ADS)

What we're using the university for is profile. The advantage is that, because it's Leicester, it adds to the trust of the sector… And we get is the heft of the University with some seriously expert people who are running research infrastructures that are far bigger. (Anonymous, Stakeholder Interview, ID_S19)

There's a bit of a legitimising effect as well as being part of the University whatever project you're involved in, as you know, we all know so there is an element there. You've got a nice big tick next to your name before you start it, but you could get then with an ALB as well. (Nicky Garland, ADS)

Being part of a university definitely has some advantage in terms of brand. Also in the opportunities that it gives you because there's a lot of research opportunities and funding available to universities. ADS has received lots of European funding over the years, which allows us to do research which has a knock-on effect to the services that we provide our users. (Katie Green, ADS)

So, whereas say, a Charitable Organisation wouldn't be directly fundable by UKRI, they could apply as a partner with, for example, Historic England or National Trust. The other and what we call Independent Research Organisations, a charitable body by itself wouldn't be directly – or normally be directly – eligible for UKRI funding, so we can give money to that directly. That body could be hosted by an existing University or one of the DCMS, Arm's Length Bodies, I guess, HE being the obvious one. And it could be a joint bid and or some kind of consortium led bid. (UKRI)

I'd be surprised if there was that kind of long-term vision and support in place within a single institution, unless there was the cash to do it and support long term. A consortium of institutions coming together could be an option if there was national level funding and national level leadership. (UAUK Member)

Option 4 – Commercial model

In general terms, the commercial model was seen as the most difficult to develop, establish and implement, and many stakeholder consultees felt its outlook would be contrary to the intention for access, public benefit, and research objectives by the proposed national collection. It was noted that most archives, museums and collections operate with an element of commerciality, and that enterprise and trading functions were often seen as a vital strand within a mixed business model. As such there was general acknowledgement that any model would likely include elements of commercial models. Aside from the potential issues around mission and model, the practicalities of administrating income streams from, for example, access to the digital index or physical store, and distribution of income within a hub-and-spoke or partnerships model, were seen as inhibitive. As with Option 2 – Charitable Trust, there are features of a commercial model that would most likely appear in all models to support a sustainable cost model beyond initial development. For example, the need to secure income from archive transfer fees and charge larger grant funded projects for access to the collection.

At HES, we have the national collection for aerial photography, and the collection sits within the organisation overall which is given its permanency and security. But they have substantial commercial income streams… so they have quite an interesting model – although they've been moving towards research funding more as well. It's a bit of a unique one, but it's still that kind of mixed funding position; so you've got core government grants, you've got research grants, you've got commercial income. But you can't have a collection without some sort of core funding that's always going to be there. (Rebecca Bailey, Historic Environment Scotland)

We've rejected a commercial model – and the idea that a service should be charging for museums to deposit. That's a nonsense, because nobody's got money, and it's hard enough to resource depositing data in the first place. The other side - 'okay, well, you can charge the users for that data' - doesn't work either. Because in the first place, it's not our data, so if we were charging for access, then the contributing museums, would want to see some of the funding. How would you then go about divvying that up? You'd have to monitor the use of records to pay out the result and the administration of that would be several times the amount needed just to run the core operation without that commercial element. (Anonymous, Stakeholder Interview, ID_S19)

There's not a lot to choose between being a private company with a charitable arm that does all of your fundraising; and the flip side of that being a charitable trust with the trading subsidiary. If you've got a trading subsidiary, then you can gift aid lots of your profits, and that does bring with it an additional income stream. (Rob Shaw, Rob Shaw Fundraising)

If you're purely commercial, I think that's going to come with costs that would be extremely difficult to manage. I mean, there's something there is something quite powerful about the

idea of it being commercial, but I think equally it would, unless it was set up very carefully, shut a number of doors. Particularly if there's an ambition for a national collection centre to deliver wider public benefit… (Anonymous, Stakeholder Interview, ID_S20)

I would think about how it would take payment? What would the costs be?… that in itself would be difficult. And could you provide [the same] level of service across all your host institutions? If there's no staffing in some collections, then you've got different levels of service offered in different places, and therefore people might be like, why do I pay this much money for this place, but not for this. It will feel like box fees all over again. But ideally, you'd be providing access for free, wouldn't you? That would not be an ideal set up. You can't charge for access to your indexes or anything like that, I don't think. You might potentially be able to charge for access to a physical store, where someone has to sit in a room while those finds are looked at. (Katie Green, ADS)

Option 5 – Independent research institute

Interestingly, the proposition of an independent research institute – as opposed to a university hosted body – was seen as advantageous in terms of increasing research capacity and framing the collection around public benefit. Discussion with UKRI confirmed that this option was certainly possible, and that the concept of the national collection was in line with current priorities in the area of heritage science and would also support centralised and regional infrastructure as part of the national collection. Access to funding via UKRI is clearly a major benefit of this model, and the ability to demonstrate not just the need and benefits, but the sustainability of future cost models beyond infrastructure funding, seen as a vital requirement.

Stakeholders felt this model offered an interesting proposition aligned with the significance of the proposed collection as a national research asset with clear interfaces with other investments, such as recent initiatives including the AHRC / UKRI funded Capability for Collections and RICHeS.

In terms of set-up and funding, it's not unheard of to have the fully funded by UKRI option. And, for instance, the Natural Environment Research Council, manage their own collections of cores of ice and rock – which is smaller scale, but with a similar objective that they should be readily available for researchers to access. UKRI also have a fund specifically set up to enable funding of large-scale infrastructures, and when I say large scale, I mean anywhere between say 10 million and 500 million pounds. We've funded a couple of programs through that route already - the first of which research infrastructure conservation and heritage science is coming online this summer, and that includes funding for supporting access to significant collections of heritage science, and so there are some archaeological collections in there as well. That could be a sort of test case, and we've collected plenty of data in the course of developing the economic case for that program

about the value of having archaeological collections readily accessible to a range of users. (UKRI)

The UKRI model would be interesting… I know there hasn't been anything quite on that scale, but obviously some of those recent rounds of UKRI investment around the kind of creative research capacity and RICHES – so there's clearly some appetite for that… I guess, the pitch has to be that public benefit is being delivered through this infrastructure is set up in a way that it couldn't otherwise be delivered. And presumably, that route to public benefit or part of that route to benefit is the provision of new knowledge and the research angle. So, that feels like it would make sense… to be responsive to that research infrastructure and research funding. I can see how you could build a broad partnership under that umbrella through independent research organisations that have a have a vested interest in that sort of subject matter. Yeah, I think I can see how that would be an effective route. (Anonymous, Stakeholder Interview, ID_S05)

It can be a single centralised store, or it can be a centralised hub and if you like with spokes in different regions, whether that can be something as simple as paying for new block of appropriately climate-controlled storage in a Regional Museum, which is then accessible as a research asset. And you sort of can repeat that 7 or 8 times in different regions at different organisations and those organisations, because we're talking about building a research infrastructure, needn't necessarily be universities or IROs. The main requirement from our perspective is that they would make the access available for researchers coming to us those collections and there's an advantage as well about having them located in museums, because they have the public as a stakeholder, front and centre of their minds. (UKRI)

Importantly it gives us access to infrastructure funding (like UKRI) and also gives the service access to all sorts of research uses of the data, which is where the interest lies. I think over the coming 10 years, having brought this data together, it is then potentially the subject for years worth of really interesting Informatics Research, just as messy in semi standardised, semantically rich but problematic data set. That's the sort of thing that AI scientists just want to fill their boots with. (Anonymous, Stakeholder Interview, ID_S19)

SWOT analysis of operational models – user perspectives

SWOT analysis of each of the operational models has been informed by all consultation methods, including a rapid SWOT discussion workshop attended by museum professionals. Importantly, the SWOT analysis incorporates a user perspective on each model, introducing ethical and cultural responses as well as feedback from a more practical and technical stance.

Option 1 - Adjunct to an Arm's Length Body

Roundtable SWOT analysis of the ALB model demonstrated that people have reservations over this option but also feel it could be a good fit for the proposed national collection. As one participant commented, “in an ideal world the ALB option seems like the right model, but of course this isn’t an ideal world”. Of all the options, this model appears to be perceived as the most balanced in terms of opportunities and challenges, perhaps a result of being a familiar and visible set-up with well aligned examples (and possible ALB hosts) like Historic England, Arts Council England and The British Museum. Different options for a host ALB were discussed and presented different sets of opportunities and weaknesses. There was no clear or single ‘natural’ home for the national collection. On a practical level, building a national collection within an existing ALB was seen as presenting many advantages especially in terms of visibility, resources and expertise. A national body would be in a position to advocate for archaeological collections and museums at a national level and, from that position, offer longer term surety and accountability than other models.

Figure 2: Option 1 – SWOT analysis

Helpful	Harmful
Strengths (Internal)	Weaknesses (Internal)
Familiar model Longevity – can't fail? Expertise for museums without internal experts Straightforward set up – in existing ALB, with existing internal structures and resources Could work better and be stronger proposition as its own ALB, with own terms of reference Chance to advocate for archaeology and museums at a national level Could support regionality (cf. PAS)	Diversity / variability of expertise across regions Clarity over partners joining / exiting the national collection Different weaknesses depending on host ALB if adjunct (e.g. would archaeologists be open to discuss with Science Museum group? Is HE or ACE the right place?) If a new ALB, wouldn't benefit from existing organisational structures / expertise Bureaucracy and paperwork
Opportunities (External)	Threats (External)
An existing ALB comes with trust in a known brand – a new ALB would benefit from an understanding of the model itself Accountability at government level Longevity – can't fail? Or the least likely to fail Could act as a Subject Specialist Network (cf. SMA) Different opportunities depending on host ALB if adjunct (e.g. museums based, heritage or other)	Needs careful consideration of host ALB if adjunct, especially knowledge of both museums and archaeology Funding could be variable, which could impact relationships with hosts / partner bodies Subject to change and risk (cf. English Heritage / Historic England) – lack of long-term security due to political change Would need clarity over mechanism of partners joining / exiting the national collection Administration could be complex, in terms of partnership agreements, service agreements etc Impact on museum sector

Option 2 – Independent Charitable Trust

The Independent Charitable Trust model was viewed as being more vulnerable than some other options, with a limited resilience to change in funding or ability to respond to external factors. Key benefits were seen as the governance opportunities – as far as a good and functioning Board of Trustees is in place. The make-up and need for a Board were also seen as a potential weakness to the model, in terms of diversity and inclusivity, as well as recruitment and retention of good Trustees. Susceptibility to personal agendas and a perceived 'closed loop' around decision-making were noted as risks. From a financial perspective, sustainability is seen as a key weakness, creating a difficult environment within which to manage a collection, for example where visitors and experience are often

the primary revenue streams. Enabling a diverse income with trading subsidiaries or by becoming eligible for research grants were also seen as a strength.

Figure 3: Option 2 – SWOT analysis

Helpful	Harmful
Strengths (Internal)	Weaknesses (internal)
Benefits from Board of Trustee model, who can be advocates and share experience and skills Starting the organisation from scratch would mean it would not be beholden to existing institutions or governance structures Financial benefits are huge – business rates, VAT exemption in some models, Gift Aid etc. Allows for philanthropic support Governance offers a degree of security and protection of assets, even in instances of operational failure Can operate diverse income streams, including trading companies linked to the parent Charitable Trust	Sustaining and recruiting a Board of Trustees can be problematic Reliance on grants or non-sustainable income streams, which can be project based and not support infrastructure Governance has shown to be problematic in terms of diversity and inclusion (recent HE report); personal agendas How would ownership and preservation be managed in terms of long-term care, security and access? Building the infrastructure from scratch is a big job, as is maintaining it Can be seen as a closed loop in terms of governance and decision-making – who monitors Trustees? Reliance on visitors mean priorities can fall on maintaining the experience, rather than the collection (note- not all charities have visitors) Charitable Trusts can be seen as a less attractive employer due to terms and conditions, salaries etc.
Opportunities (External)	Threats (External)
A new independent organisation comes with a clean slate – no perceived idea of what it is, who it represents etc Could benefit from grant funding, such as ACE National Portfolio Organisations Income stream from development means a longer term view, able to support a more sustainable model than CTs reliant on grants and footfall	Funding could be variable, which could result in a tendency to bend towards current grant trends rather than collection needs Sustainability of funding model is a big risk, as is resilience to change, and may be perceived as too risky for partners Priorities towards revenue raising income streams could risk the collection, and relationships with host organisations Bureaucracy of running a charitable trust and keeping up with requirements Why would LA Museums want to support or work with a Charitable Trust?

Option 3 – University hosted body

Despite seeing clear benefits to hosting the proposed national collection within a university environment, the SWOT analysis undertaken with project consultees tended to highlight

the weaknesses and threats of the model above the strengths and opportunities. The culture and physical set-up of a university environment was felt by some to be less welcoming - and even alienating - for non-academic audiences, nor aligned with the principles of access and public benefit beyond research which the concept of the national collection encapsulates. This model was seen as susceptible to the will of the host institution, with a lack of security in terms of both financial viability and long-term security of the collection, especially considering its physical nature. A grant-orientated funding model might focus the national collection’s activities on research and science outcomes more than collections management and access. Benefits from existing in-host expertise, such as HR functions, legal teams, estates management and collections management, were noted.

Figure 4: Option 3 – SWOT analysis

Helpful	Harmful
Strengths (Internal)	Weaknesses (Internal)
Access to UKRI investment and funding Access to other UK and European research funding Great position to improve access to and use of collections Great advocate for research potential of the national collection Presents the ability to offer a diverse geographic access point (e.g. if a consortium model were set up) Could be an easier access point to visiting regional museums - e.g. as a single concept organisation that researchers could visit Benefits from existing infrastructure, resources, expertise and employment frameworks	Collections need to be actively managed; not just research orientated but publicly accessible. Would there end up being preferential access for internal students, or funded research? Lack of security; especially for a physical collection What is the benefit for the university? Very susceptible to change in support, especially as university sector is reliant on specific funding streams or university rankings. Alienating for non-academic audiences; need to manage researcher expectations. Hard to get funding for collections management and infrastructure – focus on research and science. Access could be difficult – bureaucracy and museum requirements interface is quite difficult. Balance of research aims against collections management (e.g. such as destructive analysis). A new concept needs to be developed within the university environment – might be difficult to find host, or support could change with people.
Opportunities (External)	Threats (External)
Being attached to a research institution will come with brand benefits and profile The national collection within a research body gives a strong message in terms of significance and potential – would signpost its existence for research use Attract partners, investors, collaboration and interfaces with other bodies, benefiting the collection as a whole	Public accessibility and potential barriers to access if on a campus, including non-welcoming environments for non-academic audiences Trust – perception that university collections (in archaeology departments) are not always looked after well No more funding assurance than in a Local Authority environment – universities are not financially viable and long-term support not ring fenced or guaranteed Political change and cuts are a threat, as are politics within an institution What external standards and accreditations would the University be working to? Would a university environment support the kind of research and access that a regional or small museum might want to see on hosted collections?

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Option 4 – Commercial model

The SWOT analysis suggests the commercial model is by far the most problematic. Whilst everyone is aware of, and understands, the need for trading subsidiaries within museum and collection environments, the commercial model lacks a required framework which supports and protects the collection for the long term. As a strength, a lack of requirements around governance and transparency would reduce bureaucracy and make commercial organisations more adaptable and flexible to change. However, there is a concern that the set-up itself fundamentally shifts the focus from the principles of collections management, such as access and public benefit. Therefore, a key weakness is that decision-making is based purely on financial concerns and, without the ability to fundraise or apply for grants in the same way as other models, the ability to diversify income is limited. External perceptions are likely to focus on trust and transparency and challenge the collection's motivation under this model. For example, does a commercial entity align with the ethics of museum and heritage professionals (e.g. Museums Association Code of Ethics)? And is it in line with the principles of NPPF? The model has the potential to lose considerable support from internal and external sector audiences, without whom it cannot function. In the words of one participant this model, in particular, is perceived to contradict the "narrative of archaeology as a shared national resource of cultural value".

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Figure 5: Option 4 – SWOT analysis

Helpful	Harmful
Strengths (Internal)	Weaknesses (Internal)
Can be more flexible, adaptable and ruthless in terms of finances Has potential to provide better working conditions and pay than charitable organisations Very limited requirements in terms of bureaucracy, governance and transparency Many museums can only function with a commercial element and trading subsidiaries, with income from cafes, tickets, venue hire, merchandise etc	Susceptible to decision-making based purely on finance – little protection for the functions of a national collection e.g. access, conservation and preservation Would a commercial organisation be able to maintain good remuneration for staff? How can you monetise a collection to make it commercially viable without eroding the core collection principles? Fundamental shift in access offer creates more barriers to use and benefit from the collection Would regionally-based collections and repositories want to – or be able to – work with a commercial model? How does it sit against NPPF and development costs? How would it manage and articulate decision-making around selection and retention strategies based on collection principles, not financial ones? Is this financially sustainable – without access to grants or funding from e.g. UKRI – can it operate from commercial income?
Opportunities (External)	Threats (External)
Operating a commercial or trading entity within an alternative model is sensible and familiar – most museums and collections operate charges for certain types of access, or for cafes and venue functions.	Trust and ethics – perception that a commercially operated collection would not have public interest at the centre of decision-making processes What external standards and accreditations would a commercial body be working to, and who would monitor them? Sends out the wrong message to landowners, developers and external stakeholders – you can make money from archaeological archives Competition? If there are no other options then charges would not be competitive What happens to the collection if it fails? No guarantee embedded into the model to look after collections. Could the collection be sold? A commercial model goes against the reason why museums and heritage professionals do this work, and also against the principles of NPPF – so you lose support from internal and external sector audiences Contradicts the narrative of archaeology as a shared national resource of cultural value How could you charge for maintaining a network, advocating for the collection, or keeping communications going with regional and local collections?

Option 5 – Independent Research Institute

The Independent Research Institute option was arguably the least understood in terms of set-up and existing examples, although participants in the SWOT analysis discussion could see tangible benefits and opportunities. Many felt that more information was needed about how an UKRI funding institute would be developed and how it would operate, and what potential implications it would have for the long-term management and care of a national collection. This perception of an unfamiliar and potentially untested approach was seen as the main threat, but most consultees recognised that this was due mainly to the relatively recent development of UKRI as a body (launched in 2018). Direct consultation with UKRI as part of this project provided substantial insight into the processes that a newly proposed initiative would need to deliver, and the degree of research and consultation required to build a case for support. This requirement, combined with a need to demonstrate public access and outcomes, was felt to be encouraging.

Figure 6: Option 5 – SWOT analysis

Helpful	Harmful
Strengths (Internal)	Weaknesses (Internal)
Publicly accessible and not-for-profit, so aligned with the principles of a 'national collection' Stronger as an independent body, less susceptible to changes and decisions made from above (e.g. with an ALB / university) Embed public access, engagement and research from the outset as a primary motivator for the collection's existence Potential to be more adaptable in terms of bureaucracy, governance and transparency - but depends on requirements of funding body UKRI supportive of regional structures and investing across the UK, so existing regional and local museums could benefit from infrastructure investment during development	Identity – wouldn't benefit from a national profile in the same way as an ALB; could be perceived as research only Potential issues re. funding, UKRI supported for infrastructure and development stages, but after that it would have to be financially viable and future grants may be project / trend based Potential barriers for non-academic audiences, and therefore use
Opportunities (External)	Threats (External)
Ability to collaborate across sectors / existing silos within the HEI / museum / archaeology sectors Initial set-up and investment from UKRI will need in-depth feasibility and consultation, good for stakeholder engagement and broad partnership working Could be linked to an existing ALB Research profile could be a great advocate for the collection in terms of national significance and value	Funding – could rely on research trends Competition for funding and profile amongst other UKRI funded initiatives Susceptible to political agendas Difficult to articulate within existing museum and archaeology ecosystems Unknown and unproven model?

Operational models – discussion

The review and consultation of potential operating models for the proposed national collection of archaeological archives has considered five options: Arm's Length Body, Charitable Trust, University-based body, Commercial organisation, and a UKRI funded research institute. Analysis demonstrates that, rather than there being one lead option, the consultation has revealed common concerns and areas of interest shared by stakeholders and users. In addition, there is recognition that many characteristics of the operating models can be embedded into each, and the SWOT analysis signposts common features across the models.

Stakeholder consultation around the concept of the national collection expresses support for the idea, and caution around implementation. Archaeological archives are generally recognised as an untapped resource that, if made more accessible, could have positive benefits for research and meaningful public engagement. The umbrella of a national collection could have a key role in unifying and better articulating local collections in a national context, and for supporting a strategic approach to archaeology. The potential issues and especially the unintended consequences of setting up a national, centralised body were shared by many – and the need to deliver comprehensive consultation across the museum sector and demonstrate that heritage jobs would not be put at risk, was echoed throughout the interviews. Most expressed concern about the current climate for local museums, especially those operating within local authorities. From that perspective, a distributed model, or at least one which actively supports and benefits local and regional collections, was a common thread. All models were seen as facing a challenge of financial sustainability or having to overcome the challenges of delivering long-term commitment to maintain, sustain and provide access to a collection.

In terms of specific models, Adjunct to an Arm's Length Body (Option 1) was seen as having key advantages of benefitting from developing within something that already exists and providing some assurance of longer-term investment. It was noted that ALBs can achieve Independent Research Organisation (IRO) status, opening up the ability to attract UKRI investment and funding. It was also noted that a new ALB was a possible option, which would allow a new national collection to transcend existing sectoral silos. SWOT analysis indicated that an ALB was seen as a good model from which to advocate for archaeological collections and museums at a national level – and "the right model in an ideal world". Importantly, many felt that any model needed to have government support, recognising that the proposals were based on the need to protect a resource which is of "national cultural value".

An Independent Charitable Trust (Option 2) was felt to be vulnerable by most stakeholders, as well as users taking part in the SWOT analysis workshop. A key risk was perceived to be financial sustainability. As with other models, many recognised the fact

that a Charitable Trust would be able to benefit from access to grants and have trading subsidiaries. A Trust could also become an IRO, as noted above, and be eligible for ACE National Portfolio Organisations funding. Whilst stakeholders speaking from the perspective of a Charitable Trust expounded the benefits of working within the governance structure of a Trust, some taking part in the SWOT analysis felt the requirements – including the need for a Board – could become a weakness and threat. Other concerns raised by SWOT analysis, such as guarantees against failure, could be addressed through implementation of measures to protect the collection (for example, as shown by The Postal Museum with its two Trusts structure, see above). A key benefit for this option was seen as its independence from other host bodies, as well as advantages inherent to all charities such as business rates, Gift Aid, and VAT exemption.

Setting up a new collection on the scale of the proposed national collection for archaeological archives was not felt conducive to a university hosted environment (Option 3) or perceived to be financially secure – even by those currently working within the HEI sector. SWOT analysis highlighted many weaknesses, especially for any partners, users and beneficiaries that do not work within academic institutions. The issue of long-term security and being at the mercy of the host institution's ideas and practices was felt to be a very real concern. Consultees cited examples of university cuts impacting archaeology departments, and thereby leaving archives susceptible to loss (such as at University of Birmingham in 2012), and the similar situation with university museum collections (such as the Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture in 2023). As with the ALB model (Option 1), a primary advantage was profile and brand, and the legitimising effect of being in a university. In addition, the positives of having access to UK and European funding, as well as resources, such as HR and legal teams, were seen as strengths.

The commercial model (Option 4) was the least favoured among the consultees, as most felt that an enterprise-led structure was not aligned with the concept of the proposed national collection for open access and public benefit. Notably, a key weakness and threat was the potential relationship with development-funded work – with the cost of archaeology in development framed within the structure of NPPF and sustainable development and public benefit. Having noted a general lack of enthusiasm across both stakeholder and user groups, most were cognisant that all models would (to some extent) need to embed commercial features. For example, some kind of archive transfer fee would support a sustainable financial model within other options, and that idea is well understood and supported. In addition, SWOT analysis illustrated a general acceptance that some levels of access might attract fees (for example, for large research projects). Stakeholders highlighted that access to the proposed collection datastore would need to be open and free – and that monitoring and distributing income through monetisation of the collection would be administratively complex. In a wholly commercial set-up, SWOT analysis indicated that the security of the collection was felt to be at risk, and that questions around

trust and ethics would dissuade local and regional museums becoming part of the network. On the plus side, SWOT analysis noted that the commercial model was the most adaptable to change, being more responsive in its set-up than other options.

The final model – a UKRI funded research institute (Option 5) – has many features that were seen as beneficial, especially amongst stakeholder groups and researchers (see Section 7). Discussions with UKRI provided a good background to this option, although it was clear from the SWOT analysis that many consultees felt unfamiliar with how it might be set up and implemented. Benefits in terms of advocacy around the significance, research potential, and value of the collection were broadly noted, as was the ability of an independent UKRI funded body to transcend the perceived silos which exist within and between relevant sectors. Both stakeholder and SWOT analysis saw this option as less susceptible to change imposed from host bodies, but there was a general agreement that the model did not offer greater financial security than other options, such as the ALB model (Option 1).

Overall, the least favoured options were the University Hosted (Option 3) and Commercial models (Option 4). The Charitable Trust (Option 2) and University Hosted (Option 3) models were seen as the most vulnerable, whereas the Arm's Length Body (Option 1) was perceived the most aligned to the core proposition of the national collection. A UKRI funded research institute (Option 5) is perhaps best described as having a lot of interest – with support from the stakeholder group and intrigued interest from user audiences. A pragmatic approach which borrows characteristics from all models would seem to be a sensible one, if it can be made workable. An operational model able to benefit from national leadership and research profile, with the ability to facilitate collaborative cross-sector working, and secure sustainable income through a combination of commercial fees and fundraising, would combine the strengths of all options and address some of the more fundamental weaknesses.

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6 Consultation – Museums

Aims

Consultation with museums addressed three questions:

- What are the opportunities and challenges identified by existing repositories and museums on the concept of a National Collection?
- What kind of access to archives held in a central store might be required for those museums which may otherwise have held this material locally?
- What are the pros and cons of different business/operating models for running such a National Collection?

Museum consultation responses are collated from two sources. First, online interviews with 18 individuals, held between 12 February to the 19 March 2024. Two interviewees wished to remain anonymous (Museum A, Museum C). Second, respondents to an online survey for museums of which seven responses were provided anonymously. Consultees represented museums with different types of governance including Local Authority and Charitable Trusts and were located within different regions of England. These museums represent different types of collecting activity including museums that have never collected archaeological archives, those that have stopped collecting, and those that are still actively collecting.

The key themes emerging from the consultation are summarised below, while full transcripts form the one-to-one interviews can be found in the appendices.

Several museum curators suggested that it was difficult to fully engage with the consultation due to the lack of communication and background information around the national collection proposals. For example, Caroline Morris, Corinium Museum, commented that “A national strategy is a good idea, but it is too vague a plan at the moment to express interest.” This was also viewed by the Claire Sussums, Museum of London, who stated that “from an organisational point of view we would want to understand far more about what physical centralisation meant”.

Many respondents stated that their responses represented their personal professional views and must not be taken to represent the views of their employing institution.

Key themes

Respondents represented a range of museums including those with collecting capacity for archaeological archives, those with limited capacity, and those that have ceased collecting. The consultation also sought response from museums which have never

collected archaeological archives, and areas where no collecting repository exists (see Methodology).

The key themes arising from the consultation with museums and collecting institutions included the opportunities and challenges around:

- Changes to existing collecting practices
- Changes to financial structures
- Ownership of archives
- Standardisation of practices
- Access- use of archaeological archives
- Access- location considerations

While some generalisations can be drawn from responses from differing types of collecting institutions, these are not clear cut. Expressed views depend on the individuals involved, the history of the collecting institution, external pressures, and the governance and financial structures in which they operate.

Opportunities- Perceived benefits of the proposed national collection

In general, museums that are currently closed to the deposition of archaeological archives were strongly in favour of a national solution. The proposed national collection was considered as an opportunity to solve the issue of un-depositable archives within their collecting areas, and with the potential to transform how archaeological archives are produced, accessed, and curated. The perceived positive outcomes include increased access to collections for their own institution, researchers, and members of the public via an online digital datastore, and access to expertise to facilitate better understating and increased use of their current holdings.

Paul Taylor from Shakespeare Birthplace Trust saw the proposed national collection as facilitating a proactive approach to collections management which would ensure archaeological archives were in the best place to be seen and used by the widest possible audience. One museum curator suggested they would consider reopening to project notifications even if the archives were to be deposited within a national store, so they could be part of the decision-making process (Zoe Wilcox, Museum in the Park). In addition, some museums with current capacity to collect perceived a positive benefit from being within a national infrastructure for the collection and curation of archaeological archives. In one area where no collecting repository currently exists, the concept of the NCAA was seen as an easy solution to a significant problem. The following quotes demonstrate the range of opinions.

Please do emphasise that it doesn't make sense for museums to just carry on as they are. (Thomas Cadbury, Royal Albert Memorial Museum)

We just don't have any capacity to take those collections, and we have no plans to do so in the future. For us, there's an obvious benefit of being able to make them accessible and to preserve them in a way that we are just not able to do at the moment. (Zoe Wilcox, Museum in the Park)

There are opportunities there that such a network could enable us to unlock collections by providing access to the bits we are missing, which is really that expertise and knowledge-understanding where our collections fit into that wider context. (Paul Taylor, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust)

The idea of the NCAA is really useful, it would be great, and it solves this issue of museums running out of space, people not having access, and museums not having a specialist anymore to be able to put it onto our systems. Having a national repository for any excavation archives found in the country go to, which are processed the same way, and they have the same standards, and they're accessible in the same way would be much better than it coming to Birmingham Museums. (Emily Locke, Birmingham Museum Trust)

The fact that they [Wolverhampton Museum] are not interested makes it easier. In all future Written Scheme of Investigations for archaeological work, we will just say the archive will be deposited at NCAA or suitable local repository. As there is no suitable local repository, this will default to NCAA. (Ellie Ramsey, City of Wolverhampton Council and Walsall City Council)

Just having one central place where you can go to find out where anything is in the country, I mean a digital place, yes that would be incredibly useful. (Museum B)

We are very keen to take a proactive approach to collections management to make sure that the materials in the best possible place where it can be seen and used by the widest possible audience. (Paul Taylor, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust)

We have an unsustainable model, and museums have an unsustainable model in terms of collecting. In that they do not collect sustainably. So, we need to come up with a model for logical collecting that is sustainable, and that would be partly about not collecting so much stuff. (Hedley Swain, Brighton and Hove Museums)

I feel that my museum would be interested in becoming part of the NCAA especially as Archaeology makes up a large part of our collection but is underused by our audiences. (Museum A)

Maybe I sound quite reluctant, but I think it's just because change is scary. But I think it does definitely sound like a really fantastic resource. (Georgina Barrett, Museum of London)

Creation of a NCAA presents a significant opportunity to all stakeholders in archaeological collections, as thoroughly demonstrated by the several reports to date. Conservation is a vital aspect to the potential success and sustainability of these opportunities… Not just preventive conservation, but interventive treatment of these collections to ensure their legibility and accessibility... [The NCAA] is an opportunity to support and enforce the full and proper provision and execution of conservation in planning, WSIs, and post-ex work (ICON Archaeology Group)

Challenges- The need for integration with existing structures

Concerns were raised about the impact of the proposed national collection on museums and institutions that currently collect archaeological archives. Most especially, significant concerns were raised around the lack of capacity within current systems to implement meaningful change. Several respondents were keen to highlight that there are many geographical areas and collecting institutions where the current archaeological archive deposition and curation is functioning well, and that any national solution should not supersede or nullify that provision. Further, several curators highlighted that no solution is forever, and that museums and local authorities would need to assess take-up against any potential long-term risks. Two respondents highlighted the need to associate any new national collection with Historic Environment Records. Two respondents also raised concerns about monitoring and enforcing the practices of commercial archaeology, and the need to ensure that any new national systems and standards are monitored and enforced.

The NCAA is potentially going to be completely transformative for archaeology if it's done in the right way. But I think it could be really, really detrimental as well. (Ben Donnelly-Symes, Northamptonshire Archaeological Resource Centre)

They also need to consider that they're not coming into a system that's entirely broken. There are places where the system works. So don't just ride roughshod over the top of it if it's working. If it's not working fair enough, improve it. (Caroline Morris, Corinium Museum)

The really, really important thing is that you don't reinvent the wheel. What would be a nightmare is if you created a national scheme, and it then started inventing education programs or outreach programs when you have already got those in local museum services. (Hedley Swain, Brighton and Hove Museums)

I would imagine that the LA would like assurances of what would happen to the material if NCAA was to close, if the museum storage space has been re-purposed the museum might not have capacity to accept the material back. (Museum A)

The knowledge of that longevity, and what the commitment was, is really key to long term decisions by museums and councils. That [NCAA central store] won't go on forever either, will it? And I suppose what the exit plan is, is important too. What would we do with 10 million archive boxes if the whole thing fell apart and the funding stopped? (Museum B)

With our collection, the local HER is quite well linked with our holdings, so thinking about what would need to happen in terms of the HER as well as our database would be quite important for us. (Museum C)

Counties have the Historic Environment Record… They should be involved in some way. (Nick Booth, Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust)

What happens if in the long term the central store is not sustainable? What is the safety net? (Museum Survey 2)

Some contractors are much better at actually fulfilling what their requirements are than others. (Thomas Cadbury, Royal Albert Memorial Museum)

Stuff is supposed to go on to ADS but what we've found is that the contractors don't actually do it. So there's a huge disparity between sites that should be on ADS and the number of sites that are actually on ADS. But we haven't been actively - apart from having a very cursory look - we [the HER team] haven't been actively monitoring in terms of what the contractors are doing, so there's not been any kind of enforcement. (Museum C)

Changes to existing collecting practices

Opportunities to create space within museums

Several museums identified the potential opportunities that a national repository represented for space creation. For those museums that still collect archaeological archives, or that have recently closed to archive deposition, the potential to transfer whole archives or partial archives was seen to be a positive proposal. Views about splitting archives (some parts housed in a central store and others in the individual museum) differed across museums. Many considered the option to split the archive was in line with normal museum collecting practices, with the ability to choose what would remain physically in their collection (for exhibitions, outreach and engagement activities) while passing on assemblages they considered to be of less use within a museum setting. Some museums that currently do not collect archaeological archives suggested that alternative storage provision could provide an opportunity to open (or re-open) to archive deposition.

Most museums suggested that they would wish to continue collecting (or to re-open to collecting) archaeological material from developer funded projects, be that whole archives or individual objects, but in a manner that aligned with their collecting policy.

Variations on the collecting would be absolutely brilliant, we are open to the possibilities. (Hedley Swain, Brighton and Hove Museums)

There could be advantages to the rest of the collections if we were able to send say the bulk finds off to a central hub. (Ali Wells, Herbert Art Gallery and Museum)

The NCAA for bulk archaeology would be very useful for future and existing material. Keep nice things locally. (Liz Selby, Dorset Museum)

We will be getting pretty full in a few years . . . We are going to need an alternative in the future. I would certainly be considering moving some of the bulk archive out in the future. (Judith Stevenson, Herefordshire Museum Resource and Learning Centre)

For the new excavation archives coming in, that would be easier for us to say we no longer take that in; it needs to go to the NCAA as the National Repository, the same way that we don't take the digital paperwork, and we don't take any ownership of that digital paperwork. (Emily Locke, Birmingham Museum Trust)

The option to transfer those developer led collections that we have previously taken in, that could help us free up space for other collections within our stores. (Zoe Wilcox, Museum in the Park)

We would still want to collect, but it might be more targeted collecting, selecting what the museum really wants to retain. What archaeologists collect is not the same as what a museum service would collect- we want to dynamically collect things that are relevant to us. (Hedley Swain, Brighton and Hove Museums)

We would wish to retain and continue to collect archaeological archives from specific sites or ones of particular local significance. (Museum Survey 1)

Museums use archives for exhibitions and to tell their stories of local things. I'm all in favour of a centralised place where we can put some of the material that is of less interest from the museum perspective; but of great interest, historically, archaeologically and for researchers- some of your bulk material that you might not necessarily use. . . We'd want to separate out all the things that we could potentially put on display and use. When it's in a store a long way away- it is easier to just not do it at all. (Judith Stevenson, Herefordshire Museum Resource and Learning Centre)

At the moment we're considering ways of somehow keeping bulk material from archives which has a high research potential but has a low current use potential. In particular there is slag from iron working sites. We are getting a lot of things which fit criteria for collecting in terms of its research potential but we have nobody who wants to see it currently, and therefore it takes up a lot of room... So there is an obvious idea which means that we can either free up storage space for other collections, or mean that we don't need so much

storage space in total… There is often a tail off in use of new material that there is a high level of usage when it comes into RAMM, and then it tails off fairly dramatically - apart from a few pieces that then continue to have high usage. So having another place where the stuff could be kept would be extremely useful. (Thomas Cadbury, Royal Albert Memorial Museum)

It would free up space at our stores and take some of the admin burden. (Museum Survey 1)

If the annual cost of storing material at the central store was significantly lower than the commercial store (and this is to include travel costs and staff time) we may consider it. (Museum Survey 2)

Challenges around the capacity to implement change

Integration with a new national system was a practical concern for nearly all the collecting institutions. Many stated that the required changes to collecting practices to enable engagement with a national system were not currently scheduled or resourced. Museums would require additional staff time and funding to create and upload data, catalogue existing archives, and make decisions about retention and rationalisation prior to transfer. This situation was reported for all types of institution including those currently collecting archives, those with limited space, and those that would consider opening to the collection of archaeological archives as part of the proposed national collection. These essential collections management tasks would need to be resourced by the proposed NCAA due to a lack of funding and capacity within existing governance and finance structures. The ability to implement change is also affected by the governance of each museum or repository.

…to send existing material (e.g. bulk finds) to NCAA would require time, staff and funding – we can't send anything offsite without documenting what is being sent. (Liz Selby, Dorset Museum)

A complication for us is that we don't own any of the material we look after. We look after it on behalf of owning organisations [local authorities]. And they provide us with funding for our services each year. So, we don't have a totally free hand in what happens to the material. We need to make a recommendation, get it agreed with the Council. And we'd also need to be quite wary, about the impact that might have on funding from the council, because we wouldn't want that to be reduced. (Museum C)

Further, museums positively perceived the concept of a national collection of archaeological archives and data store that could include archives currently held within museum. It was thought that additional capacity through the proposed national collection could improve access to archives, support selection and retention activities and create space within the existing museum system.

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However, concerns were raised around the recourses and additional staffing required to engage fully with the requirements around digital data. Institutions strongly stated that such tasks would need to be funded as part of the proposed national collection to enable museums to ‘sign up’ to a national system.

There are just not the resources to do the recording, to create that data- basically, you need people. (Judith Stevenson, Herefordshire Museum Resource and Learning Centre)

My main concern is documentation and how it would work to pass information over to NCAA. Huge resources of time and money needed which we can’t do without significant funding. Would need time, staff and funding. (Liz Selby, Dorset Museum)

If we were to open up again to taking notifications for new projects that would obviously have a knock-on effect on our staff time, we already feel that we are capacity with that. (Zoe Wilcox, Museum in the Park)

With new data you might be able to do it in a certain way, but anything old is never going to get updated. So it would be working with the data that we've got, and an acknowledgement that actually that data is unlikely to be changed in any meaningful way unless someone else does it. (Nick Booth, Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust)

We only do so many research loans a year just because of the resource it takes. (Alexander Chalkley, Birmingham Museum Trust)

That is a capacity and skills issue that we haven't properly resourced so far. (Hedley Swain, Brighton and Hove Museums)

A team at the national repository that could advise around rationalisation and disposal of existing archives, that would be really useful... To enable greater access to existing collections and support the existing museum system and the existing archaeological record it could consider ideas around how to help people with selection and disposing of existing archives... a centrally funded support system could really help the existing system and potentially create years’ worth of collecting space. (Ali Wells, Herbert Art Gallery and Museum)

The resources and capacity that would be required to import the data into this national system has also got to be considered because it that is now above and beyond what we are doing; its adding another layer of work and more to do. (Museum B)

We would possibly look at any future archives from city of Birmingham going there, but anything we've already started to catalogue, that's when it gets trickier and would take a lot of resources before we could then send it. At the moment not everything is catalogued necessarily to a high level, and we would want to know exactly what's in the boxes before it goes anywhere. Once it's with the NCAA, if we wanted to do an audit check to make sure

everything's still there, etc., we would know what we were comparing it to, and we just don't have the resource to go through all the finds boxes to do that, to safely say we are giving you this to the look after for us. (Emily Locke, Birmingham Museum Trust)

We would welcome the opportunity to link our existing digital data to a centralised data scheme. And for it to be available to others. Data / technical support probably required, along with time availability for volunteers. It would all depend on having capable volunteers at the time. (Alastair and Bridget Wheeler, Beaminster Museum)

If something like NCAA was set up then there would be upfront a huge amount of work to enable the various systems to mesh together. And then potentially the amount of work locally would tail off, if a lot of that was shouldered by a national archive. Then yes there would be a chunk of work that is done locally [now] that wouldn't be needed. (Thomas Cadbury, Royal Albert Memorial Museum)

In an ideal world it would be lovely, but our collection is already online, ADS holds information. It would be lovely to have an all singing, all dancing central data set, but the costs would outweigh the advantages - I'm presuming you would want local partners to contribute and that is where we cannot. (Museum Survey 2)

The logistics of doing so may be beyond the current staff resource/time/budget etc. that is available to prepare for such a transfer. Would need to know more about the operating model, costs, access, ownership etc. (Museum Survey 4)

Changes to financial structures

Opportunities and practical implementation

Museums were asked about the potential impact of a standardised deposition fee. For museums that currently do not collect archaeological archives this was not perceived to be an issue, as they are not currently benefiting from a deposition fee and their curatorial role is not reliant on that income. This view was also the case for those collecting museums where archaeological archives formed only as small part of their provision, or where deposition fees are not linked to staffing and resources.

Deposition fees become part of the overall museum budget so the curatorial team would not be directly impacted if they reduced due to some archives being deposited nationally. (Ali Wells, Herbert Art Gallery and Museum)

A couple of museums considered that the proposed national collection may be financially beneficial to the museum sector and the local authorities in which they sit. These positive perceptions included the national collection taking over roles and responsibilities that the museum currently performed and supporting additional activities through grants and storage. Several respondents suggested that if finances were managed centrally, hub or

partner museums in the NCAA could benefit from grants or apply for funding as needed (for example, Caroline Morris, Corinium Museum). Two respondents regarded a national collection as supporting jobs within the sector and improving skills development and careers.

We don't really want another building, so what this is doing is resolving the issue of having to provide more space. Financially, it's more prudent for the Council to pay an extra day a week, to administrate the process, than for them to actually provide a new facility which will need staff, heating and everything else. I can certainly see that it's financially better for local authorities to have a national archive, even with the extra administration that would involve for the staff in the museum. (Judith Stevenson, Herefordshire Museum Resource and Learning Centre)

I would not be concerned about the impact on curatorial jobs, as there is no dedicated Archaeology Curator at the museum, it would probably free the team up to focus on other collections, community working, exhibitions etc. (Museum A)

Promotion and public engagement within the NCAA, because those ticks some of the councils' boxes. (Ellie Ramsey, City of Wolverhampton Council and Walsall City Council)

A central pot of money would be helpful, yes! In terms of our organisation, our collections team is two people for the entire collection, which is more than 3 million objects - and that's the staff for everything. We don't have any documentation support. There's collections care - we don't have any in-house conservators. So any ways of boosting that capacity would be helpful. (Museum C)

The most important point from my perspective to emphasise is using the [NCAA] project as an opportunity to think about how you can support posts in regional museums. Because it would be a shame if expertise got eroded or jobs were lost as an unintentional side effect of the project. (Museum C)

There is the thing about the sector itself - jobs and continuing pipelines into the sector and ensuring expertise in the future. A distributed model may support that because potentially there is more variety of work there. (Claire Sussums, Museum of London)

Museums were consulted about how they would expect the implementation of a standardised deposition fee to be processed and allocated, and the potential impact of lost fees on current curatorial provision. These questions were most relevant to those museums that currently collect archaeological archives. Several respondents had questions around the practical processes of a centralised approach in addition to existing local authority structures, and questioned which costs would be passed onto museums. The majority of respondents thought the deposition fee should be allocated to where the

archive was being deposited for its long-term curation. Two respondents from museums that voiced awareness of the impact of potential lost income.

Fees are important as its essentially links us to saying we're taking responsibility for this collection and storing it. I'd be very surprised if, as an institution, we would be comfortable with moving away from that model. (Finbar Whooley, Museum of London)

Fees go some way towards the costs that the museum bears to bring material in, store it in perpetuity and give access to it. (Claire Sussums, Museum of London)

Fees go into the central pot. They notionally offset some storage costs, such as rental costs of the [storage] units. [But]If income stopped [to RAMM], we would have to slim down what [storage] units we hold. So we would then seek to transfer more of the historic material to a central archive. (Thomas Cadbury, Royal Albert Memorial Museum)

The income from the depositions is ringfenced and can only be spent on work relating to archaeology. The loss of income from archaeological depositions would have to be communicated clearly, especially if there is an increase in expenditure relating to archaeology – for example an annual fee. (Museum A)

If we're retaining part of the archive and part is going to the central store, I would see that the fees split along those lines. I would initially envisage the deposition fee continue to come through the museums, but we would be open to alterative arrangements too. (Ali Wells, Herbert Art Gallery and Museum)

It would get complicated if it was a partial deposition. It might be that the NCAA doing all the admin, if it's coming to you, and that we just take a partial bit from the developer. Therefore, we wouldn't get much of the payment. (Emily Locke, Birmingham Museum Trust)

Would there be a cost into accessing our own material? (Ali Wells, Herbert Art Gallery and Museum)

Would it be possible to charge the researchers? It's not something we like to do generally, so if the national collection supported that activity financially that would be considered a positive. (Ali Wells, Herbert Art Gallery and Museum)

Challenges - concerns about the impact on existing provision

Concerns were raised around the impact that a potential national collection could have on those museums and institutions that currently collect archaeological archives. Several museums expressed challenges that they are currently facing due to pressures on council budgets and local authority finances. Respondents stated that where deposition fees are retained and utilised directly for the care and curation of archaeological archives, they do

not in any way cover that long term care. All repositories reported that archives are supported financially at a local level.

Archives are one of the few ways collections can make money. (Caroline Morris, Corinium Museum)

If there's a museum out there making lots of money out of this, tell me about them! (Hedley Swain, Brighton and Hove Museums)

If the National Store could be cheaper to use, then the local authorities will use them, and essentially just stop us even though we would be able to provide a better service to people locally in Northamptonshire. (Ben Donnelly-Symes, Northamptonshire Archaeological Resource Centre)

Resources and the capacity become withdrawn and withdrawn and withdrawn and withdrawn further on a local level. And if we're not careful, we're going to end up with very few museum archaeologists across the country. (Museum B)

The deposition fees contribute to paying for extra curatorial time, resources (boxes etc) and any remedial conservation (on archives that did not have post-ex funded, or older archives). (Museum Survey 1)

Not in the short term- but in the long term yes. It is not just the income from the deposits to consider, this allows us to accession the archives, but it will affect us applying for Section 106 money to cover storage costs for the following 10 years. (Museum Survey 2)

Concern was raised that the creation of the national collection could be seen by local authorities as a means of reducing local expenditure, or outsourcing archive storage provision to the national collection as a cheaper option. The non-statutory status of museums within local authority provision added to these concerns. One curator expressed concern about how whether contractors could choose to deposit at their local museum or nationally, and the likelihood that the commercial unit would choose whichever was the cheapest option, leading to disjointed archive storage and access.

We actually make, not loads, but a relatively substantial income relating to archaeological archives... So that's income we would not want to lose. And we could probably make more, as we've been quite passive in terms of just accepting depositions from people when they're ready to deposit. I guess it would make sense to for us to participate if there was a nationally-set set of fees, I think that would make sense. We make most income from charging an upfront fee rather than the actual deposition of boxes, because that’s the point at which people have money. Basically we wouldn't want to lose the income if possible, but obviously if the stuff was being stored in the national store it would be reasonable for something to be diverted towards paying. (Museum C)

If this is a national store being paid for centrally/being sustainable, what incentive is there for local authorities to continue funding their own museums or repositories? (Ben Donnelly-Symes, Northamptonshire Archaeological Resource Centre)

It could become a form of commissioning out and when you commission out a service you tend to lose all of your in-house capacity, experience and knowledge- it's a very local authority experience. (Museum B)

My concern is that by not giving the local authorities the responsibility as part of the planning system that they understand and plonking it in a national store- that's out of sight and out of mind. (Museum B)

Here we ought to be talking about the collection of archives being a statutory function. It is a statutory function, but obviously not of museums, and I think that technicality is a really important one. (Museum B)

In our area the units choose the cheapest option. So, archives from the same site/different phases end up in different museums. Tullie charges for deposition but Senhouse doesn't. So, the site archive has been split. If one museum signs up to NCAA and the other museum doesn't, the contractor will choose the cheapest fees/costs to determine where the archive is deposited. (Elsa Price, Tullie Museum).

This potentially provides an opportunity for employing museums to reduce staffing/expertise required for managing and making archives accessible at a local level. There are concerns about the capacity for staff responsible for the remotely managed NCAA collections to accumulate locally relevant knowledge and understand the local community context. Income from deposition fees we receive contributes to our overall collections management budget and would be a significant loss. (Museum Survey 4)

As a curator of a local authority museums service this is my main concern. The council are likely to see this as a cost cutting measure and my job would be axed. (Museum Survey 5)

Ownership of archives

Opportunities - Retention of Ownership

Most respondents concluded that they would prefer ownership of archaeological archives from their collecting areas to be with their museum, regardless of the physical storage location of that material. The reasons for this were varied and included complexities of the deaccessioning and disposal process, ability to access and use the archives for exhibitions and engagement and recording researcher engagement as a reportable metric. The preference to have ownership of archives was stated by museums that currently collect archives, and those that have closed to archive deposition. Where no collecting repository existed (Wolverhampton and the Black Country), it was thought that ownership could pass

to the national collection with the stipulation that access would be fully supported when requested.

I would hope they [the council] would go with any recommendations we'd make. I think the ownership would have to be retained by the Museum service. That would be simplest- we are the owners- we're just using a storage facility to store our collections. (Judith Stevenson, Herefordshire Museum Resource and Learning Centre)

I think that [retaining ownership] would be a much simpler scenario, because then you're not disposing of it. You are in a position where you're essentially making a loan. (Museum B)

We are a charitable trust, with the collections being owned by the City Council so there is quite a complex and long-winded process for us to dispose of objects. Retaining ownership even if the archives were held at a centralised store, I think, that would get us around that process. (Ali Wells, Herbert Art Gallery and Museum)

If we then decided to send that over to the NCAA, it would be for us all to discuss whether your store it on our behalf as a loan and therefore that raises questions around access and security, where your facility is going to be, how will it be insured, etc. Or whether we would be transferring ownership to you, and therefore we would have to go through a disposal process- that takes a while all but it's doable. (Emily Locke, Birmingham Museum Trust)

All accessioned collections are owned by the city - would need highest level cabinet approval for changes to be made. (Museum Survey 4)

Challenges around ownership and loan agreements

Many museums considered the transfer of archives could be manged through current loan systems. They also stated that any national collection centre would need to meet current professional standards for curation, care and monitoring, before such loans could be agreed (this is explored further in Section 6 below). Several museums thought that nationally agreed standards and robust collection and curation practices would be essential.

All of these concerns are technical details. I'm sure we could come up with a protocol process by which either we (repository) retained ownership or we transferred ownership. I mean, that's what museums do- we have quite recently transferred one of our big objects from us to another museum through the normal channels. (Hedley Swain, Brighton and Hove Museums)

You would probably need some sort of memorandum of understanding or contractual agreement, where it was really clear at what point decisions were made, by whom, when deferred to the host, and at what point the decisions had to go back to the originating

organisation… What would be really helpful to sort out is a set of template agreements, the national collection would say these are our template processes, and we could all use them- that would give it a framework of commonality, a sense of assurance. (Paul Taylor, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust)

Any changes to existing ownership systems, and ultimately the adoption of the NCAA would have to be signed off at Local Authority level. (Museum A)

We would be open to loaning the material in and out of the NCAA, but requests would have to be authorised by the museum. It would also have to be clear whether the loan documentation from the museum or from the NCAA would be used. (Museum A)

We would need evidence that you will make the archives publicly accessible as well as to researchers and universities and to enable that material to leave the store. We would then go through the formal process of transfer/disposal. (Museum Survey 2)

Some respondents perceived issues around the legal Transfer of Title of the finds and archive owner to the repository to be problematic. They suggested that without a change to national policy many undepositable archives would remain that way.

Realistically, if you are building a national store then ToT [Transfer of Title] needs to be managed on a national level with national legislation to ensure that all archaeology from fieldwork is owned by the state. Otherwise, it would be an absolute nightmare to manage all of the sites that do not end up in public ownership at a national level. (Ben Donnelly-Symes, Northamptonshire Archaeological Resource Centre)

There are some unbelievably good archives stuck at Cotswold Archaeology that we can't have because of no ToT [Transfer of Title]. So, a national strategy for ToT could be great- we just have to work out how that fits in with us. (Caroline Morris, Coronium Museum)

Many respondents raised concerns about who would make decisions about the use of material which was within museum ownership but held centrally. These concerns included who would manage and approve the research process; who would approve the loan process; who would make decisions about access and collection care priorities; who would make conservation decisions, destructive analysis decisions; and who would approve access to human remains. Further, who would monitor and document the resulting activities. It was noted that Accredited and non-accredited museums may have different standards for care, access, and use.

You want the right expertise at the right place to make the right decisions. (Hedley Swain, Brighton and Hove Museums)

Any agreement would need to cover safe preservation and storage and all that kind of thing. So, like a loan agreement really, but on a large scale. I think we were envisaging

that we would still legally own the objects so there wouldn't be an issue in terms of transfer of title. (Emily Locke, Birmingham Museum Trust)

Would there be a blanket agreement that any time we'd want to loan an object from Northamptonshire that is in the national store it would be approved? Presumably parameters would need to be made for this, but what if the museum doesn't fit the conditions for display- but already has objects from their own collection on display? (Ben Donnelly-Symes, Northamptonshire Archaeological Resource Centre)

What would the approval system be for destructive sampling? Different curatorial teams have very different views on this. We are quite open to sampling but I am aware of museums who are very conservative in this area. (Ben Donnelly-Symes, Northamptonshire Archaeological Resource Centre)

We would need to be actively involved in the decision to allow research on human remains, and absolutely for destructive sampling, if we were retaining ownership we would need to be involved in that decision. (Ali Wells, Herbert Art Gallery and Museum)

Probably need some sort of memorandum of understanding or contractual agreement, where it was really clear at what point decisions were made, by whom, when deferred to the host, and at what point the decisions had to go back to the originating organisation. But as long as that's clearly laid out, and in in our experience, certainly most museums and collecting institutions are operating in broadly similar structures and in broadly similar ways. They follow broadly similar processes about approvals, about notice periods for loans about how that's managed. What would be really helpful to sort out is a set of template agreements, the national collection would say these are our template processes, and we could all use them- that would give it a framework of commonality, a sense of assurance. (Paul Taylor, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust)

One thing I'd have to look into is insurance if material was held centrally- most of that material would have a nominal monetary, valuation, so it's not a massive issue. (Ali Wells, Herbert Art Gallery and Museum)

Local retention of selection decisions

All museums, collecting institutions and local authority representatives voiced clear opinions that decisions around the selection and retention of archaeological material could only be made at the local level, by people who understood local and regional collecting and research priorities. This opinion was unanimous regardless of the current policy on archive deposition, if they would like to retain ownership of their archaeological archives, or if ownership would pass to the national collection.

Local selection issues and research priorities are still relevant. (Ali Wells, Herbert Art Gallery and Museum)

I'd suggest local expertise, networks and relationships are key to making the best decisions about selection and retention. (Museum B)

It would have to take local selection strategies into account. (Ellie Ramsey, City of Wolverhampton Council and Walsall City Council)

If we're going to be the legal owners of this collection, then we would want to make sure that the selection criteria fit with our collecting policy at a local level. We envisage that it's the national collection who is notified initially- but there are points within that workflow where we're notified with the opportunity to input - assign accession numbers and also in terms of the conversations around selection criteria. (Zoe Wilcox, Museum in the Park)

I try and be active in talking with the field units about what they're going to deposit and discussions around their selection policies which I think we would still need to be involved in. (Ali Wells, Herbert Art Gallery and Museum)

At least the local decision-making process first. Currently there is a local decision on what's retained, because it's the local people that have that knowledge of what is significant in that area and that should be maintained. (Judith Stevenson, Herefordshire Museum Resource and Learning Centre)

I think the museum would have to be involved in communications with depositors regarding deposition decisions. We currently check potential depositions to make sure that we do not accept superfluous material. I would be concerned that if the depositors liaised directly with NCAA whether that stringency would continue. Especially if there might be a point in the future when the material comes back to the museum, and the museum must find a way of storing it. (Museum A)

Directly via museums, so we remain aware of what work is being undertaken, what is being found. (Museum Survey 1).

Standardisation of practices

Deposition standards

In addition to the questions of ownership, consultees were asked if they would consider signing up to national standards for the creation and deposition of archaeological archives. Most museums, collecting institutions and local authority representatives considered standardisation of the creation and deposition process to have advantages for all involved.

National standards for creation would be good and popular. (Liz Selby, Dorset Museum)

I would have no problem stipulating national standards. (Ellie Ramsey, City of Wolverhampton Council and Walsall City Council)

It would make it easier for everyone- for research to access archives and units would stop complaining. (Ben Donnelly-Symes, Northamptonshire Archaeological Resource Centre)

I think a broader set of standards, especially when it comes to the way that things are listed whether they come into the NCAA or other museums, as well as things like standard box sizes, standard packaging, would make it all from a storage perspective a bit easier. (Alexander Chalkey, Birmingham Museum Trust)

I can't bear the fact that everyone's got a different system in place- it does drive me nuts! If you want to find out about thirteenth century pottery from a particular place, or to compare assemblages, there's no easy way of doing it still, and nothing's improved all these years of data, collecting and digitisation. (Judith Stevenson, Herefordshire Museum Resource and Learning Centre)

I feel that if there was a national standard for the creation, compilation, and deposition of archaeological archives it would make it easier for archaeological services to comply and for audiences to access the material as it is all managed to the say standard. (Museum A)

National standards are a good idea in principle, but each site and collection is different and will have different needs. (Museum Survey 6)

As one of the larger collections and as an institution that's actively involved in reviewing all of our standards, then we would probably suggest that we should certainly look at how our standards might become part of new standards, rather than there being new standards and looking at ours and adapting it. (Finbar Whooley, Museum of London)

No, we have detailed high standards and box sizes that fits our existing storage facilities. (Museum Survey 2)

We already work to sector wide best practice standards. Should national standards be bought forward we would likely be open to adoption providing they allowed for some local flexibility. (Museum Survey 4)

Whilst welcoming the idea of national standards for the creation and deposition of archives, some concerns were raised about the mapping of new national standards onto existing museum practices. This included the standardisation of box sizes, and the resources required to support any changes to internal processes and systems.

How would that happen if the site notification came centrally? This touches on the question that if it's a partial deposit and it would work in terms of our database versus a national database like, would we still be recording accessioning things into our database, even if I might never see them? I'd be open to different ways of working. (Ali Wells, Herbert Art Gallery and Museum)

National standards would be very hard to implement. For example, we use our HER event numbers as an accession code but many places are not as integrated into systems like that. (Ben Donnelly-Symes, Northamptonshire Archaeological Resource Centre)

We have a set size box that fits on our shelves, so that does mean that we are restricted. . . There's no way you could change that unless there was thousands and thousands of pounds to change the existing big roller racking system to accommodate larger size boxes, or the national store would just have to accept lots of different archive box sizes. (Judith Stevenson, Herefordshire Museum Resource and Learning Centre)

We already have standard box sizes, however, some contractors do not wish to pay for a few boxes of one size so we have to accept non-standard sizes. (Museum Survey 1)

We are currently preparing for a major new collections centre subject to approval and the racking is very bespoke to our box sizes in order to for the collections into the space. Also, we may not agree with some of the approaches set out nationally such as marking of human remains. (Museum Survey 5)

A few museums raised concerns over how national standards would be agreed at a level that suited all repositories within the national system. They also stated that the requirements of existing best practice standards for archive deposition should not be reduced.

We'd be interested in the flexibility of approach. Our guidelines and standards work for us and are cited as best practice by the SMA [Society for Museum Archaeology]. (Ben Donnelly-Symes, Northamptonshire Archaeological Resource Centre)

In principle we would be up for national standards, and I could see how it could make the whole process a lot easier and makes a lot of sense. But we would need to consider how they that integrates with the existing collections. (Ali Wells, Herbert Art Gallery and Museum)

I am aware of many other repositories standards where they are either overly complicated or way too limited in what they expect. As long as the national guidance has been developed in a very collaborative way across a lot of organisations. (Ben Donnelley-Symes, Northamptonshire Archaeological Resource Centre)

I wouldn't want to hand it [digital data methods] entirely over to a new system. It must be done to Tullie standards/guidelines so it's consistent, and so we have oversight of it. (Elsa Price, Tullie Museum)

Curation and collections care standards

In general, many respondents who would consider sending material to a national collection centre were not concerned about the standards of care that would be provided there: they assume that they will meet professional standards. Respondents again emphasised that the requirements of existing best practice standards for collections curation and care should not be reduced, and one respondent saw the opportunity for a national collection to improve sectoral standards and practical care of archaeological material.

I'm assuming that the national store would be built to museum standards it doesn't to me make any odds whether it's our store or a national store. (Ali Wells, Herbert Art Gallery and Museum)

I assume if it's going to be a national store, there won't be those issues. The collection will have to be monitored, and they have to be maintained within the standards of this profession. (Judith Stevenson, Herefordshire Museum Resource and Learning Centre)

This is a good opportunity to offer much better conditions than exist in local museums. Across the [museum] sector – people think archaeology is invincible, but you can't just shove it in a basement and think it'll be fine. If I feel it's best for long term preservation to go a central store then it should go there. It would be wrong to keep it in inadequate storage when there is better available. But I am very anxious about losing local and professional connection to material. (Elsa Price, Tullie Museum)

One respondent suggested that changes to professional standards as regulated by the Museums Association should be carefully considered, to avoid reducing the existing protections afforded to museum collections.

There is a protection in the [disposal] procedures for the Museum Association. They're not like they are by accident. They give you the freedom to try and move ahead with disposal in a way that we haven't had before, really, in recent years. But there is also a real protection- if something is significant, it is protected and that's rightly so. I think we'd have to be very, very careful that we were not opening the door to people saying archaeological collections are less significant than others- that's not what any of us want. (Museum B)

Access - use of archaeological archives

Opportunities for researchers

Most respondents perceived the NCAA concept to offer significant potential to support and encourage academic research. Most respondents clearly stated this would occur through the presence of an online datastore. However, one museum reported that academic research is not a priority for the use of their collection, and another thought this concept would reduce archaeological research. Others noted that splitting material between different storage locations could impact the quality of academic research.

For academic research, surely it would make so much sense to have everything together in one place, to be able to make those connections between collections and effectively just have an absolutely huge data set all in one place. (Zoe Wilcox, Museum in the Park)

We very keen to make our collections data as accessible as it can be through our own online catalogues, also through sort of aggregated content providers. So, for example, our collections on our UK Museum Data Service- we are very keen to be part of that when that gets up and running and established. (Paul Taylor, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust)

If you were able to map this more, it would develop a much more coherent research strategy for archaeology, not just in regions, but across the whole country. And it could potentially transform the way that archaeological research is being decided on and being done. I think with a national store you would have the potential support and potential backing to do something really quite special with that kind of mapping of collections. (Ben Donnelly-Symes, Northamptonshire Archaeological Resource Centre)

I've been looking into how we can make our archaeology collection more accessible, particularly researchers, and this would give us that opportunity. (Ali Wells, Herbert Art Gallery and Museum)

I think that would be much better if the research questions went straight to the National Archive because so often, they [researchers] are trying to contact a lot of different places so that would be easier. I think local people probably rather ask the local museum. (Judith Stevenson, Herefordshire Museum Resource and Learning Centre)

Engagement with researchers is not the current focus for the new Director, whose focus is getting visitors into the building. (Liz Selby, Dorset Museum)

What we find is that people…they'll be looking for something and then we'll be 'oh, there's this' so we'll get that out and it sparks interest in that. So if you have things in different locations that's a potential problem. (Nick Booth, Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust)

The separation of archives and collections would undermine research access. The best way of supporting research is to retain both in the same physical location. I profoundly believe that this initiative would undermine archaeological research. (Museum Survey 7)

Opportunities for museum engagement

Several museums acknowledged that access to information about archaeological holdings across England had the potential to improve and enhance their exhibition and engagement activities. Importantly, this included the respondents from Beaminster Museum (a small volunteer led museum) who saw potential for the proposed national collection to enable wider engagement to archaeological collections by museums that have no current involvement with commercial archaeology, and no potential to become involved in its current format.

There is a major Roman fort archaeology project by Bournemouth University started 2023 producing 50 kgs excavated material; continuing summer 2024. Beaminster Museum would like the archive as it is within our catchment area, but earlier archives are already in different museums… We would want to use NCAA for borrowing items for display – but only if we're able to fulfil the conditions they asked for. (Bridget Wheeler, Beaminster Museum)

For research or exhibitions, it would be a lot easier. If a request was put in to borrow something for an exhibition- that is just a normal sort of loan procedure. (Judith Stevenson, Herefordshire Museum Resource and Learning Centre)

Something like the national collection concept could only, I think, open up more opportunities for us, and whether they actually happen here in Stratford, or whether they're further afield either is really interesting to us, too. (Paul Taylor, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust)

We are very keen to take a proactive approach to collections management to make sure that the materials in the best possible place where it can be seen and used by the widest possible audience. (Paul Taylor, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust)

The NCAA is an opportunity to increase access. We already loan material to PhD students, so this wouldn't be much different... Cross loans to other organisations – advantages to promote research. But decision making must be retained locally. (Liz Selby, Dorset Museum)

Access to a wider research resource would be an advantage and museums would also be aware of how their archives fit into a wider research/historic landscape. (Museum Survey 1)

The importance of the digital datastore was also emphasised as a central tool for enabling museum use of a national collection. For example, Museum B pointed to Art UK (artuk.org) as a resource to support curators when planning exhibitions, and the absence a similar resource for archaeology. Access to detailed archaeological object information and facilitation of loans, transfers and transport of those objects, has the potential to encourage 'braver' archaeology exhibitions.

There's a very successful inter-museum artwork loans system through the ArtUK website. That's the first place we go when we're exhibition planning and it's the same for everybody else. Essentially, we don't have that, do we? In archaeology? Nobody knows what's where. (Museum B)

*We might end up with some much more powerful archaeology exhibitions if we had that kind of information at our fingertips. That's interesting, isn't it? In terms of archaeology exhibitions, if you think about it, you get the Nationals doing quite broad-brush exhibitions about the Roman army etc. But most other museums are doing archaeology displays around their locality- they're not being brave in the same way. But we don't just do endless exhibitions about B. W. Leader because he was born in ***- we're much braver. (Museum B)*

It's interesting, isn't it, with archaeology and exhibitions? Why is it Stonehenge exhibitions are only in the British Museum. Why is it people are not putting in their requests for parts of the Staffordshire Hoard in order to tell stories? We don't know enough about what each other's got. (Museum B).

In addition, Claire Sussums, Museum of London, advocated clearly for a digital repository.

The thing that I think would be very powerful - and it's probably easier said than done - is a national data set. It's things like Towards A National Collection are thinking but that for us would be immensely powerful. And a national preservation set as well. So that you could centrally access data, and everyone would contribute to that data, and then it was freely available to whoever needed to use it. And that there was national support for the digital preservation. Because preservation by its nature is incredibly changeable, quite complicated. You need a good set of expertise around it and that can be expensive. So if a national scheme supported that as well, that would be amazing, that would be incredibly powerful. And it would help, especially if there is a baseline set of standard of those that standardisation goes with that - not just from the data standard but from the preservation standards.

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Opportunities- Access to centralised expertise

Access to centralised expertise was considered a huge positive for many of the museums within the consultation group, especially those without any in-house archaeological expertise. However, these views must be balanced by the concerns of a centralised system further eroding local provision and expertise (see Section 6 below).

National advisors would be helpful for smaller museums. (Elsa Price, Tullie Museum)

Expertise is absolutely essential. We have no in-house expertise, our only knowledge is what we have acquired through small projects and displays. Currently the museum mentor for Dorset [Museum Development scheme] might be able to help or put us in touch with others, but our museum doesn't have many existing links… In-house interest in archaeology is done by individuals with enthusiasm/interest in it… The opportunity to access online and in-person interaction with a person who could suggest broader areas of interest relevant to our geographical area - to expand and improve the museum - would be a huge benefit. (Alastair and Bridget Wheeler, Beaminster Museum)

We would definitely welcome advice from an advisory team! E.g. documentation, facilitating access – help to assess research applications and their suitability. As we have no in-house archaeologist we currently use an external unpaid advisor, but this is not reliable in the long term. (Liz Selby, Dorset Museum)

If a national collection led to awareness to cooperate at a local level that might help. There is a large amount of defensiveness in museums/staff – to loan, or even give access to see material. Museums are very possessive with what they have in stores. They are not falling over themselves to offer loans to small museums. NCAA has the potential to lead to greater collaboration and support within geographical area - which is lacking at the moment. Building up regional networks would be good. (Alastair and Bridget Wheeler, Beaminster Museum)

NCAA (especially advisors) could promote networks between collections/ museums– encourage and support regional networking by museums. (Liz Selby, Dorset Museum)

Having access to the NCAA Advisory team would be useful, as we do not currently have a specialist archaeology curator in post. (Museum A)

Advice and assistance is always welcome. It's often the biggest issue, not knowing where to go or who to ask or even what questions to ask. If there was someone who could offer that - it's like in the Museum Development team, isn't it? It's having someone you can ask on the ground, who knows what you're going through and pointing in that direction. Whether it needs to be a separate thing or whether it could fit in with the Museum Development team – with all those connections. Just linking into that would seem preferable, from a user point of view… Thinking of some of the smaller museums, like

volunteer museums - I'm sure there'll be a lot of publicity when this [NCAA] launches… but people don't always see all that. And actually, there's a high turnover of staff as well. So fitting in with a well-known network would be useful. (Nick Booth, Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust)

Challenges - The need for good communication

A recurring theme among the museum respondents was the need for a good communication between a national collection and the diverse network of existing museums. Email was perceived as an easy option for communication but lacked longevity and reliability. The idea of a new centralised communication system, akin to OASIS, was received with mixed response.

…an additional system would be even more confusing [than current communication by enail] e.g. remembering to log on. If I received an email notifying me, then this could work. (Liz Selby, Dorset Museum)

OASIS – people are not regularly using it. No-one in my organisation knows what it is. Something like OASIS could work if they are an archaeology specialist and use it every day, but otherwise it's just another thing to get your head around. Tullie is a 'medium' museum, for smaller museums it will be practically hard to onboard to a new communication platform. (Elsa Price, Tullie Museum)

Maybe we [RAMM] should make more use of OASIS. Or if there is a national system then I'm sure there are ways of making communication much more streamlined. Then there would be a flow of information. There will be less duplication and less chance for making mistakes along the way. (Thomas Cadbury, Royal Albert Memorial Museum)

I've tried to get set up on OASIS but I haven't managed to get it working well. It doesn't send me notifications about anything. (Museum C)

Instinctively I want to say 'I want to be the point of contact!' But whether that's actually practical, I don't know. But you're almost treating it as a remote easily managed facility, so to have some sort of notional control over it sounds great, but whether that is actually practical? And especially if ownership has actually gone directly to a national collection rather than here then that seems a bit presumptive! So, if the point of contact was the central archive, then would just have to be clear communications and potentially opportunities to visit or a remote connection to it - a digital link to a meeting or something like that. (Thomas Cadbury, Royal Albert Memorial Museum)

[Keep communication] As simple as possible! And somehow in writing as it would need to be recorded. A way that if some new information is discovered, something could then be copied into or transferred into our existing collections management system, in a way that isn't time consuming and by someone who isn't in any way an expert. So, the information

needs to be accurate and fairly simple to understand. So, I guess an automated system? I think the more people you put in front of it, the more chance something goes wrong - getting lost in someone's inbox. (Nick Booth, Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust)

Access - location considerations

Opportunities - The benefits of a central location

Most respondents thought that where possible, archaeological archives should remain in the local area or region in which they were found. However, most respondents also acknowledged that storage in a central repository was preferable to there being no storage solution in situations where no repository existed, the museum had closed to depositions, or the repository was running out of space. In these cases, it was thought that the proposed national collection of archaeological archives could provide better access than would exist locally.

I do think it's really important to acknowledge that the museum works best at a local level. (Hedley Swain, Brighton and Hove Museums)

Local would be preferable but they are not accessible at the moment so a national store is still better than the current situation. (Ellie Ramsey, City of Wolverhampton Council and Walsall City Council)

It is a potential concern . . . but at the moment we're not even able to take those archives in, so we're not able to make them accessible anyway. I think, probably the benefits just about outweigh the risks. (Zoe Wilcox, Museum in the Park)

I think we could really sell a national store about how Coventry collections are being better featured in papers, PhDs, and research. (Ali Wells, Herbert Art Gallery and Museum)

It doesn't really matter to me if it's 5 minutes down the road, or it's 3 hours away. Actually, if it provides better access to the people, that's what's important. But there does need to be some kind of interaction between a centralised store and the local area. Regional advisors could potentially link the collections and knowledge. (Hedley Swain, Brighton and Hove Museums)

External comms would be important to local people could understand why part of their history was now stored miles away. I feel the collection is under accessed and under used and a national collection could change that in a positive direction. (Ali Wells, Herbert Art Gallery and Museum)

There might be some consideration needed regarding making collections accessible particularly if travel costs might be prohibitive. Would it be possible to have an online database for users to search? Would it be possible to have a 'request' system, so material could be requested by a user and then sent to a participating museum of their choice? Or

would it be possible to ensure that the database had high quality records so that users could access them online? (Museum A)

Challenges- Might a national collection restrict access to local museum users?

Respondents were keen to emphasise that increased academic researcher access must not be at the expense of diverse audiences and users who engage with museums at a local level. These include local non-academic researchers, and volunteers.

If a national store is located somewhere miles away from Northamptonshire, then local people will just not use it making them even less utilised, essentially opening a national store up to the criticism that is primarily for professionals and a specialist research store. (Ben Donnelly-Symes, Northamptonshire Archaeological Resource Centre)

How do volunteers engage with these collections? We have over 100 active volunteers. It is not just us, volunteers up and down the county engage and support with these collections. If a national store is built, these local opportunities could be taken away from them. (Ben Donnelly-Symes, Northamptonshire Archaeological Resource Centre)

I would not be in favour of creating a national one stop shop for PhD students and academics, at risk of a worse service for the local community. And I totally get what a pain it is to go to 260 museums across the country to go through all the cuneiform brooches. But the problem is a lot of this collection the research and academics are interested in, is also the collection that the local community want access too, because it's amongst the most significant that they're the objects that people want to see. (Museum B)

Assuming that the budget is always going to be tight - or it starts with a good budget and then it [education uses] starts getting cut - that [public education] might be one of those things that goes. It's better just to try and focus on all the elementary stuff which is safe storage, and having the ability to share that information and knowledge and the collections with the country. (Nick Booth, Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust)

It would be useful to have a public consultation about these plans launched. We do not get many requests from 'local' people for the archaeology, but that does not mean that they would be comfortable having the material moved out of the county and to potentially travel to view it. (Museum A)

Local groups, of which there are many in my area, would see this as a mothballing of the collection. I doubt local researchers who currently can pop and access collections are likely to want to visit a storage facility many miles away. (Museum Survey 5)

Local communities would not respond positively to collections being removed from regions to be centralised. (Museum Survey 7)

Challenges - Might a national collection adversely affect local and regional knowledge creation?

The transfer of archaeological archives out of the local area to a central repository raised several concerns among the consulted museums. Many respondents expressed concern that the creation of a national repository with centralised expertise would adversely affect the creation and retention of local and regional knowledge. Several respondents asserted that existing museums should be involved with, or at least made aware of, any research using their collections and the research results. Several respondents clearly stated that their professional archaeological knowledge is developed from in-person collaboration with researchers, and the associated time to themselves see and understand their collection. The physical removal of research to another location was perceived to prevent expertise developing at the local and regional level.

I'd be quite happy for most research on our collections to happen without my knowledge. Just to be kept informed that this research had taken place and what the outputs were. (Ali Wells, Herbert Art Gallery and Museum)

The nature of my work is that I can't do my job from home, so I can't do my job if the material is hundreds of miles away. (Elsa Price, Tullie Museum)

Research requests are used for advocacy within the museum. (Elsa Price, Tullie Museum)

Potentially this would remove local specialism knowledge. For example, we have researchers looking at one published site and we can signpost to 4-5 other assemblages relevant to their research. I think this would be much more tricky in a national setting. (Ben Donnelly-Symes, Northamptonshire Archaeological Resource Centre)

If material is stored offsite there will be a divorce from the material. Curatorship and the connection with material will be severed. It won't feel like it's part of the collection, and I will lose the ability to develop specialist knowledge of the collection…I rely on researchers to develop and maintain my own knowledge of the collection. I need to maintain contact and relationships with researchers. I can't do that if researchers are not working at Tullie [i.e. they are working at NCAA hub]. So it's a choice – I either sacrifice time (to go and be with researcher offsite) or sacrifice the relationship with that research. (Elsa Price, Tullie Museum)

Usually I find my learning comes when there is some sort of research that's happening. So I probably, don't have enough knowledge about the material that is coming in other than just reading through the reports, then taking deposit of the boxes, and at that point my knowledge might stop. But as soon as there is an exhibition, or as soon as there is the next step, then my knowledge - and hopefully the institution's knowledge - increases quite dramatically. And so you would need some mechanism to enable that level of knowledge

to disseminate out to the regions [from NCAA] and out to the relevant museums. But nothing beats actually sitting with material itself. So to just read reports from a researcher or an academic is good but to actually be there and see the stuff is even better. (Thomas Cadbury, Royal Albert Memorial Museum)

I do not support this initiative. It is very much a scheme designed by archaeologists to 'save' museums, rather than working with us to creating a sustainable method to look at, and manage archives which would look at streamlining deposition, and 'local' being supported. It is also simplistic its viewpoint without understanding the nature of deposition and the use and management of collections. (Museum Survey 6)

I think there should be a way, even if the material wasn't coming here, curators would - if they wanted to be – were involved in the process to the extent that they knew what was happening and where it was going and a bit about the sites and the nature of the material. There's a risk that if that wasn't happening, you wouldn't have that kind of really good overview of what's happening in your collecting area or your county. (Museum C)

It's worth keeping in mind that when you take [material] away, you also potentially move that collection from those who know the most about it, who are in a position to speak about it and know it intimately. So it doesn't seem to be a barrier, but I think it's something that should be preserved. (Georgina Barrett, Museum of London)

There is a fundamental question about the relationship between localism and nationalising or centralising… How do you keep that element of being responsive to local needs? Being about for the good of archaeology as well as of the collection. (Finbar Whooley, Museum of London)

There is a risk that if you centralise, that takes away what little [training and job] opportunities there already are spread around the country. It will potentially create a bit of a vacuum. It may have an impact on those people who are just getting started in their career in that the only opportunities are in a very specific location, but if you don't live in one of those locations it's not accessible. And diversifying the sector is already a challenge. By centralising it even further makes me wonder whether that would have a detrimental impact on what is already an issue. (Georgina Barrett, Museum of London)

It should be considered that this [centralised model] may take this [conservation] expertise away from regional museums and smaller commercial archaeology units, where the bulk of conservation work would need to be undertaken prior to deposition with the store. This work would be better supported by regional hubs. In particular, smaller, localised regional hubs would retain conservation expertise spread throughout England rather than contributing to 'brain drain' towards a single national facility. Further, a higher number of regional hubs would offer more equitable access for public, researchers, students, and other stakeholders, and would be a chance to offer conservation engagement activities for

public and support/workshops for museum staff who have had to take on collections care where funding for their conservation colleagues has been cut. (ICON Archaeology Group)

The way the museum itself uses archaeology is that it's quite often used in the context of other disciplines, for its proximity to other kinds of collections. Thinking about our new galleries, archaeology features very heavily in some of our new galleries, and archaeological expertise alongside social and working history and other kinds of expertise. For a national repository, you would need to be careful that you bore that in mind, because with the best will in the world a lot of those conversations and the development of that kind of content is born out of direct proximity to the material. (Claire Sussums, Museum of London)

As per the definition of the agreed characteristics of a Publicly Accessible Repository the location itself should avoid introducing barriers to access with regard to travel time and costs - that goes for the museum and members of the public. The cost of moving/withdrawing/returning material may be prohibitive and not conducive to project formulation and planning. (Museum Survey 4)

Further, respondents voiced concerns at how the proposed national collection might be perceived by stakeholders such as funding bodies and local archaeology groups. This was most vehement among respondents in the geographical extremities of England, who predicted negative public perception for their museum if local material was removed and placed centrally. As already described, some respondents were concerned that removal of material to a national store might cause local authorities to remove responsibility for their care entirely. Only one respondent (from a museum without archaeological curatorial expertise) suggested that being part of the proposed national collection would demonstrate the importance of having in-house archaeological expertise.

They are a local resource. We hold them on behalf of the local people. I think that there is public recognition of where these things should be- discussions have got very, very localised in recent years haven't they? As in people's views on where things should be, rather than central repositories. I don't think they'd actually care too much about boxes of archives, but in principle they would care about where their history was being kept. (Judith Stevenson, Herefordshire Museum Resource and Learning Centre)

Lots of people feel very passionately about their archaeology being kept locally. We have had people questioning why we store material from Corby in Ilchester which is only 25 miles away. (Ben Donnelly-Symes, Northamptonshire Archaeological Resource Centre)

I have concerns about how impossible it would be for us to access anything that we put in the National store. A lot of that is to do with budget. If local archives are divorced from the area where they were excavated, I worry that local authorities will see them as irrelevant

and no longer their responsibility over time, the museum will lose expertise over time and users and the museum will struggle for access. (Museum B)

This model seems to be going back to pulling away regional heritage from regional people. It feels like a regression back from empowering regional archaeology and local history to centralising everything in one place, which would typically be in the south of England. (Elsa Price, Tullie Museum)

I'd like to think it [offsite storage] wouldn't be an issue if we're able to show that it's being stored securely. Our Designation [status] does mention the archives and the collections that we hold, but it doesn't talk about them having to be all on site. So I can't see that being an issue. But like all these things… it's PR management. And fully briefed stakeholders. To say [to them that] we're not sending things away that you're never going to see, it's just being looked after better. (Nick Booth, Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust)

Being part of NCAA would further underline the necessity to have in-person staff and the need for this at Dorchester. (Liz Selby, Dorset Museum)

Operating models

Environmental impact

For a small number of respondents, the environmental impact of the proposed national collection was not perceived as an important consideration. However, several respondents perceived the need for any new national collection centre to be environmentally sustainable and to meet net-zero targets as a base requirement. For others, the environmental considerations extended to the functioning of the proposed national collection. Two respondents suggested that a new national collection could be a catalyst for improving the use of sustainable materials across the sector, through increased buying power and incentives to improve standards. A concern was noted about the functionally necessary impact of transporting archive material over long distances for deposition, and for use.

Environmental considerations will become more relevant, but not massively. Currently, financial decisions take precedence over environmental considerations. (Liz Selby, Dorset Museum)

I feel that the carbon footprint/Net Zero is an important consideration for the cultural/heritage sector. I would be more interested in supporting the NCAA if they demonstrated a commitment to climate action. (Museum A)

Sustainability includes having a store facility, that is, from day one carbon neutral and has a carbon footprint that is managed alongside transport. (Hedley Swain, Brighton and Hove Museums)

A carbon neural or environmentally aware national collection would be seen as a positive by the council as they have targets to meet. (Ali Wells, Herbert Art Gallery and Museum)

Organisational commitment to get to work towards net-zero by 2030, we are building environmental considerations into all of our project and procurement processes. (Paul Taylor, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust)

Environmental [considerations] would be heartily received by Senior Leadership Team - if it's a simple way to say e.g. they've reduced their carbon footprint. (Elsa Price, Tullie Museum)

Our buildings are all Listed... If it's a new system, a new purpose-built store that's environmentally sustainable, then that's a clear bonus. (Nick Booth, Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust)

If you're having national standards you've suddenly got the capacity to work out what is a good environmental material, and also you've suddenly got a lot of buying power. So you really could invest in some environmentally good storage materials and things like that. (Museum C)

By the NCAA holding multiple depositions, researchers would be able to be more efficient with their time, it would also be greener as it would reduce the number of research trips the researcher has to make to a variety of different museums. (Museum A)

I can see there's a lot of benefits in the [NCAA] project to drive up standards, to find suppliers that are carbon neutral or becoming carbon neutral. And maybe there is more standardisation of materials, box sizes, all those sorts of things. Then maybe it's going to be a bit more sustainable that suppliers can respond to our requests for making things more carbon neutral. (Thomas Cadbury, Royal Albert Memorial Museum)

The issue would be transporting stuff around the place. There's always the risk to material. And also, it's not a very carbon friendly activity. You would need to think carefully about when it's sensible to transport things and when it's not sensible to transport things. (Thomas Cadbury, Royal Albert Memorial Museum)

You could be bringing pallets and pallets of material for one researcher. (Claire Sussums, Museum of London)

The carbon footprint would be large for this initiative, especially if collections are moving around the country. (Museum Survey 6)

If the place in which you store something is one part of that question – that's probably the primary part. But then it's the 'call back' - the movement of the material - that is equally and actually sometimes the bigger question. For example in London - we're in the middle of a

major city with very good transport links but actually it isn't possible to drive to our stores so you have to rely on public transport. (Claire Sussums, Museum of London)

Proposals for operating models

The majority of consulted museums did not have any specific views about different potential operating models. Lack of details around the potential financial operating structure of the NCAA concept prompted several respondents to question whether they will have to pay to be part of the system, or pay to access and use their own collections stored with the national collection. In addition, a few respondents expressed concern that whatever model is adopted needs to ensure financial longevity.

Knowing the budgets as we do, there is no additional income that would mean that we would be able to contribute towards anything else. (Museum B)

Who pays for the transit of material? (Ben Donnelly-Symes, Northamptonshire Archaeological Resource Centre)

If we wanted to borrow some material, how easy is it? How? What's the cost? What would the restrictions be? If it's like having to do a loan request now to a National [museum], it's never going to work because it takes up so much time. (Nick Booth, Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust)

Financial: cost of retaining archives in the NCAA, cost of retrieval, as a local authority museum justifying spending money on something outside the county may be difficult to argue. (Museum Survey 1)

A key consideration is the longevity of any of those organisations. What happens if one of them goes bust? Where are the protections in terms of the collection items and who's responsible? I think that's a key consideration. In terms of a commercial body – what's the impact on researchers going to be? Is it going to make research less accessible? Will costs be prohibitive? Will museums have to pay to access the services? Because we don't have any money so that won't happen! (Museum C).

I suppose it would be hard to argue against [us] paying a once-off fee if they're [contractors] passing the material [to NCAA] for permanent storage. It would be hard if it was a recurring fee. Budgets change, personnel change. In 5 years time that's just going to look like a saving [in a budget]. Or you'll be in the situation where museums have to keep paying because they can't afford to bring it [collections] back. (Nick Booth, Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust)

Is there any impact/involvement when museums shut down? Future rescuing of museum collections? (Alastair Wheeler, Beaminster Museum)

We've 20 or more years experience of actually managing a significant facility and we'll have views about the theory of it, and a lot of it will be nuanced by our actual experience of what it's been like. I'm really conscious of the cycles that you go through in any of these sorts of institutions and these sorts of schemes. I suppose I'm like everyone else interested in the long term - and whatever decisions are made - how it can secure archaeology into the future. (Finbarr Whooley, Museum of London)

There are very limited benefits, except to the organisation who runs this, who will obviously gain resources, staff and access to collections. (Museum Survey 6)

I wonder about a university [model] as well. In many ways that would have a huge amount of benefit depending on which university it was, but it would need to be clear that the collection is independent of their specific research aims. There would need to be very clear terms of references to the independence of the collection as a national entity rather than it being part of a university collection, which then puts it into the similar position potentially of risks associated with it. (Claire Sussums, Museum of London)

You've not supplied enough information for the different models to comment. My main concern for the central store would be the long term sustainability and financial resilience of it. (Museum Survey 2)

A charitable trust could be beneficial as it would be easier to generate support for the trust etc. perhaps with a commercial arm to help income generation? For example, a café, paid-for activities – e.g., school workshops, events etc. Being a university-based research institution would also be beneficial as there could be a strong focus on the students using the NCAA. But it would need to be balanced to ensure that the NCAA is accessible for everyone and not considered elitist due to the university connection. (Museum A)

[For a university model] You would also need to solve the risk of students at that university getting preferential access -it should be equitable, no matter what you study. (Georgina Barrett, Museum of London)

A university is not a neutral political area and may not be a stable environment and will depend on political will of the exec body. (Museum Survey 6)

However, most respondents were nervous about the idea of a fully commercial operating model. Firstly, as they thought it did not meet the requirements of a publicly accessible repository. However, a couple of museums stated they currently pay for some services provided externally, such as object conservation, or subscription services that provide benefit to the museum's mission and activities. Second, respondents expressed concern that any commercially run operation would need to meet best practice professional standards. Third, one respondent was concerned at the potential impact of a commercial model in commercialising the museum's own functions.

What's in it for the commercial person? (Finbar Whooley, Museum of London)

Cultural worry about it being a commercial venture. (Hedley Swain, Brighton and Hove Museums)

A fully independent commercial body running the national collection makes me nervous. (Ali Wells, The Herbert, Coventry)

If it were a commercial body who has legal ownership over this collection? What hypothetically would happen if the commercial body went bankrupt? Would that collection then become a financial asset? And then that would affect the long term access to that material. Obviously, that's a worst case scenario, but maybe something to consider. Also human remains - I'm not certain what implications there would be for a commercial budget to have custodianship over a collection of human remains which would inevitably be part of an archaeological collection. (Georgina Barrett, Museum of London)

I feel that there would be the most barriers relating to the NCAA being run as a quasi-commercial body, as there would be a stronger focus on the profit-making elements of the NCAA. For example, increasing the subscription fee to an unachievable level for most institutions, increasing costs for users etc. (Museum A)

If it's purely commercial it's difficult to make money from archives, but also it diminishes the actual value of them. Whereas if it is funded or supported by a national body, it acknowledges how important archives are, that we think this is important, and therefore, society as a whole will contribute to the preservation and access of this material. (Ellie Ramsey, City of Wolverhampton Council and Walsall City Council)

Visitor numbers are essential for keeping organisations like Tullie running. Charitable Trusts typically have a blended approach to funding which is based on funding and income generation. Both funders and income generation depend on engaging more and more people and the collections are key to this. (Elsa Price, Tullie Museum)

I wouldn't like it to be a commercially run body at all. I think it has to be nationally run. (Judith Stevenson, Herefordshire Museum Resource and Learning Centre)

We use the National Conservation Service for some of our conservation work and that's like a subscription model, and then we'll pay on top for additional work. And they have a storage model that you can buy into as well. (Paul Taylor, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust)

My preference would always be that, even if it's commercial that there is still a good level of access, because that's most important to us, even though we can't provide that much at the moment. If it was commercial we would be basically asking whoever own that building- Do you comply with these standards before we would even think about lending it/ giving it to them to store for us. In particular, if it was a commercially kind of hired spaces and

things like that, to make sure that the building that it's in and the collection area is secure and not anyone could get into it- and it's by appointment only. (Emily Locke, Birmingham Museum Trust)

Also it [a commercial model] would almost commercialise the museum's existing resources, because if it was commercialised then all the researchers would come to museums, putting too much strain on our resources so we would then have to up our charges accordingly. So it would definitely have a knock-on effect. (Thomas Cadbury, Royal Albert Memorial Museum)

From the landowner point of view, to transfer into a permanent collection – I think there's something stable and understandable about the fact it's going into a museum environment where it's there for the public good. If you chose a different setup, particularly a commercial one, whether that might influence people's desire to actually try to sign transfers of title. If it's a commercial model, unlike a charity or a university, whether that affects its long term resilience. (Claire Sussums, Museum of London)

Several responders mentioned Historic England as a potential host for the proposed national collection of archaeological archives.

If we're talking to England, then Historic England? Using the mechanisms that are already in place. I don't see any need why you would need to create anything completely new. (Hedley Swain, Brighton and Hove Museums)

Historic England might be the right sort of set up with the right sort of aims to run it. (Ali Wells, Herbert Art Gallery and Museum)

If you think about something like Historic England, where there is already that remit to look after elements of the nation's heritage makes a lot of sense. Likewise, it might be felt that an entirely standalone archaeological body was set up- either of those I think would make a lot of sense. If we're going down the route of a series of regional hubs, and I guess you're probably thinking that there are maybe major regional museums who might take on elements of that work alongside what they already do for archaeological and archives. Any of those models could work quite well. (Paul Taylor, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust)

Personal views are that it should be a public body (Historic England) or something set up like that (E.g. the National Archives). I think a commercial body that would be private wouldn't work. (Ben Donnelly-Symes, Northamptonshire Archaeological Resource Centre)

Central hub and regional spoke model

Museums were asked whether they might engage with a national collection of archaeological archives within the framework of a hub and spoke model. For one respondent this potential was seen to offer increased resilience and longevity to the

national collection. For another the central location offered potential for improved conservation of collections. One respondent stated that they would want to choose which hub location their museum was associated with, rather than being assigned this from a centralised authority, as nearby cities were more difficult to access using public transport than larger locations like London (Liz Selby, Dorset Museum).

I wonder about the resilience and the future of archaeology. Having a national identity in a data set with regional repositories is probably one of the strongest models you could have because it's distributed. By its nature it's not a single point of failure. (Claire Sussums, Museum of London)

Having an on-site interventive conservation lab and resource in a single national store would create a hub for specialist archaeological conservation work. This would have the obvious pros of gathering expertise and large amounts of available research material in one place. (ICON Archaeology Group)

Many museums perceived this to be the most successful concept. Several respondents suggested that they might have the space to act as a ‘hub’ or ‘partner’ museum within the proposed national collection, to support researcher access or host a proposed Regional Archive Advisor. Other museums did not have physical space but suggested they could provide advice to other museums, in a similar way to the Museum Development Network. In both situations, the resources required to support such activities did not exist within the current museum system and would need to be provided through the national collection. Several queried whether hubs would be responsible for material solely from their region, or to provide access to nationally held material at a local level. Several respondents pointed to existing networks that could provide a model for the hubs, specifically the Museum Development Network, and the Portable Antiquities Scheme.

We host the Museum Development network to South East England, so it would be an easy add on. (Hedley Swain, Brighton and Hove Museums)

[Becoming a hub] would be something we would look at. We're an NPO [National Portfolio Organisation] as well as World Heritage Site and Designated collection so it fits in with that strategy. We'd have to recruit - like we did with the Museum Development Team - a team of specialists who can deliver it and manage it. If it comes to storage, then space is a problem for us. We would not be able to store anything in the World Heritage Site. (Nick Booth, Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust)

Being part of networks like that is really helpful for us to exchange ideas and to understand what other collections hold and what we hold, and how they might work together. Obviously, we are also part of Warwickshire curator’s network. So, we're used to working in that sort of regional way as well as in the subject specialist way, so I think that can be quite useful. (Paul Taylor, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust)

I really love the idea [of NCAA] but in my personal opinion it would work really well if it was regional. Could there be someone based regionally e.g. at Tullie, employed by NCAA, to be a regional archaeology advisor? To communicate with contractors, small museums. Like the Museum Development system, or like regional Finds Liaison Officers. (Elsa Price, Tullie Museum)

It's much easier for us to provide access because we have a room, and we have the infrastructure for it. As long as there was a delivery service that didn't cost anything for us and it was organised well enough in advance. Obviously, Northamptonshire would have to take precedence, because that is, that is our area. If you are going to have a national model where we would be a hub within it- what's the priority for the hubs? Is it to check in the archives as they come in? I would probably say it's not- it should be about engaging with research and engaging with local people. (Ben Donnelly-Symes, Northamptonshire Archaeological Resource Centre)

You would have to have paperwork put in place; obviously anything that enters the museum has to be signed in and signed out, and monitored while it's in our is in our care- there's an additional responsibility for that. Again, it's how that would be resourced? If we were a hub, I would assume somebody would oversee that temporary loan in for research and sharing, then we'd have to ensure that it was going back in as good a state as it came to us, so we'd need a resource to cover that as well. (Ali Wells, Herbert Art Gallery and Museum)

Having a central store with hubs where people can view material is actually a really good idea. The issue with the central store is there will be areas where people are going to miss out. I imagine it's not going to be in central London or anything like that because it's going to have to be cost-effective. So it might be quite difficult for people in Cornwall to get to or whatever, so that having those regional hubs I think would be important. (Nick Booth, Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust)

In theory we would be happy to be a 'hub', but in practice I would imagine that we would not be able to provide the level of access and support required. This is due to limited capacity within the existing team, especially as we get regular access requests for other areas in our collections. (Museum A)

Tullie is a lead museum for Cumbria – it's the biggest museum with specialist staff. So being a hub would appeal. But it depends on practicalities – we're currently in a ten-year capital development project. If another museum was the regional hub (e.g. Newcastle) it would be easier to have to travel there than a central site down south, but I still have big concerns about my time needed for that. (Elsa Price, Tullie Museum)

You would hope all that stuff had been stored correctly so we weren't having a threat of importing any pests into the collection. You have to think about quarantining material. We

would potentially have to make a charge for the use of space. I mean the more I think of it, the more I think there are drawbacks to just moving stuff around and having these regional hubs. Yeah, it's fine to access stuff that is in this collection but moving stuff around it suddenly brings a new level of issues. (Thomas Cadbury, Royal Albert Memorial Museum)

In principle we'd be really open to discussion about that… London is a capital city where a lot of international academics attend…But we'd need to work out the mechanics - archaeology by its nature, the call back could be pretty huge... So therefore, the invigilation and management of that potentially would impact on the museum's operations, and that would need to be balanced or funded in some way. (Claire Sussums, Museum of London)

Challenges - a system and infrastructure that is sustainable. (Museum Survey 1)

Summary discussion

What are the opportunities and challenges identified by existing repositories and museums on the concept of a National Collection?

What kind of access to archives held in a central store might be required for those museums which may otherwise have held this material locally?

The response to the concept of a national collection of archaeological archives broadly aligned with the museum's or collecting institution's current policy on archive deposition, though the division is not clearcut.

Respondents from museums that are currently closed to the deposition of archaeological archives were strongly in favour of a national solution. Perceived positive outcomes include increased access to collections for their own institution, researchers and members of the public via an online digital datastore, and access to expertise to facilitate better understating and increased use of their current holdings.

In addition, several respondents from museums that currently collect archaeological archives were positive about the concept. The two primary perceived benefits were the potential to deposit bulk material which is underused (either already existing within their current collection, or future finds) and thus create space in their own location. These respondents also saw the benefit of an online digital datastore to increase awareness of and access to their collection.

However, a small number of respondents saw no benefits the proposed national collection, stating that they would not wish to take part in such a system and considered the concept damaging to the museum sector as a whole. These views were expressed only by museums currently open to the collection of archaeological archives and benefiting from inhouse expertise.

Several respondents were keen to highlight that the deposition and curation of archaeological archives is currently functioning well in some geographical areas, and stated that any national solution should not supersede or nullify that current provision. Several respondents expressed a variety of concerns about the impact of a new national system on existing local and regional provision.

Most museums suggested that they would wish to continue collecting (or to re-open their collecting) of archaeological material from developer funded projects, in a manner that aligned with their collecting policy. No museum stated that they would stop collecting archaeological archives if a national collection was created.

While the additional capacity created through the proposed national collection could improve access to archaeological archives, integration with existing museum practices was a practical concern for nearly all the collecting institutions. Specifically, in order to implement any new national policies and practices existing museums and repositories will need significant funding to enable staff and time to prepare and document collections to be moved, undertake necessary legal practicalities such as loan agreements or deaccessioning prior to removal and transfer of title, and to create or upgrade digital archive data. These tasks are not resourced or scheduled and will require significant time investment from existing staff and volunteers. Institutions strongly stated that such tasks would need to be funded as part of the proposed national collection to enable museums to 'sign up' to a national system.

Access to centralised expertise was considered a huge positive for many of the museums within the consultation group, especially those where no in-house archaeological expertise existed. However, some respondents expressed concern that the creation of a national repository with centralised expertise would adversely affect the creation and retention of local and regional knowledge.

The majority of museums, collecting institutions and local authority representatives considered standardisation of guidelines to have advantages for all involved. This view was expressed for guidance about the creation and deposition of archives, and the care and curation of collection. Some concerns were raised about the mapping of new national standards onto internal museum practices. This included the standardisation of box sizes, and the resources required to support changes to internal processes and systems.

Most respondents concluded that they would like to have ownership of archaeological archives from their collecting area, regardless of whether it was physically stored in a central location. The reasons for this were varied and included complexities of the deaccessioning process, ability to access and use the archives for exhibitions and engagement and recording researcher engagement as a reportable metric. Where no collecting repository existed, it was thought that ownership could pass to the NCAA with

the stipulation that access would be fully supported when requested. However, all museums, collecting institutions and local authority representatives were clear in their opinion that decisions around the selection and retention of archaeological material could only be made at the local level, by people who understood the local collecting and research priorities.

A national collection was perceived to offer a significant potential to research, both from academic researchers and for other users such as museums currently outside of the archaeological archive process. Museums also perceived the increased value to their own activities, with the potential to borrow material for exhibitions from small scale to nationally important themes and reach. It is an important reminder that research and use of collections comes from many different sources. The control of access to collections is an important consideration, with several respondents indicating that they would wish to retain control research access and other uses, even if it was stored in a central location with central experts. This consideration arises from the legal ownership of collections and the professional duty of care for them, for the maintenance of knowledge within the institution, and as a reporting metric demonstrating the value of archaeological collections to the holding museum.

There was a minority opinion that the national collection should prioritise its functions to the care and potential of archaeological collections for research, and not distract itself with public engagement. This was perceived to dilute the functioning of the national collection and undermine museum activities and functioning.

What are the pros and cons of different business/operating models for running such a National Collection?

The majority of museum respondents did not have any specific views about different potential operating models. Most respondents did not favour the idea of a fully commercial operating model. Several suggested that Historic England could be a good host for a national collection. However, these two findings should be read with caution. First, as the amount of information provided to survey and interview consultees about the operating models was necessarily limited. Second, as stated by several interviewees, many respondents were partaking as individuals and not on behalf of their organisation. The nature of employing institutions and governance structures means that many curators are not involved with governance and organisational matters, and this question was perceived to be beyond their remit and expertise. One person noted, off the record, that such matters were for the consideration of their governing body rather than themselves. Third, the sectoral visibility of Historic England among archaeological curators is such that it was perhaps inevitable that respondents thought of it as a potential operating model, for its familiarity and national scope.

Several museums perceived a solely centralised national collection as a threat to archaeological expertise. It was perceived to divorce curators from research by separating the personal contact between curator and researcher and remove the potential for curators to physically engage with material in their collection and thus develop their own expertise.

Most respondents thought that where possible, archaeological archives should remain in the local area or region in which they were found. A respondent at the geographical extremity of England predicted a negative public perception for their museum if local material was removed and placed centrally. However, most respondents acknowledged that storage in a central repository was preferable to there being no storage solution in situations where no repository existed, the museum had closed to depositions, or the repository was running out of space.

Some responders suggested the proposed national collection may be financially beneficial to the museum sector and the local authorities in which many museums operate. These positive perceptions included the national collection for archaeological archives taking over roles and responsibilities that the museum currently performed and supporting additional activities through grants and storage. Several museums expressed challenges they are currently facing due to pressures on council budgets and worried the creation of the proposed national collection could be seen by local authorities as a means of reducing local expenditure, or outsourcing archive storage provision to the national collection as a cheaper option. Where deposition fees were utilised by collecting repositories to support curatorial provision, the loss of this income stream was considered a negative impact which could jeopardise curatorial functioning. For museums that currently do not collect archaeological archives this was not perceived to be an issue. Most responders though the deposition fee should go to the institution curating the archive or be split between these if archives are held in multiple locations. The potential for a central fund to support core museum activities was welcomed.

The vast majority of respondents were in favour of an operating model that facilitated a hub and spoke functioning. Across the different types of museums and collecting status this was perceived to support and utilise existing provisions, and also develop improved sectoral working. Several respondents pointed to existing networks that could provide a model for the NCAA hubs, specifically the Museum Development Network, and the Portable Antiquities Scheme. Several museums also suggested themselves as potential hosts as a regional hub.

A recurring theme among the museum respondents was the need for a good communication between a national collection and the diverse network of existing museums.

The environmental impact of national collection was a consideration for several respondents. Several suggested that it would be a positive tool for reducing, or being seen to reduce, their institutional impact on the climate as they work towards net-zero goals. The presence of a central storage location was seen as a benefit to reduce the negative impact of existing poor storage conditions. However, the need to transport material to and fro within the system was perceived to be a negative impact on the environment. The creation of centralised standards was perceived to be a tool for improving sectoral access to environmentally friendly materials which could be enforced for commercial archaeologists and enacted through mass purchase power.

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7 Consultation – Researchers

Aim

Consultation with researchers addressed two key research questions:

- What are the benefits/opportunities and concerns/challenges identified by current researchers on the concept of a National Collection?
- What level of research access might be sought by universities and other research institutions of a national collection, on-site, and off-site? What would the advantages or disadvantages of such a model be?

Consultation responses are collated from two sources. First, online interviews with twelve individuals or groups, held between 12 February to the 19 March 2024. Respondents in these interviews included the Universities of Birmingham, Bristol, Exeter, Leicester, Newcastle, and York, as well as consultation meetings with the UAUK Steering Group and wider UAUK membership. The second source were eight respondents to the online survey for researchers, which was also available for individuals wishing to respond but unable to be interviewed within the project timeline. Four respondents were anonymous. This widened the consultation to include independent researchers, University of Cambridge, Historic England, Oxford Archaeology and Headland Archaeology.

Key themes

Respondents represent a variety of current archive use for research, teaching and education purposes, with frequency of use ranging from two or three times a week, to once every couple of months, and once or twice a year. Despite limited knowledge of the project itself, the interviews and survey feedback provided a great commonality of responses. The key themes and supporting evidence are summarised below.

In general, the concept of a National Collection for Archaeological Archives was well received by most respondents, with an emphasis on potential access to digital information about the contents and nature of archives. Access to expertise via an advisory network was also seen as advantageous, and there was a general recognition of opportunities to signpost underused but nationally significant collections, and bring together Regional Research collections such as type series. The creation of a purpose-built facility providing access to archives in an appropriate and accessible venue was also mentioned by numerous researchers. Favoured resources include bench space, some lab facilities and as a potential venue for research orientated workshops and conferences.

There were some shared concerns, with an emphasis on accessibility and the centralisation of resources at a single location. One respondent regarded the NCAA concept as a box-ticking exercise whose remit and potential were not yet demonstrated

(Marie Woods). However, it is likely that this comment represents the prevalent view among research respondents that they were unaware of the background to the NCAA concept, its previous research and the rationale for this consultation. Few research respondents were aware of the FAAP programme. There is some evident confusion about how far advanced the NCAA concept is, although interviews provided an opportunity to respond to queries and clarify the current programme.

Findability of archaeological archives

Researchers commonly reported two difficulties with the current system of archaeological archive management. First, identifying what material exists that is relevant to their research (e.g. specific materials or object types). Second, locating where those items are stored. Therefore, the prospect of a single, searchable digital resource to identify and locate archive material (written, photographic and finds) within the auspices of the NCAA is seen as a significant benefit.

Finding archives: Current situation

Researchers recorded difficulties in identifying archives (i.e. awareness that a particular archive existed) and locating that archive (i.e. finding where it is currently stored), as well as the broader context and information about the archaeological site (i.e. where the physical archive is not easily linked to the site records). As David Gould stated, “The problem I have is knowing who to ask”. Only one survey respondent stated they use site reports (Researcher Survey 3) and several researchers utilised word of mouth (Researcher Surveys 4, 6 and 7). Often, researchers worked directly with the archive creators to find suitable material for study (i.e. an archaeological contractor) rather than liaising directly with museums. Other researchers directly contact museums or individual curators (e.g. Researcher Surveys 3 and 4, Henry Chapman and Medi Jones-Williams), and a few routinely contact commercial units directly (Wil Partridge, Theo Reeves, and Anwen Cooper). Previous experience in commercial archaeology seemed to play a role when it came to contacting archive creators for information. Digital searches were the most common method for locating archives and their constituent material through generic internet searches (Researcher Surveys 5 and 6, Theo Reeves and Anwen Cooper), specific resources including ADS, Jisc, National Archives, Online Library Databases (Researcher Survey 5), or museum online collections (Researcher Survey 3 and Medi Jones-Williams). None of these was seen as satisfactory. One researcher (Stephen Upex) reported that as the known local expert in his field, he routinely received emails from individuals asking if he personally knows where specific assemblages and archives were held. The following quotes reflect typical experiences:

It can sometimes be quite difficult to find out where stuff is. (Steve Rippon, University of Exeter)

I'm sure there are loads and loads of things that would be useful if you are studying landscape [archaeology], but it's not knowing who to speak to or where to find it. That's the problem I have. If it's all really easily catalogued [in NCAA] and there was some kind of website where you could find where something is, that would be really useful. (David Gould, University of Newcastle)

I am already facing obstacles in accessing the collections online, including the public-facing catalogues and spreadsheets sent to me by curatorial staff, which is significantly impacting my ability to complete the necessary destructive sampling forms and my sampling strategy. (Medi Jones-Williams, University of Bristol)

Locating archives typically begins by email, approaching institutions where archives are most likely to be. (Henry Chapman, University of Birmingham)

I like to work with the units because in some senses, they know how to approach the question and know their archives. The post ex manager at a Unit will be somebody who I can explain the project to and they might come back a week later having thought about it in relation to our collection. And I have access then to a couple of key site supervisors and can ask these things – that's more work for them but is a lot more efficient than attempting to try and search through ADS, because I don't know particularly know what I'm looking and it can be a dead end. (Rachel Crellin, University of Leicester)

It can be difficult for a unit to know what it has and doesn't have, sometimes because they don't have a log of that in the way I need necessarily. Or you might have to talk to 10 different people at a unit before you establish if an archive is there or not. (Anwen Cooper, Rewilding Project)

I don't know how I would go about finding original archive data- I would probably approach the original excavator and ask them and be bounced around several people before finding where to go. (Theo Reeves, University of Birmingham)

At present I get about 3 emails a week with people asking me about RB and Saxon pottery from the local area when these enquires could be channelled through an (expert) individual attached to the museum who could deal with the enquiry. (Stephen Upex, University of Cambridge)

Finding archives: Future potential

Most researchers perceived a significant benefit of the proposed national collection as being a central, searchable index and catalogue of physical collections, especially in providing an interoperable datastore with other key digital catalogues (ADS, HERs, MDS) and considering developments around heritage information (HIAS). This would provide a quick and easy method to locate physical archives and their contents, with direct links to

available online data (i.e. via ADS and potentially other digital repositories). The availability of an online catalogue was seen as a potential catalyst for new research.

Having a database which is searchable by an accession code or a place or a location or a material or a period and you can find relevant material from all different sort of parts of the process would be very useful. That's something I think ADS does quite well for the digital archives and will be key for physical archives. And then linking it to something like ADS would be fantastic, or to a publication in a local journal that's out of which there's a bibliographic record existing out there in the depths of IDs. To be able to link those and then find the physical archive, that would be great. (Rob Hedge, University of Leicester / freelance finds specialist)

I could make use of collections I did not even know of previously. I would use collections more often. (Researcher Survey 7)

We have the benefit of university collections, in addition to unprovenanced material which is easier to access. It would be better to use archaeological archives, but the barriers mean that we resort to easier options. (Henry Chapman, University of Birmingham)

It sounds like a great idea… I'm looking for new sites for a comparative project so it would increase the possibility of using sites in England. (Researcher Survey 6)

If info was available on online and open access this would 100% improve my research. (Medi Jones-Williams, University of Bristol)

A centralised catalogue would be extremely useful. I would want to search by site and see what museum it's stored in. (Wil Partridge, University of Exeter)

That would be a game changer. If we want the reuse of any of these archives, that is the number one thing. (Alex Smith, Headland Archaeology)

One of the appealing things of the idea of the National Collection and that National Archive space is that it wouldn't be and it would have to explicitly be non-territorial. And it would have to be a shared space that isn't trying to claim stake to a resource but is about supporting a wider ecology of museums and collecting bodies. And so that's certainly one of the one of the attracting things about it. (Anonymous, Stakeholder ID S05).

Using archives: Future potential

Two respondents noted caution with the functioning of the digital repository, and its impact on finding and using archives. First, that the proposed NCAA would depend on the quality of the data and metadata entered into it (Researcher Survey 4). Second, that the digital resource would need to contain data from a broad variety of museum and repositories such as "smaller institutions and more unusual collection locations" (Researcher Survey 2). However, locating collections via a digital portal was regarded as enabling

democratised access, which would benefit researchers at all academic levels. One researcher (Theo Reeves) suggested that a national user-friendly interface could remove some of the barriers to access. He gave the example of genealogy records held by the National Archives at Kew as an example of an ‘approachable’ archive data store. One researcher (Henry Chapman) highlighted the volume of research initiated through the PAS database.

It would be a benefit and increase accessibility and equity when access would be permitted [when] more centralised and according to transparent and fair principles. (Researcher Survey 7)

The issue of going through all the individual counties and through individuals is a lot of work. Whereas a user-friendly interface in common usage- you would feel a bit more confident in searching a national level database. (Theo Reeves, University of Birmingham)

It would hugely help research projects (including student-led dissertations or thesis), enabling the maximum research (and therefore public knowledge) gain from developer-led collections. It would cut down the time needed to search out and scope where suitable collections are held. (Researcher Survey 3)

This would become an amazing resource for research, on a par with the PAS database. It would reduce the time spent trying to obtain site reports, track down finds, work out parallels and generally would make research massively more efficient. (Researcher Survey 3)

To have that detailed archive index which would be incredibly helpful, and would certainly mean that I used archives much more. Accessibility is key to use. I imagine that much of the reason for the high level of use of the PAS database is its accessibility. The problem with the PAS though is that it is incredibly limited compared with archaeological archives. But it does demonstrate how easier access generates use and improves research. (Henry Chapman, University of Birmingham)

Currently how we find things out is a barrier to entry. It's so difficult for a PhD student who will spend the first year and a half, absolutely tearing their hair out. And by the time they finally figured out where everything is and how it all fits in, then they're running out of time or funding or at that point. So it's a barrier to approaching that kind of research in the first place. And it's also a barrier to getting it completed. (Rob Hedge, University of Leicester / freelance finds specialist)

Consistency of reporting standards

Several researchers recorded problems with the quality and nature of existing archaeological archives, highlighting the need for more rigorous monitoring of commercial practices by the planning authorities. For example, researchers commented on the inconsistency and inadequacy of data such as grey literature reports which lack details of finds or contextual information (Steve Rippon). The potential of a national collection was viewed positively as a tool for improving the quality of reports produced by commercial archaeology, which would be more easily enforced by planning archaeologists. The concept was therefore perceived to offer a significant potential for improving the quality and usability of future archaeological archives for academic research. The need for clear policy guidelines to support archive creation and deposition was emphasised. This concern was noted both by academic researchers, and by individuals from Beaminster Museum who research material held in other museum collections to inform their own practices and uses. Several respondents felt that a central repository for digital content would be a strong benefit of a national collection, but they also questioned how this would operate in relation to existing provision with the ADS (Archaeological Data Service). This comment demonstrates confusion around the function of the proposed national collection datastore as a digital index to physical collections which signposts digital collections, but does underline the desire by many consultees to access a joined up and interoperable service.

Current situation

A Time Team archive by Wessex Archaeology is currently deposited at Dorset Museum for a site in our area. We found it time-consuming establishing where the archive was held, what the archive comprises, then accessing it; no digital archive was available. When we did access it, we found that Dorset Museum is storing boxes of low grade excavated pottery from the site. There is no record or information available to them or to us as to where the significant finds – if any – are held. If NCAA is established, access to archives needs to be both digitally as well as physically. (Bridget Wheeler, Beaminster Museum)

It's only in the last three or four years that people have been logging stuff more systematically in OASIS, and some really good work from the eighties and nineties that isn't in OASIS, and nobody knows it exists. (Anwen Cooper, Rewilding Project)

The challenge has been that the archive has been amalgamated into larger institutions twice, and the database for entries does not include appropriate information to enable searching. There can also be issues of the quality of the original deposition with some earlier (i.e. 1960s) archives, where a high level of interpretation is required to determine what material is relevant. (Henry Chapman, University of Birmingham)

Contemporary to one of the excavations I have been looking at for my PhD, someone had carried out a borehole survey. The report mentions about 10% of the results of the bore hole survey but I would have needed the rest of the data to use within my research. I tried the original unit, the HER, the institute involved, but I never got a direct answer about if the full borehole survey existed in the archive or if it was just in someone's note book. As there was no way of knowing if the borehole data would exist, I could not commit to going to the archive and going through all the archive boxes due to time and resource constraints. (Theo Reeves, University of Birmingham)

People don't come back to them because they're currently difficult to access in museums as well as in in the publications. Whereas, if people knew that they were easier to access, they would do the research. (Anwen Cooper, Rewilding project)

Potential of the proposed NCAA

It's important that data sharing is encouraged if not enforced. That's what matters. (Researcher Survey 2)

I think that data could be mined form various sources and linked together- we don't want to repeat what already exists. You could mine the ADS data, and it would also show their records as well the museum holdings . . . but there's still going to be stuff missed off isn't there because of time lags and publication backlogs. (Anwen Cooper, Rewilding Project)

I think there has to be a breakdown between formal museum collections that are donated by the public and then archaeological research or archaeological commercial collections that come in. That's another part of my PhD that I'm teasing out at the moment - what would that policy actually look like? How would it be framed, and what are the procedures that you can go through? (Marie Woods, University of York)

Access to information requires archaeological collections to be well-catalogued, easily searchable and clear standards of information held. (Researcher Survey 3)

There is a critical issue for the whole [NCAA] project for anything produced after this resource is created. There will be guidelines, we will accept boxes of finds and you can specify box size and so on. And you can specify what archive you will accept and how it's catalogued and so on and so forth… So, by specifying what it is that you accept, all you should need in your central archive is somebody to support the researcher who turns up. To say, right, these are where the finds are, here's your computer terminal where you can access the scans, these are the shelves where the paper archive is – get on with it. (Steve Rippon, University of Exeter)

In a perfect world, detailed information about what collections exist would be extremely handy online, noting that the types of search terms being used might not equate to headline database entries. (Henry Chapman, University of Birmingham)

What are the plans for the level of digitisation for new archives? Is there a plan to have it on a website you could just go online and look at it? Because that would be really good rather than having to travel somewhere just to look at some paper things that could be scanned. So that does seem like a really vital thing. (David Gould, University of Newcastle)

I could see a model where actually the ADS grey literature resource is switched to the national collection as it were. It's digital, it doesn't matter where that's housed. (Steve Rippon, University of Exeter)

Detailed searchable records of archives contents and location. (Theo Reeves, University of Birmingham)

The NCAA is a very useful way forward and would support it fully. This could be linked with index systems to find one's way around collections, especially if it were available online. (Stephen Upex, University of Cambridge)

Access - museums and expertise

Researchers reported the current unpredictable nature of being able to access material once they had identified at which museum or repository it was held. A significant reason for this can be classed as 'museum issues' which include a lack of response from the museum, a lack of museum staff time to provide access, and access prevented by operational reasons (e.g. museum closed for redevelopment). However, several researchers strongly valued the benefit of working alongside existing museum curators and volunteers who are familiar with their collection. Some saw the creation of a national collection or body as undermining museum knowledge creation and management, as well as concerns about potential erosion or undermining of regional expertise. Still, the opportunity for a national approach to offer collection and curatorial expertise was seen as a significant opportunity (for example, Researcher Surveys 3 and 7), and one noted the positive impact this might have on monitoring and facilitating progress of archive deposition (Alex Smith). Access to expertise could also include an element of public outreach, if there existed a database of experts including professionals and individuals from local archaeology groups, that users could access via the proposed collection datastore (Marie Woods). It should be noted, however, that most of the respondents to this consultation self-selected their involvement, as they already had experience of working well with museums and their staff; this theme does not necessarily represent those for whom access to collections and museum staff is difficult or untested.

Current situation: Museums and expertise

Sometimes access is very easy, the archive stored well and the curator knowledgeable. Other times, there is no specialist curator, volunteers are unclear about the location of

finds, access is limited to certain days or times, and difficult to arrange access. (Researcher Survey 3)

It's been hit and miss. The biggest issue is communication. (Researcher Survey 2)

It is really difficult to get access to museum collections at the moment. Because of under-resourcing. It's not the fault of the museum. They've got too few staff, commitments to do public engagement, work with school kids right the way through to university academics doing their ivory tower stuff and so on. So at the moment, yes, in theory you can get into a museum to see stuff. But it can often be incredibly slow. Research projects have deadlines like everything else and sometimes it's not practical to do it [research visit] because it takes too long. (Steve Rippon, University of Exeter)

The biggest challenge is the pots are not catalogued/accessioned, despite having been in the collections for years/decades. . . I am stuck at the moment and don't know how to progress. I have offered to catalogue the assemblage at Tullie House myself, as otherwise there is no way I can sample them. I will need to create temporary records in order to do my research. The curators have told me all collections are off-site in cold and inaccessible stores… (Medi Jones-Williams, University of Bristol)

Many museums are not aware of the archaeological collections they hold. Especially those that have been deposited under research frameworks rather than through development. (Researcher Survey 8)

It is often necessary to obtain the permission of individual researchers/academics who oversee those archives. This then comes down to personal contacts. (Researcher Survey 7)

Some archives are about impossible to use with poor indexing etc and the lack of staff in many places is the biggest problem. (Stephen Upex, University of Cambridge)

You sometimes notice the difference where there is an actual archaeologist in a curatorial post. It's not so much about the ability to know what they've got or anything like that, it's about the enthusiasm for research to be done on it and how enthusiastically they go about facilitating that. (Ben Jervis, University of Leicester)

My experience is generally very positive in terms of archive curators being willing to help when they are available. But there is also a real problem in availability, or in some cases, institutions still having sufficient staffing to support enquiries. (Henry Chapman, University of Birmingham)

Proposed NCAA: Negative impact on expertise

Having experienced curatorial museum staff with knowledge of the region and archaeology is indispensable, when accessing a collection that you have no idea what's in that store.

Sending a list of objects to staff is unhelpful as you can miss really important things… [NCAA] staff would lack detailed knowledge of the collection, built up by regular access to it. (Wil Patridge, University of Exeter)

A centralised NCAA system will be a more generic process/mechanical without any real knowledge or intent behind it. (Wil Partridge, University of Exeter)

So it'd be potentially just one more place to go, one more person to speak to. (David Gould, University of Newcastle)

Increasingly, you're seeing archaeological expertise not being present in local museums, particularly in those areas where you've got four or five museums that serve the county. You've got a collections manager who may or may not have an archaeological background. So in that sense, having access to archaeological expertise within a national scale curatorial team would be really helpful. But at the same time, you want to be able to access local material and local expertise sometimes, particularly if you're working with the community, or volunteers within a museum or something like that. That's something that really needs to be thought through – so that, by centralising, you're not diminishing the role of museums that the local communities are linked to. (Ben Jervis, University of Leicester)

I think what I'm getting at is I think there's a real dissonance between what archaeologists are trying to do and the challenges that museum curators face now. Whatever curators there are left - there must be about five archaeology professionals left in museums. I'm not tyring to a disservice to those left, but it's often the social history personnel, the education officer, that that is deals with, and that deals with schools and collections. I think, more broadly, that the archaeological collections going into museums are going to be a problem in terms of what we're going to do with them when they get there. (Stephen Sherlock, Consultant and researcher)

Clearly the museum and archives in the public sector needs to be massively improved. The issue is government funding. How well funded would the NCAA be? How many jobs would be created? Who would lose their jobs? (Medi Jones-Williams, University of Bristol)

Proposed NCAA: Positive impact on expertise and advisors

It always helps to discuss and share ideas. (Researcher Survey 8)

[Staff could provide] widely available knowledge about research gaps, unexamined archives and interesting finds. And increased enthusiasm from people running these places. Placing trust in researchers to handle archives with care and to know what they're looking for. (Researcher Survey 2)

It's very hard to capture all the data about a site online, especially from legacy records. Having someone who could answer questions about it would be very helpful. (Researcher Survey 6)

We know that universities don't have access to a great deal of material to help for all disciplines. Not just from archaeology, but when you think about biology, microbiology, you can look at all of that and say, 'okay, well we've got these samples, historic samples that can help with DNA strains'. So, it's looking at the wider picture, not just from an archaeological perspective, but using that material to support academic research. (Marie Woods, University of York)

Being able to talk to curators is incredibly helpful. Regional and thematic knowledge is always very helpful. (Henry Chapman, University of Birmingham)

The Regional Advisors would be really useful because, part of it is that thing of being able to talk to someone and they'll be able to suggest different connections, maybe outside of the HER search. Having that in depth knowledge of the means and the ways by which these archives are produced - because archives are culturally situated they are in themselves, and cultural objects subject to the same biases of selection and retention and curation as any other material. Again, they're not they're not static. You need someone with the expertise and specialist curatorial knowledge is really useful to signpost any issues and information about the archive. (Rob Hedge, University of Leicester / freelance finds specialist)

Having a person to go to who not only knows the collections but also the pottery series that are held in that collection would be brilliant. (Stephen Upex, University of Cambridge)

I personally think it's a good thing if there's more productivity on behalf of the archive / repository, to get the archives in because there's an archive backlog across the country. And I bet you'll find there's less of an archive backlog for regions where there's more proactive people in the archive repository. In fact, I know that's the case. It might make more units invest a little bit more in their archives team and be good for both for the depositors, mostly units, the curatorial stuff and the museum service. (Alex Smith, Headland Archaeology)

I can see great benefits for that. And I know from personal experience in the Northeast there was renaissance funding about 10 years ago out of Newcastle and of Hartlepool, that fed in a level of skill and expertise into collections management and touring exhibitions of things that that is on the level that you're talking about, that that I can see great benefits for. (Stephen Sherlock, Consultant and researcher)

Access - geography and transport

Geography and the resulting restrictions placed on physical access to collections was a common theme. These include both the geographical location of stored collections, and the practical consideration to travel long distances and/or stay overnight. Respondents felt the geographical location of any central store was an important consideration. These responses therefore clearly speak into the decision about whether to have a single central store or a dispersed hub model. Some respondents stated they would visit a centralised store if it was necessary (e.g. respondents 4 and 6, Henry Chapman, Theo Reeves and Anwen Cooper). Most researchers preferred the idea of a hub model, with material being transported to regional locations for research access and use. The need for the researcher to be able to choose which hub material was sent to was noted. The associated issue of cost is considered separately below (Section 7).

Geographical location: current situation

Currently I must prioritise which museums have the most suitable material, to save time and money (Wil Partridge, University of Exeter).

Would I go all the way to Essex just to look at one bag of pot? No, I would just not do that research. Would I do it if it could be transferred down to Bristol? Yeah, I probably would. I always have a threshold in my head – does something involve an overnight stay? Because it dramatically increases the cost. (Steve Rippon, University of Exeter)

I currently expect to travel to local/regional museums for access. This wouldn't change for me. (Researcher Survey 4)

For the whole of the EAPIT [Exeter: A Place In Time] project we spent three years just looking at stuff in the South West. If you had to go to another part of the country that would be a bit of a pain for a three-year project. (David Gould, University of Newcastle)

Geographical location: neutral views

[Would you visit a central store?]: If it was worth it and if I could afford it. At the moment, it's much easier for me to visit local collections. (Researcher Survey 4)

[Would you visit a central store?]: Depends for what purpose and where it is, but could make access easier. (Researcher Survey 7)

It would be a bit of a pain if you're talking about having a central archive, but actually half the stuff actually isn't in the central archive, that kind of undermines the whole point a little bit. (David Gould, University of Newcastle)

I think access should be a key priority. Not everyone has access to their own transport. (Researcher Survey 8)

Either a national centre, or a relevant regional hub. Ideally these would be accessible by public transport. There is a decision to be made between cheaper modern warehousing in not particularly accessible places and use of e.g. high-street regeneration schemes to create centres with public fronts. (Researcher Survey 3)

I do think public transport is important – to facilitate public access to research; for student placements and training; to allow more people to access. However, it shouldn't be the overriding factor. (Researcher Survey 3)

Geographical location: Future potential of a centralised model

I would want to visit the collections wherever they are. If they would be moved to such a centre which is then easier to access, then great. (Researcher Survey 2)

Obviously, a lot will depend on where the national centre is. Sometimes, places are more or less easy to get to, in practice, for a lot of people. A lot of organisations think that London is the centre of the universe and it's not. Birmingham is actually a lot more accessible than for example Leicester or Nottingham – some of the places geographically in the centre of the country are actually quite difficult to get to. (Steve Rippon, University of Exeter)

The fear could be that this becomes a British Museum scenario where material is held and then guarded with limited access. If there was a very clear purpose that there would be open access, then yes. (Marie Woods, University of York)

It would be a lot more efficient. You wouldn't believe how many journeys [co-researcher's] had to do to gather stuff, and it's mostly from Southern Britain, for the Rewilding study because he's had to go to each individual museum and fieldwork organisation. Obviously, if there was one place where stuff could be called up by its bar code it would just be easier- it would also be greener. (Anwen Cooper, Rewilding project)

Personally, yes, I would go to a central National Centre. Especially if there were half a dozen different archives that I wanted to see. Not everyone would be able to, so I think you would want some sort of transport system whereby you could order up archives to be delivered to a regional hub. (Rob Hedge, University of Leicester / freelance finds specialist)

If there was one place, you could take a week and visit and go through all the archives you have identified, I could access multiple sites in one day rather than trying to visit multiple counties our units it would take up less time. (Theo Reeves, University of Birmingham)

I think all those points about accessibility, public transport access, ideally – and I guess you need somewhere with a relatively cheap hotel nearby. From that perspective, somewhere in the Midlands makes sense doesn't it, because it's best connected. You

don't want to be in London as it would cost anyone a fortune to get there. Maybe somewhere in the Birmingham area. Something with a railway station right next to it. (Ben Jervis, University of Leicester)

I'd be happy to visit a national centre to access collections, although location would be quite critical in determining how frequently I would use it. (Henry Chapman, University of Birmingham)

If everything is contained within a central store, that'd be great. And as you say, if there's good facilities there to actually analyse them, then that makes absolute sense. But it really depends on how much material they want to look at and how big the material is. If it was one single place where you could go to and get material collected from different museums that you wanted in one place, I'm sure specialists / researchers would love that. And it probably would encourage more people to do that type of research as well, rather than having to make trips to 10 different museums. That's a good one! (Alex Smith, Headland Archaeology)

Geographical location: Future potential of a hubs model

A regional hub would be really convenient – like an interlibrary loan system to return it back to the museum for study… it would be good to choose which hub museum, so [you] can send it where the staff member is most helpful/specialist. (Wil Partridge, University of Exeter)

Hubs sounds like it would make it easier. (Steve Rippon, University of Exeter)

Aggregating material rather than making it available locally also presents access problems. I think I would prefer to see investment in local archiving, partnerships between local/regional places of deposit. The data about collections could be brought together, for example via ADS, as a place to search and find collections. See how the National Archives database also permits searching local archives catalogues. (Researcher Survey 4)

I live in Bristol so going to some depressing place down south like Swindon is fine for me now, but I am from Scotland – if I lived and worked in Edinburgh now, I would highly resent having to travel to some awful place within the orbit of London. (Medi Jones-Williams, University of Bristol)

If loans were possible, I would probably use this as it would be incredibly convenient. But in practice, I am happy to travel to collections. (Henry Chapman, University of Birmingham)

Access - costs

Respondents were concerned by potential costs to access archaeological archives held by a national collection. Access fees for material held by the proposed national collection were perceived to restrict research by all types of researcher, other than for large grant

funded projects. This view was recorded by researchers across the demographics including established academics, doctoral researchers, and local museums. This is especially a consideration for independent researchers, students, and pilot projects, which may not have the benefit of grant funding or other support in place. The dominant reluctance to pay an access fee arises from the need to pay research costs (including travel, accommodation and access fees) from their own pocket. Established researchers stated that some costs can be written into funding bids but they would need clear details prior to submitting grant applications. However, as Steve Rippon's comment in the preceding section demonstrates, not all research by established academics is undertaken with project funding, and they are therefore in the similar situation of self-funding research costs. Respondents showed that the cost of access also needs to consider transport of materials for scientific analysis. The following number of quotes show the strength and range of feelings held by respondents:

[Fees] would be a barrier to most researchers and public users. There could be a sliding scale from free to charged-for, for those who can write funds for access into a research grant bid. (Researcher Survey 4)

Need to know what sort of figure! We run on an extremely tight budget - no outside funding at all. Being asked to pay for access would be a problem. As would travelling to a central hub. Costs would come from volunteers' own pockets. If once a year/five years it might be feasible, but not more often. (Bridget Wheeler, Beaminster Museum)

It would be a barrier and seeing parts of the collection may be a requirement to then apply for research funding. So at least an initial consultation should be free. (Researcher Survey 7)

Within reason, a small fee is acceptable, but I have seen ridiculous fees, especially if they charge per day and you just need an hour. (Researcher Survey 2)

To have to charge a fee to access this material - I think, no, I wouldn't support that. The developers should be paying for this frankly. (Steve Rippon, University of Exeter)

Yes, such fees could be written into grant applications, although it is sometimes difficult to know the length of time/access requirements ahead of actually starting the research or seeing the collections. I don't think this would be an issue for university-based researchers but could be for student projects, local community projects etc. (Researcher Survey 3)

The cost of moving material is super variable. For some museums or material groups, I can turn up in a car and I take the material away and it costs me nothing. But others work within very specific rules, or the value of what you're loaning goes over a certain amount, so you need an art handler and the lowest amount you'll pay for an art handler to move stuff might be 5 or 6 grand. In other cases, they'll move it cheaper – or the curator might

drive it down and you have to pay for the curator time and expenses, or a museum will add a charge on top for the time of packing. And sometimes you might also have to pay for the conservator. Some loans cost me my time to drive there £25 worth of fuel and others, it cost £1000s and £1000s of pounds. (Rachel Crellin, University of Leicester)

Most of my work is not supported by grants and on a tight budget so the size of the fee might be the difference between using the collection or not. To me it would make sense for collections being loaned to cost a fee, but maybe not if they're visited at the central archive. (Researcher Survey 6)

The larger the grant you're applying the more chance you have to write this stuff in. But you can't go around every single place to ask what their current charging policy is. But in five years time, when you actually want to spend the money, things can be completely different. And we're seeing this increase, so you've had to pay curator time for researchers to actually go into the museum and that was a major barrier on a recent grant application. (Ben Jervis, University of Leicester)

[Would access fees be a barrier]: 'Yes, unless you could get funding, but a lot of funding is being cut at the moment. Charging would probably be a barrier to access or limit the amount of research that can take place. (Theo Reeves, University of Birmingham)

I think you should have – where there is a grant behind research – there should be fees and those fees should be standardised because it should be a way of helping to maintain the collection and I'm 100% fine with paying that. But when that becomes £120 quid for a half day, that comes to masses of money and so loads of their collection isn't getting studied because it's too expensive. So, there should be fees, but then there should also be a zero cost access, so you can send an undergrad somewhere or a master's student. The other area [for free access would be] undertaking pilot studies, so you can get the big funding. (Rachel Crellin, University of Leicester)

Funding is the problem across the board with all aspects of research and if there were charges then this may limit the take up of visits. (Steve Upex, University of Cambridge)

Travel to pick up collections is usually no problem and can be costed into project bids. (Researcher Survey 3)

Fees would be a barrier, but mostly because we are not used to it and so there is no culture of paying. Within my institution, I do have access for funds that could be used for this purpose (currently such funds are used for things ranging from conference travel to radiocarbon dates). (Henry Chapman, University of Birmingham)

If this is going to be a National Archive then Government funding should factor in allowing for free access. Other works/financial requirements can be obtained through the paid

members of staff in applying for funds/grants, wider sector sponsorship or university memberships. (Researcher Survey 8)

The other thing about bench fees, especially for freelance specialists, you're not necessarily going to know whether the archives might be useful until the stuff arrives on your bench. If you've already agreed a cost, anything more then comes out of the specialists pocket. (Rob Hedge, University of Leicester / freelance finds specialist)

Research facilities and equipment

The potential for dedicated research space was regarded as a strong positive aspect of the potential NCAA. Researchers reported existing provision at museums are insufficient and unpredictable. The creation of a central location - or regional hubs with similar types of provision - offered the potential for bookable rooms or work areas, equipment and lab facilities, as well as rest areas and café amenities.

Some also suggested the potential for a public space or venue to enable teaching, workshops or conferences. Two respondents stated that equipment will need to include ‘archaic’ kit such as a microfiche readers, 35mm slide viewers and old computers to read floppy disks and CD’s, and questioned how easily these could still be sourced (Wil Partridge and Theo Reeves). Consideration of how a national collection and facility would link in with other UKRI / AHRC funded facilities was also raised by individuals and through conversations with UAUK members, with specific reference to the Capability for Collections project (CapCo) and the Research Infrastructure for Conservation and Heritage Science project (RICHeS).

Researchers also raised the issue that good access requires adequate and sustained staffing and resourcing; one researcher suggested a system like IKEA with staff to help up front with researcher requests and suggest alternatives or additional data, while staff behind the scenes retrieve and organise archives via a barcode system (Theo Reeves). In addition, there was recognition that good facilities in one place could also be accessed and used by researchers during project delivery – adding value to the facility beyond the study of deposited archive materials.

Existing research facilities at museums

The research space in museums varies enormously. The RAMM [Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter] is very, very well provided for with The Ark, an amazing facility. But I've looked at some assemblages in museums literally standing up with a box half dangling off the shelf. So improved facilities would be a big plus. (Steve Rippon, University of Exeter)

Staff are usually very good. Premises are not necessarily well equipped for visits/space to consult material. (Researcher Survey 3)

If you're looking at a large ceramic assemblage from an urban site which has 150 boxes of pottery having the layout space, suitable microscope and the ability to take photographs of the pottery [will be important]… you don't want to be doing you processing for petrology or anything else in the archive store, but certainly that large layout space for a large amount of material is needed. Often you end up working in the meeting room, as those facilities aren't available in a traditional museum store. (Ben Jervis, University of Leicester)

Often Museums and archive stores just don't have suitable facilities and until this can be offered to researchers then there will be an impasse. (Steve Upex, University of Cambridge)

Potential for research facilities and venue

Researcher space, digital access on site, somewhere to open download the digital records, access to ADS etc. Possibly a way to access old files and disks and ability to transfer that data. Support to access the archives or records - I suppose you would want system a bit like IKEA! Café or kitchen facilities if you are spending that much time there. Photocopying or scanning facilities I assume would be standards in a researcher space. And if you are there for multiple days, affordable accommodation nearby. (Theo Reeves, University of Birmingham)

Research spaces, ideally specialised to artefact type (faunal remains, human remains, stone tools, pottery etc.) with equipment for safely examining, measuring, photographing, possibly scanning artefacts. Plug sockets for laptops. Good lighting. Clear procedures (where to put items once finished, how to move artefact boxes, making sure not to commingle anything). Supervision without it being overbearing - someone who you can ask pragmatic questions. (Researcher Survey 2)

Laboratory space for sampling, scanning, analysis (including space to lay out collections); research rooms for consultation of paper or digital archives; photography facilities; advanced bookings ideal. (Researcher Survey 3)

I think EAPIT [Exeter: A Place in Time] is a definite model. Using lots of funky new modern scientific techniques to analyse material that is on the shelves in museum collections. (Steve Rippon, University of Exeter)

At such a facility, it would be handy to have two main things – space to work with collections, and onsite support and expertise to help. (Henry Chapman, University of Birmingham)

Bookable research rooms, photography equipment, basic equipment for analysis e.g. scales, if not a café then somewhere near a café. (Researcher Survey 6)

Maybe the opportunity to stay overnight, or at least a location where it is easy to find accommodation. (Researcher Survey 7)

To have work rooms and, crucially, setting out space. You need a lot of bench space to properly set stuff out – and proper sort of bench space. For lab space, I envisage most people will have their own spaces for lab work, but it will be useful to have some binocular microscopes that you can borrow and use. (Rob Hedge, University of Leicester / freelance finds specialist)

You mentioned earlier, the idea that these places might have labs associated with them. So from my perspective, that sounds super on the one hand, but like a potential duplication of things that are already happening on another hand. The AHRC CapCo project (Capability for Collections) has created all of these amazing lab facilities in universities and some museums across the UK already. It will be stupid to replicate that and invest in more of that equipment, because I don't actually believe there's currently the throughput on all of this equipment that all of these universities and museums have purchased which means that there's no capacity for other people to work on it. (Rachel Crellin, University of Leicester)

If you could get a good range of equipment and things like SEMs, pXRF and all that sort of thing in one place, that would be great. And for bringing your own archives and your own your own finds to it. And then at the same time, maybe collecting things from other archives to do comparative studies - I can see that being massively useful. If you have a wish list, that will be up there. (Alex Smith, Headland Archaeology)

I guess actually another thing that we should be useful is it capability for it to hold events. You can see it as being really useful money spinner, having conferences and those kinds of things, particularly if they've got a handling element to them. And you can see benefits for a project like ours, and I guess for Rachel as well. Being able to just go to a single point and do a lot of your business in one place is really valuable. (Ben Jervis, University of Leicester)

Environmental considerations

When asked whether environmental considerations would be relevant to their use of the proposed NCAA most respondents had no strong opinion while one expressed a general awareness of the issue (Marie Woods). Only a single researcher expressed concern for the impact of the physical central store (Researcher Survey 3).

The majority of respondents were mindful of transport and travel to the NCAA location. In terms of potential, some felt that this would increasingly be relevant and so should be considered, and one interviewee suggested the NCAA could offer leadership in field for the archaeology and museums sector (Rob Hedge). One researcher said environmental considerations were very important to them and travel decisions were based on environmental impact and sustainability considerations (Anwen Cooper). Two researchers said environmental sustainability factors were not a consideration for them (Researcher Survey 6 and Medi Jones-Williams). One researcher (Theo Reeves) pointed out that public transport was the preferred method on funding applications, and that sometimes decisions about where to visit had to be made based on the availability of public transport. Importantly, one respondent who lives in Devon stated that a central store would increase rather than reduce their current individual environmental impact.

Proposed NCAA: Negative environmental impact

The fact is, it would increase our carbon footprints! There is a simple fact that a hell of a lot of people live a long way away from a mainline train station… I could see that some of the cheaper places to get an enormous warehouse - this is going to be an incredibly impressive facility - they're likely to be out of town. So actually, the primary means of accessing this is really going to be people driving, rather than public transport. Which then opens up, well, where is it easy to get to if you have to drive? So I think a lot of thought would need to be given to the location. And I think some organisations can be very precious about 'we have to use public transport'. But by the time you've driven, say, an hour to get to a mainline train station, then you've got the train up, then you've changed trains, then you potentially want to get a taxi from the city centre train station out to an out-of-town warehouse… (Steve Rippon, University of Exeter)

Environmental impact: Neutral response

It's always good to have public transport links but depending on whether I need to bring lots of kit, I usually drive. (Researcher Survey 2)

Travel is only a minor aspect compared to e.g. air conditioning/humidity/climate controls for collections, plus all those plastic bags! (Researcher Survey 3)

NCAA: Positive environmental impact

It is inappropriate now to build something that only works by virtue of private transport/car. At the very least, a new Centre must have charging points for EVs, but excellent public transport is essential. (Researcher Survey 4)

In terms of net zero, carbon footprints etc, I've not really seen anything like that but I'm sure there's potential for that kind of thing to come on stream in the future. Other than in terms of costs - I have a Zoom meeting, instead of flying somewhere. It's rarely to do with the carbon footprint… at the moment. That is something to think about in terms of digital storage, which is obviously is not carbon neutral. Too many museums are retrofitted into buildings, which are not entirely appropriate, particularly the storage. (Ben Jervis, University of Leicester)

The sustainability of carbon footprint contribution to net zero challenges is an interesting one, because I think the NCAA could also have a really important role as a place to develop ideas and showcase new ways of working. Dealing with archives in a really innovative way could support the rest of the sector. I think that would be quite a quite a kind of good legacy for it and becomes a home for discussion of archives and best practice - working out new models of how to create curate and archives in the 21st century. (Rob Hedge, University of Leicester / freelance finds specialist)

Obviously, if there was one place where stuff could be called up by its bar code it would just be easier- it would also be greener... Increasingly, universities are meant only to use public transport, unless it's like absolutely necessary, and not to fly. I'm quite hardcore about using public transport . . . you just have to get in a different mindset and think in advance- it takes a bit longer, but you have to these days. That's all part of being a bit more sustainable. So somewhere that was on a public transport route and easy to access would be best. (Anwen Cooper, Rewilding Project)

Public transport is crucial. (Medi Jones-Williams, University of Bristol)

Public transport is obviously going to be beneficial (primarily in relation to environmental sustainability), but on a personal level, I would be happy either way. It may sound petty, but if driving, easy car parking is incredibly important. (Henry Chapman, University of Birmingham)

Public transport is important, also with funding applications, they prefer you use public transport. (Theo Reeves, University of Birmingham)

Operational Models and potential

Researchers were asked for their views on potential operating models within the general concepts of an Arm's Length Body, an independent Charitable Trust, a quasi-commercial

or commercial body, or a university-based research institution. Many of the survey participants did not respond to this question. This suggests either a lack of opinion, or a lack of knowledge about how operating models may impact their research and access.

Of the participants who did respond, the majority did not favour a commercial model. One respondent pointed out that a diverse research landscape is increasingly valued by funders and that a variety of institutions could support the research infrastructure (Anwen Cooper). A couple of researchers suggested that a university would not be a good fit due to the higher costs and potential restrictions to access, however one researcher pointed to the good track record of universities with research and funding. One responder pointed out that funding could be sought beyond traditional funders such as Historic England (Anwen Cooper).

Researcher participants who did offer their view commonly showed concern for ensuring the financial sustainability of the proposed national collection, ensuring longevity and security of the collection, and consideration of interface and staffing needs. The following quotes reflect the range of views:

I think the NCAA is a useful idea in principle. (Researcher Survey 3)

I've mainly worked in university settings, but now I'm doing a research project from within industry, and funders are increasingly interested in a diverse a diverse research landscape. I think that they would say that they wouldn't have a preferred type of organisation delivering this kind of initiative, because is more likely they would prefer that it wasn't a university that was delivering it. I think there needs to be expertise, but there is expertise in many different types of organisations- especially in archaeology, and it's not valued equally. (Anwen Cooper, Rewilding project)

My feeling is that universities are possibly more problematic here. From my experience, costs are likely to be higher, and the practicalities of access can be tricky. I think that a Charitable Trust is perhaps the better way to go, but that a quasi-commercial body might be the most suitable. However, overall, I do not feel strongly. (Henry Chapman, University of Birmingham)

I think it's a good idea, in principle. There's two different elements there: where do we put the archives when there's nowhere to put it? And then where do we find them? If the NCAA could solve both of those, it would be it would be fantastic for academic and commercial researchers and independent researchers. (Alex Smith, Headland Archaeology)

Yes, it’s a useful idea. (Ben Jervis, University of Leicester)

There would be benefits if it was university-based as unis are better funded and professionally run. (Medi Jones-Williams, University of Bristol)

I can certainly see the necessity for this approach. (Stephen Sherlock, Consultant and researcher)

Sustainability and long-term view

I'm more worried about financial sustainability. (Researcher Survey 6)

In theory, the charitable trust linked to a university department is maybe more risky, I'm not sure. But because you haven't got that kind of state backing of the Arm's Length Body, but on the other hand, the Arm's Length Body can be wiped out with a stroke of a pen, right? Equally, a charitable trust can fail and the university can change its priorities. But if a charitable trust and a university are linked, then you've got the board of the trust, that friction can be uncomfortable but it does mean you've got checks and balances and no one institution can pull the plug. (Rob Hedge, University of Leicester / freelance finds specialist)

I worked at The Hive, which was a university / public joint venture so it was part county council and local authority and part university. They were equal partners which did have some advantages but those partnerships can be quite tricky to navigate. We found they often depended on personalities. And key people build working relationships over time and everything's rosy, and then someone retires or someone moves on and you start to get friction as people who didn't buy into the original vision come in. And institution priorities change and suddenly what they committed to 10 years ago, they'd no longer want to spend. (Rob Hedge, University of Leicester / freelance finds specialist)

[On an ALB model] There's a certain, hitting the ground running side to it as well, isn't there? It's partly something that already exists, they've already got procedures in place, they've already got staffing, processes and stuff, you know, kind of building from the ground up. (Ben Jervis, University of Leicester)

But obviously, the long-term funding is the problem. Yeah, but it's certainly worth doing and I agree with that. One of the things that some of the museums in Essex that we spoke to would say, 'yes, but if you gave the money to our staff, we could do that locally'. (Stephen Sherlock, Consultant and researcher)

It has to be resilient against cuts in the future. (Theo Reeves, University of Birmingham)

For the client, it's not really dependent on whether it's Historic England or a university based one. Developers like surety, so, the more surety you can get from the start the better. I would have thought that for ease of getting things established and ease of running it and working with various museums, if you were aligned to a body like Historic England, they'd be more inclined to get buy in from different museums. For example, the fact that ADS is University of York makes no difference to us, against if that was done through Historic England. (Alex Smith, Headland Archaeology)

[AHRC] have this idea of these kind of heritage hubs, where museums and the public can interact more. It's no good saying to universities, why don't you take on all of these archives without some way of funding and supporting that. The real risk would be to give universities archives, which some might say yes to because they'd see the research potential of them and think about what they bring into the future. Others would say no, I can't support and house this. What needs to happen is that the two things need to be connected. So, they need space to store all the stuff and then they need people. So one of the big problems with CapCo, is that it's put all this science into universities and museums, but what it hasn't done is put people in with them. So you have to already have existing technicians to run this stuff. (Rachel Crellin, University of Leicester)

For a long time, people like Historic England were expected to fund and drive and deliver all these kinds of things. But actually, money is very limited in lots of public organisations, whether it's museums or Historic England. And yet, via research projects, you can garner huge amounts of money that can be spent on blue sky thinking, but they could also be spent on things that are practical and that have impact across the discipline. (Anwen Cooper, Rewilding project)

Commercialisation

I don't think an initiative like this should be profit-oriented. (Researcher Survey 2)

If you make it commercial you will have the restriction that they will charge. (Theo Reeves, University of Birmingham)

I would worry that a quasi-commercial body would be pushed to make a profit, which would mean rising fees for both deposition and access. A university-based research institution has its own risks - priorities and funding models change. I think it would be best as an independent charitable trust, supported by national organisations. (Researcher Survey 3)

The financial constraints of operating as an independent organisation could impact on the previous elements of this questionnaire. The aims and objectives of what you hope to achieve could be lost and barriers will be made due to capacity and income. (Marie Woods, University of Newcastle)

With a commercial model, you need to be careful about what you're monetising, and how you frame your monetising. For example, that you’re not actually monetising access to the data, because that data should already be in the public domain. It’s worth thinking about that in relation to HERs as they're always treading that line which was / is part of the big debate around HER charging. (Ben Jervis, University of Leicester)

I would shy away from it being based in university. What it needs is long term sustainability and it works with something like ADS because - if the University of York were to walk

away, there are other means in which that digital data can continue to function as an archive. Where you've got boxes and stuff, and a university decides to pull the plug - using the classic example of a university closing its archaeology department, for example, then all of a sudden that material is homeless again. That's the worst situation in a way because at the moment, it's homeless, but it's also distributed. If it was all in one place, it would basically fall to Historic England acting as the curator of last resort. Actually, running it through Historic England would actually be, in a sense, the most sensible way of doing it because they've got the infrastructure and they've got the know-how and they've already got the links to government. And they have expertise in terms of science advisors and, if you talk about having labs and stuff, that'd be a whole different ballgame if it was integrated into Historic England's scientific side. And under Historic England for example, it would also already be a research organisation, which could apply for funding in its own under its own name as well. (Ben Jervis, University of Leicester)

Discussion – the Researcher perspective

Consultation with sector-based researchers has responded to two key questions:

- What are the benefits/opportunities and concerns/challenges identified by current researchers on the concept of a National Collection?
- What level of research access might be sought by universities and other research institutions of a national collection, on-site, and off-site? What would the advantages or disadvantages of such a model be?

Researchers perceived the concept of a National Collection of Archaeological Archives as a good idea, with significant potential benefits including improved awareness, accessibility and collaboration at all levels of the university structure – from undergraduate to master's level, doctoral, and established academics. Their attention is most drawn to the practical workings of such an entity and the impacts and benefits for their individual research.

The creation of a digital index and catalogue was the biggest perceived benefit as it would allow information to be discovered more easily and provide access by users regardless of their physical location. There was a strong desire for the collection datastore to facilitate digital access to the contents of archives including born digital material, and scans of paper records – whether through interoperability with existing digital repositories and heritage information (such as ADS, HERs or potential for interfaces with HIAS and MDS). However, caution was voiced about the need to ensure the quality of data entered into that system, the need for clear guidelines, and the enforcement of these by planning authorities and archaeologists.

The primary perceived benefit of physical access was of research being easier and quicker to arrange through a centralised system, to a variety and volume of material. Researchers

were very keen to see practical improvements to research facilities including bookable workspaces, and access to new and archaic equipment. However, the cost of physical access is a demonstrable concern for the different types of researchers, and there was a significant common view that pay-to-access would be detrimental to enabling research, especially for those operating outside of large grant funded projects or developing research ideas.

Among the consultees there was no clear consensus of preference of access through either a single centralised model, or a dispersed hub model. For some, the proposed national collection offers potential for reduced personal research costs including multiple journeys and overnight accommodation. However, several respondents expressed concern at the geographical constraints of a centralised national store. Most important was the potential impact on researchers located far away from the site, and the increased environmental impact of having to travel a distance rather than to a regional location. There was no consensus on the importance of public transport, with some stating this was essential while others expressed the impracticalities of long-distance travel on multiple transport forms and their necessary reliance on private car use. The perceived increase to their environmental impact for using a central store is an important area for consideration, though the ability to visit one central store to retrieve materials and data, rather than travel to several locations was also considered potentially greener by some. Overall, a model comprising a central resource with regional hubs was the preferred approach. The geographical location of the central store is an important factor, and it is important that due consideration is given to the practicality of regional access to that location if a centralised model is implemented. Further, in a regional or distributed model, the ability for researchers to choose their hub location rather than this being allocated by a central system, would be beneficial.

A further important aspect for researchers is the impact on knowledge creation and management. The creation of the proposed national collection with advisory staff offers potential to create expertise and support for researchers with ‘go-to’ people from whom to seek advice and input. With acknowledgement of the current pressures felt within the museum sector, and the reduction of specialists with archaeological curatorial expertise in many regional museums, a raft of regional advisors was felt to have merit. In addition, a team working under a national collection umbrella would be able to offer leadership in some areas, such as developing and testing workflows which respond to the need to work in an environmentally sustainable way. There is, however, a wide and deeply felt concern that the establishment of a national collection may have the unintended consequence of further threatening and dismantling regional museum curatorial knowledge.

With regards to possible operational models, the research community had less to say – generally, a commercial model is disliked but other structures seen as having less impact

on the nature of research and access. Overall, rather than a specific model being seen as preferred, commentary focused more on financial sustainability, long-term surety of the collection and mitigating for risk against the changing support of host bodies.

One limitation of the current consultation, recognised by the project delivery team, has been a focus on university-led archaeological research. Whilst a significant user group for the proposed national collection, it is felt that there is a need to recognise the diversity of researchers with an interest in the concept. Potential users of archaeological collections by other disciplines including biological sciences, object conservation, and geology is a key group which has not been engaged in the current research. A second group are the diverse archaeology researchers who work outside of formal academic contexts, some of whom have been consulted. This includes but is not limited to: museum staff and volunteers, freelance specialists, contracting archaeologists and heritage researchers, Finds Liaison Officers within the Portable Antiquities Scheme, local archaeology societies, metal detectorists, individuals interested in local history, and school pupils. Engagement with wider audiences will offer significant and demonstrable actualisation of the value of archaeological collections and will be required to demonstrate value for any funding model. The need to recognise this and engage with wider audiences in future consultation stages is therefore highlighted as a key recommendation.

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8 Results: Reviewing of Museum and Research Institution Needs

Introduction

Through a two-month stage of consultation and desk-based research, this project has gathered a substantial consultation dataset, providing qualitative feedback around four key aims:

1. What are the benefits/opportunities and concerns/challenges identified by current repositories/museums on the concept of a National Collection?
2. What level of accessibility, either virtually or physically, to archives in a central store might be required for those museums which would originally have held this material locally? As well as defining considerations, the implications of this should be quantified.
3. What level of research access might be sought by universities and other research institutions of a national collection, on-site, and off-site? What would the advantages or disadvantages of such a model be?
4. What are the pros and cons of different business/operating models for running such a National Collection?

Consultees have been drawn from across the sector, focused on two primary audiences – museums and researchers. Additional consultation with relevant stakeholders has provided additional depth, facilitating a broad though necessarily shallow picture of potential operational structures. This was used to understand the range of possible stakeholders that a national archaeological collection might have (see Figure 1), and informed deeper consultation with primary audiences to explore the aims listed above. The following section reflects on the results of consultation, frame around each aim. This is followed by a series of recommendations from the project team, highlighting needs for future development of the project, especially regarding consultation and communication needs, as well as consideration of how additional work should be framed.

Museums – benefits and concerns

The consultation indicates that – in general – the museum community welcomes a national approach to the management and care of archaeological archives, with some notable exceptions. The sector has a strong preference for this to form a coherent strategy which encompasses newly created archives and those existing within the current dispersed museum network. It must be emphasised that the responses given to this consultation were those of individual museum practitioners, and in most cases do not represent the views of their employing institution.

Due to the diversity of the museum sector, especially the historic legacy of curation and collections management practices that interplay with present day realities of decreasing and uncertain funding, it is not possible to identify a single preferred way of working, or a preference for one of the operational models under consideration (see Section 8). However, many overriding positive themes are evident. Of primary importance is the cultural value of archaeology, and its importance as a research resource, and for its inherent benefits to society.

Other recurrent themes arising from this consultation were:

- The opportunity to demonstrate the value and potential of archaeological archives at a national level.
- The benefit of 'saving' archives that would otherwise be at risk of loss.
- The potential to rationalise and refine existing archaeological archive collections to improve efficiency, access, and use in their current holding institutions.
- The opportunity to further develop collections management standards for archaeological archives and their varied constituent elements, building on existing established professional guidelines and ethics.
- The opportunity to create a digital datastore that combines future and existing archive data into a single open resource, to create new opportunities for public engagement, researcher access, and museum use.
- The opportunity to further develop a network of expertise that supports working with archaeological material in museums of all size, governance, location, and varieties of inhouse staff or volunteers.
- The opportunity to better integrate the professional sectors of planning, commercial, museum, and research archaeology.
- The opportunity to create training and professional career opportunities for entry level and early career professionals.
- The opportunity to improve the environmental impact of collections management through nation-wide buying power for packing materials and other essential resources.
- The opportunity to access funds to improve storage, access or staffing within the museum ecosystem.

Consultees also expressed numerous concerns about the potential for a national collection of archaeological archives to negatively impact the current ecosystem. The overriding concern was that a national collection threatens the existing museum infrastructure and working relationships, which currently work well in many areas. There is a clear need in any future development of the proposed national collection to acknowledge and articulate the value of the positive practices that currently exist, and to regard the whole museum

ecology as a diverse system with aspects that include functional and dysfunctional practices.

Other areas of concern expressed by the consultees were:

- The undermining of current functioning provisions for archaeological archives.
- The potential for a lost income stream to undermine the functioning of the museum or its governing body.
- The dismantling of archaeological expertise at the regional and local level, including the removal of researcher-curator relationships.
- The potential for existing governance and funding bodies such as Local Authorities to remove existing provisions as a cost-saving measure, in favour of a national ownership body.
- Legal practicalities of the ownership and use of any material curated by a national collection.
- Ethical considerations of the ownership and use of any material curated by a national collection.
- The impact on existing staff and volunteers of the required tasks arising from the creation of a national collection, such as the preparation of finds and digital records for physical transfer or inclusion in datasets – and this will be financially supported.
- The impact on existing staff and volunteers of using a centralised collection including time, travel, and loss of ability to focus on other core museum functions.
- The dismantling of diverse public access to and engagement with archaeology, as currently offered by regional and local museums.
- The potential diluting of the perceived core purpose of a national collection as a store repository and knowledge base.
- Environmental impacts arising from increased travel to use and access a national collection, as users and depositors.
- The potential negative public and stakeholder perception of a centralised resource undermining the importance of regional identity.

Museums – preferred operating model

Consultation with museum representatives showed no clear preference of Operating Model. The primary considerations for museums were:

- To ensure a stable and secure longevity of the national collection in its physical materiality.
- To ensure a stable and secure longevity of the national collection in its digital entity.

- To ensure equal and open access regardless of geographical location, governance, or content.
- To ensure a national collection could never be regarded as a financial asset.
- To ensure all professional legalities and ethics were adhered to.

Museum consultees did, however, evidence a strong preference for a central hub and regional spoke format. Many of the reasons for this preference overlap with those listed in the preceding section (Section 8). Additional reasons for the preferred hub-and-spoke model are:

- To advocate for the value of archaeology at the regional and local level.
- To maintain access to archaeology for museum users from all audiences, demographics, and different types of museum access and engagement.
- The potential to support regions and museums where archaeological archive provision currently works well and to invest in facilities within existing museums and repositories.
- To maintain regional expertise of archaeology and continue to develop the inter-personal relationships of knowledge that arise from research use of archive collections within the museum setting.
- To reduce the practical impact for staff and volunteers on use of archives including time, travel and accommodation costs.
- To ensure regional identity is supported through local heritage provision.

Researchers – benefits and concerns

The consultation indicates that the academic community welcomes a national approach to the management and care of archaeological archives. Akin to the museum sector, researchers voiced a strong preference for the proposed national collection to encompass newly created archives and those existing within the current dispersed network. It must be emphasised that due to the defining constraints of this consultation and the focus on academic researchers, the opinions of the full diversity of research users is not fully represented.

Academic consultees were enthusiastic about the concept of a national collection of archaeological archives. They perceived many benefits which include:

- The creation of a searchable, centralised, digital datastore offering the ability to discover, locate and access archaeological archives.
- The potential to enable more frequent research use of archives at all academic levels.
- Easier and quicker access enabled by a central contact point for information and access requests.

- The provision of dedicated bookable research spaces, labs and communal event spaces, that include archaic and cutting-edge technology and equipment.
- The potential for expertise in material types or regional archaeology to support research through identifying suitable and comparable archive elements.
- More diverse and representative research results arising through engagement with inaccessible and ‘unknown’ archives.
- A reduced cost in time and money through accessing multiple archives in a single research trip.
- Improved environmental benefits of reduced travel journeys which also utilises the public transport network.

The perceived downsides were:

- The demise of regional expertise through the centralisation of experts.
- The potential loss of detailed curatorial familiarity and insight to archive material through the removal of extant museum curators.
- The unintentional loss of unplanned ‘chance’ discoveries through more regulated access to stored material.

Researchers – preferred operating model

Consultation with academic representatives showed no clear preference for the Operating Models under consideration. The main considerations were:

- To ensure a stable and secure longevity of the national collection in its physical materiality.
- To ensure a stable and secure longevity of the national collection in its digital entity.
- To ensure equal and open access regardless of geographical location, governance, or content.
- To ensure the collection remains free of political bias or agenda.
- To create sustainable travel options for the climate and financial resources.
- To ensure geographical access was facilitated by public and private transport.
- To continue provision for local and regional access to archives.

Operating models: Museum and Research Institution needs

Project consultation around the concept of the national collection has expressed general support for the idea and ambition presented, with key interest in the potential for wide-reaching positive impacts of a coherent approach and recognition that something needs to be done urgently. However, there is palpable caution and concern around implementation, both in terms of unintended impacts on heritage jobs, especially in regional museums sector, but also in clarification of purpose. This is, in many respects, predictable. At this stage, the proposals are necessarily vague, and it is difficult for those consulted to respond to the specifics of a business model when they have bigger and more fundamental concerns. A collective and collaborative approach is called for, strongly, within both audience groups and some stakeholders, a point picked up in the project recommendations below (Section 9). Interestingly, a recurring theme developing from within audience consultation is the benefits of a hub-and-spoke model which both supports and benefits from regional and national collaboration.

Several points can be drawn from the project consultation and feedback does respond to each of the project aims, as outlined above. In terms of the overarching ambition to explore operating models for a national collection, and consult on perceived pros and cons (Aim 4), the review of focused on five options: Arm's Length Body (adjunct to), Independent Charitable Trust, University-based body, Commercial organisation and a UKRI funded Research Institute. Feedback around the nature of each of the operational models tends to be more cultural and qualitative, than practical and quantitative. As is evident in the discussion sections above, many responses and concerns outlined, transcend operational model types and are, in fact, often relevant to all.

Key findings are that:

- There is a strong argument that the weight and centralised nature of a national collection (e.g. adjunct to a relevant ALB, Option 1) would be better equipped to respond to or address some key issues, for example title and ownership, or to realise the full potential of the concept via national leadership for archaeology. The umbrella of a national collection could have a key role in unifying and better articulating local collections in a national context, and for supporting a strategic approach to archaeology across England and within regions.
- From a largely qualitative and cultural response to the models presented, the least favoured options were the University Hosted (Option 3) and Commercial models (Option 4).
- A University hosted model (Option 3) was felt to be unrealistic (which University), impractical (in terms of physical capacity and long-term guarantee), and not the right location (especially for non-academic public engagement and access).

- The commercial model was felt to give the wrong signals (around what is being monetised), seems inconsistent with current planning framework (sustainable development for public benefit), and is a restrictive and therefore not a sustainable business model on a very practical level (user audiences would not engage, audiences unable and unwilling to pay for access).
- Access to information about the national collection – if comprehensive – could be extremely valuable, both for museums and researchers. Operationally, the different models weren't seen to impact this, but practical implementation would have to support input, maintenance and interoperability at a local (regional collections management) and sector level (ADS, HIAS etc).
- In terms of vulnerability and risk, the Independent Charitable Trust (Option 2) and University Hosted (Option 3) models were felt to be the least resilient to change and most susceptible to the challenge of long-term financial security (for universities, in terms of changing priorities).
- A UKRI funded research institute (Option 5) attracts interest but is the least familiar, especially within user audiences. The areas of this option which are most favoured are its research profile and ability to raise infrastructure funding, with confusion around the potential relationship of the independent body within the current ecosystem. Arguably, an ALB model (Option 1) with independent research organisation status could provide a similar profile which achieves the positive elements highlighted and addresses concerns.

Analysis of consultation feedback has demonstrated that, rather than establishing a strong case for a single option, there are pros and cons which are relevant to all and which have been highlighted consistently between both stakeholder and target audience groups. As noted above (Section 5), a pragmatic approach which incorporates several characteristics and functions from all models would seem to be a sensible one – if that could be made workable. An operational model able to benefit from national leadership and research profile, with the ability to facilitate collaborative cross-sector working at regional and sectoral levels, and secure sustainable income through a combination of commercial fees and fundraising, would combine the strengths of all options and address some of the more fundamental weaknesses.

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9 Recommendations and considerations

Project recommendations

The following recommendations have been drawn from the discussions which took place over the course of the project with cross-sector consultees. The proposed national collection for archaeological archives presents a huge opportunity to address a substantial and critical issue in England's archaeological sector and support the nation's regional museums and repositories. There are also substantial concerns over the potential impacts and unintended consequences that such a collection could have on the existing museum ecosystem. Future development should allow an in-depth and cross sector consideration of proposals.

Future consultation and review of options

- A period of extensive and wide-reaching consultation with museum professionals and relevant volunteers needs to be undertaken at a formative stage in the future development of the project. This will require sufficient information about any proposals to be made available, to enable real consideration of impacts and challenges, as well as potential opportunities. The consultation must allow adequate time for engagement and response, with a clear trajectory of how the findings of the consultation will be taken into account within the decision-making and development for the national collection project.

- Undertake a formal consultation, with a clear and realistic time frame, to enable formal response from governing bodies (including local authorities), stakeholder organisations and agencies, relevant charitable bodies and representative groups and forums.

- Where decisions have been made on the nature and development of a national collection, and on the shape of proposals, a degree of explanation should be provided to document the project journey. Where consultation about proposals occurs, it should be visible which criteria or factors might be considered important or influential within future decision-making.

- Consultation about the national collection should clearly outline the intended purpose and remit of the collection, and more fully describe how it might operate or function. This will allow audiences and partners to better understand their own role and agency within the proposals. For example, this might outline how local and regional museums might continue to contribute to decision-making processes about collections held in a central store.

Consideration for the role of the national collection within the current ecosystem

- Understand the interdependencies and relationships of the proposed national collection with regional and local museums, and repositories holding other related material.

- Understand the interdependencies and relationships of the proposed national collection with regional and local museums that currently have no involvement with the archaeological planning process but that would benefit from access to and engagement with a national collection and its associated professional networks.

- Consider how the proposed national collection could take an active role in providing access to and publishing regional museum collecting areas, including monitoring the capacity and status of collections, through working closely with museums and relevant sector partners.

- Consider how the proposed national collection could be fully integrated into the planning framework and its implementation, including during the design of mitigation strategies, requirements set out in project briefs, project methods and monitoring, and discharge of planning conditions.

- Consider the role of ownership or assumption of ownership within the archaeological project, to clarify the requirement to deposit an archaeological archive alongside legal parameters around ownership.

- Consider how a national collection would utilise, support and enhance the implementation of sector wide guidance, professional standards and frameworks, including:

    - established professional guidance and standards
    - regional research frameworks
    - selection and retention strategies, including application of the CIfA Selection Toolkit, SMA Guidance on the Rationalisation of Museum Archaeology Collections, and the Museums Association's rationalisation and disposal toolkit.

- Consider how a national collection could benefit archaeological collections and material derived through means outside of development or research funded excavations, such as object collections created from metal detecting, archives held by community-based groups and societies, regional reference collections and typological series.

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Principles underpinning the development and operational model of a national collection

- Responsibility for the proposed collection should be recognised as a shared national resource of significant cultural value at government level. The proposed model has the potential to transform how we investigate, understand and create access and engagement to our shared past.

- From this perspective, research interest and collection use will come from a wide range of professionals and a diversity of disciplines beyond archaeology. This presents a significant opportunity to provide tangible public benefits though education, engagement and citizen science.

- A collaborative model, which recognises both regional and national approaches, should create an environment able to facilitate and encourage, rather than prevent, cross-sector and inter-regional working.

- A national collection should be rooted in the concept of a distributed model, rather than a single store. This approach can unify collections and their associated data from across England, including those created from excavations undertaken in the past as well as in the future, recognising the significance and value of the nation’s dispersed archaeological archive.

- A national collection should seek to maintain and improve the care, curation and use of archaeological collections and the skills and opportunities for professionals associated with its workings.

    - A national collection should strive for social, financial and environmental sustainability, seek to minimise its impact on the environment.

In conclusion, evidence from the consultation makes it clear that the proposed national collection for archaeological archives presents a huge opportunity to address a substantial and critical issue in England's archaeological sector, whilst supporting the nation's regional museums and repositories. It is felt that the substantial and understandable concerns over the potential impacts on the existing museum ecosystem can be addressed through in-depth and cross sector consideration of more detailed proposals. Although no single operational model was felt to be most suitable, one which commands leadership at a national level and enables access, research and public benefit, should endeavour to stimulate and support collaborative cross sector working at both regional and sectoral levels. Long-term sustainably can be achieved through ensuring a diverse income from commercial, grants and fundraising activities, as well as provision of a joined-up and well-articulated approach to England's archaeological archives.

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