



Local Heritage Engagement Network

Briefing Note (March 2015)

Northamptonshire County Council Heritage and Archives Service – Proposed Budget Cuts

The Northamptonshire County Council Archive and Heritage Service 'Archives, Heritage and History' are based in Northampton and currently undertakes a number of key heritage roles for the county, including:

- Running the County Archives and Records Office
- Curating and maintaining the Historic Environment Record
- Looking after 24 'County Heritage Sites' and maintaining public access to these sites
- Hosting the Northamptonshire Portable Antiquities Scheme (as a partnership scheme with DCMS, The British Museum and all of the other local authorities across the county)
- Heritage education and outreach

The service has already seen its budget cut several times, with a number of staff losses in the past 3 years. The proposed target in 2012/13 was to find an equivalent of a 35% saving of the salaries budget for the service.

(<http://www.northamptonshire.gov.uk/en/councilservices/Council/equalities/Documents/PDF%20Documents/Budget%202013-14/11-002-05-and-11-002-07a-ArchivesHeritage.pdf>)

Northamptonshire Archaeology, previously run by the council, was also outsourced to MOLA (Museum of London Archaeology) in January 2014.

The County Council are now proposing to cut a further £25,000 from the Archive and Heritage Service budget for 2015/16, with the majority of savings to be found through a reduction in staff numbers. This will inevitably have a significant effect on the department and the service that they are able to provide.

LHEN believes that this saving will target the post of Historic Environment Record Officer, making the post redundant and replacing it with a part time Historic Environment Record Assistant. This degrading of the post will likely impact the capacity and quality of the HER service in the county – a vital component of the authority's ability to deliver sound archaeological advice within the planning system.

In the Council Plan for 2014-2019 they state that they will 'continue to celebrate Northamptonshire's rich cultural heritage' and 'continue to strive to connect [local residents] with the county's rich cultural heritage and unique identity' (see Council Plan 2014 available to download from - <https://cmis.northamptonshire.gov.uk/cmis5live/MeetingsCalendar/tabid/73/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/410/Meeting/2211/Committee/399/Default.aspx>).

At present the complete details of the cut are not available in the public arena and so it is extremely difficult to assess what the impact of these cuts will be. It is imperative that the Council release a detailed statement of where the cuts will be targeted, alongside a full assessment of the impact of these cuts on current services. The current proposals are part of a proposed plan to find £126 million of savings across the council as a whole.

Key issues:

The proposed cuts to the Archive and Heritage Service are likely to have a significant negative impact on the conservation and protection of the historic environment of the region. This increases the risk of unnecessary and potentially illegal damage to irreplaceable archaeological sites. It will also affect the ability of the service to support local communities' engagement with their historic environment.

The Council has obligations as a planning authority to 'recognise that heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource and conserve them in a manner appropriate to their significance' (National Planning Policy Framework, p. 30). The NPPF also clearly states that Local Authorities should either maintain or have access to archaeological information in an Historic Environment Record (HER) as well as expert advice to inform its planning decisions. It is currently unclear how these obligations can be met effectively, if the current service is cut back.

At present, the County Council also hosts a number of county-wide services, including the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) Finds Liaison Officer. The proposed cuts have the potential for impact on the ability of the PAS to cover the county.

There are worrying precedents in this area. The County Council reduced their archaeology service significantly in 2003 and again in 2006 resulting in a sharp fall in the number archaeological investigations requested in advance of new developments. In response to local and national pressure the council reinstated the service in 2009/10 and the number of planning applications with identified archaeological implications rose by approximately 80% (<http://www.archaeologyuk.org/ba/ba122/feat2.shtml>).

If you wish to have a say on these cuts it is vital that you write to your local councillor ASAP!

Council for British Archaeology

Who to contact:

You can find your local county councillor by using the postcode search facility on the council's website - <https://cmis.northamptonshire.gov.uk/CMIS5Live/MyCouncillor.aspx>

Please write to:

- The Leader of Northamptonshire County Council (and chair of the council committee) Councillor Jim Harker: jharker@northamptonshire.gov.uk
- Councillor Andre Gonzalez de Savage responsible for Heritage, Records and Archives: agdesavage@northamptonshire.gov.uk
- The Northamptonshire Heritage Champion Councillor John McGhee: jmcghee@northamptonshire.gov.uk

Support from the archaeological sector:

The CBA South Midlands group are an autonomous local group under the umbrella of the national Council for British Archaeology. CBA South Midlands covers four counties — Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Northamptonshire and Oxfordshire. Their website has a full list of local and regional archaeological groups, societies and commercial organisations: <http://www.archaeologyuk.org/cbasml/>