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Fighting back

Some suggestions as to how to campaign to save museums, archaeological services and the historic environment

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These notes are intended to provide some guidance in campaigns to protect and preserve local and regional archaeological services museums etc from cuts which will damage the service they deliver to the profession, to academia and to the public at large. They are based on the experience of members of the committee of RESCUE – The British Archaeological Trust and on advice we have received from other campaigners. Many pressure groups have published similar advice (RSPB, Liberty) and it is always worth looking at how these organisations conduct themselves for further ideas which might be adapted in defence of archaeology. These notes concern only England. We shall be compiling similar guidance for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to take account of the different political arrangements in those countries.

Basic rules

The basic rules to follow when contacting councillors, politicians, civil servants or others are fairly simple:

- Be polite
- Be confident
- Know your facts
- Stay calm

However misguided, short-sighted or plain stupid you think a proposal is, it is never a good idea to lose your temper and positively counter-productive to become abusive or insulting. In the case of Cllr. Melton and the Fenland District Council, we rapidly appropriated Cllr. Melton's contemptuous phrases (bunny huggers, historic lefties etc) as badges of pride. Don't hand your opponents the same gift and never let them play the 'injured party' card by giving them examples of abuse to pass on to the local media. We have every reason to be certain of the importance of the historic environment and should be able to put these points calmly and rationally – leave it to the politicians to make empty rhetorical points and to appeal to the worst side of human nature.

Who to contact

Who you should contact about a particular issue will depend to some extent on where the threat is coming from. In the case of museums and HERs / SMRs and similar locally run and funded services the first people to tackle are your own elected local councillors and those councillors who act as the chairs of committees. They rely on your votes and will respond to public pressure if this is deemed to represent a threat to their re-election. If you do not know who your councillors are then check the local authority website where there will be lists, usually arranged by ward.

Councils also have systems of committees and sub-committees and the members of these should also be contacted along with your own local councillors. Different councils have their own ways of arranging things and you may have to search the websites to find the correct committee. Examples include the Council's Cabinet, and Scrutiny and/or Finance Committees and your local Area Board: it is always better first to discuss the issue with a Councillor you know on one of these Committees (or, in the case of an Area Board, your local Councillor) so that your approach to the Committee can be made most effective. If you are able to speak at a meeting, try to get your concerns and suggestions discussed and minuted.

Some local authorities have appointed individual councillors to be *Heritage Champions*. English Heritage have a full list of these people but won't release it on the rather curious grounds that if they did then the councillors concerned would be contacted by members of the public wishing to raise issues pertaining to heritage. We rather thought that was the point but sometimes there is no arguing with the official mind! You ought to be able to find out if your local authority has a heritage champion by looking on your Council's website, contacting the Town Hall or one of your local councillors.

Local newspapers once played an important part in the scrutiny of councils and would often act to hold elected members to account. To some extent they still do this but local journalism is in decline and many papers employ little more than a skeleton staff who rely on press releases for their information. This can be to your advantage as they will be receptive to information supplied to them and are usually keen to print letters from their readers. In addition, it can be useful to copy your letters and/or e-mails to councillors to the local newspapers with a covering letter. This will alert them to the fact that there is an issue of local concern and may prompt some further coverage. It also prevents councillors pretending that there is no public interest in the issue.

It may be helpful to discuss the issue, perhaps informally, via a contact or face-to face, with your County Archaeological Officer or someone in the Council's Museums/Heritage Department.

Moving up the political ladder, contact your MP and your MEP, the latter particularly in the case of planning matters as Britain has obligations under EC regulations and directives in respect of the historic environment and planning (notably the Valletta Convention and the European Landscape Convention, details of which are given below. Contact details for MPs and others can be found on several websites, including They Work for You: <http://www.theyworkforyou.com/>. A similar site, which also includes local councillors and MEPs is Write to Them: <http://www.writetothem.com/>.

Your first objective should be your own MP and/or MEPs but a letter can also be copied to the Minister concerned. Those most directly concerned with archaeological and historic environment matters are in the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). Both have extensive websites which include contact details and much more, including the text of speeches, press releases etc. Contact details are given below.

The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Archaeology (APPAG) can be contacted by writing to the Secretary, Lord Redesdale or the chairman, Lord Renfrew of Kaimsthorn at c/o APPAG, House of Lords, London SW1A 0PW.

If your local MP or a Member of the House of Lords is willing to ask a Parliamentary Question (either a written question or for a short debate), that can be particularly helpful.

What to say and how to say it

Obviously the content of your letters and/or e-mails will depend on the particular issue that you are tackling but there are few general rules to follow which will maximise the impact of your campaign.

- Be concise – there seems to be a general reluctance on the part of our elected representatives to read much more than a single side of A4 paper so try to keep your letters brief, concise and to the point. If the issue is a complex one and requires a longer letter, use bullet points to make the major points stand out.
- Keep the points you make strictly relevant to the issue – a long rambling letter raising multiple points will often be discarded as the work of a mad person.
- Emphasise points that will resonate with elected representatives. In the case of museums and heritage attractions for example, emphasise the economic benefits to the local area and region through tourism and the impact on local businesses if people have no reason to visit your town or village.
 - Other points might include the educational opportunities and benefits to young people of the opportunity to participate in archaeological excavations (reductions in crime and anti-social behaviour have been claimed for Dig Manchester for example and these were supported by the local police).
 - The cultural importance of heritage should not be overlooked as contributing to the vitality of local communities– emphasise the numbers of people active in local heritage groups and societies and the impact this has on community cohesion.
- Politicians are keen on sound-bites and ideas with a simple tag-line. Currently, for example, we hear much about the Big Society and such initiatives often have a cultural and community aspect to them which can be emphasised in connection with heritage issues when you are dealing with politicians.
- Emphasise the popularity and levels of interest in the past. Television programmes such as Time Team regularly attract an audience of around 2.5 million and TV companies only commission programmes when research indicates that the audience share will be significant. Whether you like Time Team or not, the fact that it is repeatedly re-commissioned attests to its popularity with a wide range of viewers and this is some indication that there is a sizeable body of people who regard archaeology as something to be supported.

There is no sense in which these examples are intended to be spurious or to mislead politicians. Examples of the wider benefits of archaeology and history are legion and many have been documented in RESCUE NEWS and in publications such as British Archaeology. You will find links to websites containing useful facts and figures at the end of this document but if you know of local examples which make the case then use them as they will be particularly relevant to councillors and MPs.

Obtain as much support as possible for your concerns – the more letters that are written and on an individual basis – the more likely it is that notice will be taken. It is always better to write an individual letter than to sign a petition. Circulars distributed to local people should set out the main concerns, give names and addresses to write to and encourage people to express their concerns in their own words. Advertising in parish magazines or local papers is another way of attracting attention and encouraging concerned individuals to join the campaign. The sample letters below can be adapted to suit local concerns and give an individual approach.

Draft letters

The following are suggested outlines of letters that might be useful in specific cases. It is important to include relevant local information. Specific references to museum exhibitions, services offered to local schools and community groups and outreach or community activities organised by or in co-operation with the local HER / Museum/Archaeology Unit are essential. You may also want to mention specific contacts you have had with the Service / Museum either as an individual or as a member of a local heritage or archaeological society. Essentially the letter should be as specific to the local case as possible and should not look like a 'form letter'. As mentioned above, you might also want to copy it to the local newspaper or internet forum to make sure it is widely discussed.

A further point (thanks to David Connolly for highlighting this) is to write and let councillors or your MP know when an institution has been of particular value or assistance and as a result how much you value them. If they hear that a museum or HER is valued by the voting community then they will be much less inclined to close it down and sack the employees. Examples might include a community excavation in which you or friends or relatives took part, a particularly good exhibition or display (permanent or temporary) and, in particular, the benefits to the education of your children of the services provided by the museum.

Copy your letters (preferably by e-mail) to RESCUE (contact details below) and post details of the proposed closures or cuts on the RESCUE Facebook site or use the feedback form on our 'map of cuts'. We can then take up the issue as well and make our own representations to the Council concerned as well as ensuring that the matter is included in any discussions we have with relevant government Ministers. We will not, of course, identify you by name if you would prefer to be anonymous.

Cuts to a Historic Environment Record or Archaeology Service

Dear Councillor X,

I am writing to you to express my grave concern over the proposal to close / impose budget cuts of XX% to the XXXshire Archaeology Service. The Archaeology Service does vital work in ensuring that proposals for development conform to existing UK planning regulations (specifically Planning Policy Statement 5) and to EC Directives on planning and development. The Service is also charged with monitoring the work of archaeological contractors in the county. The staff maintain the county Sites and Monuments Record, an essential resource for a wide variety of community and educational groups whose work would be virtually impossible without access to the raw data pertaining to our county's past.

With only 1/2/3/4 members of staff and a workload that is likely to increase as economic recovery gathers pace, the Service is already fully stretched and there is no room for further cuts to either staffing levels or to the operating budget. I urge you to oppose the proposed cuts and to argue for the retention and adequate funding of a service which does vital work in ensuring that the historic environment of the county survives and is enhanced for the benefit of all.

Yours sincerely

Cuts to or closure of a museum

Dear Councillor X

I am writing to you to express my grave concern over the proposed cuts to / closure of the XXX Museum. The museum not only holds archaeological and historical archives relating to the history of XXX (town, village, city, region) but the staff also do a vital job in working with local schools and colleges to educate children and young people about our community's rich and varied heritage.

Amongst the archives held in the museum are those of the XXX collection which are of national importance ... *(include relevant details)*

Educational services include provision for visits by local schools in connection with the history syllabus and these are threatened by the proposed cuts *(include relevant details)*

The museum attracts XXXXX visitors annually and plays a significant part in the local tourist industry from which many local businesses gain direct benefit. These benefits, which are probably generally unappreciated, will be lost if the plan to cut/close the museum are put into practice.

While I appreciate that cuts have to be made times of financial pressure I believe that the decision to cut / close the museum will have an impact on the local community and on local businesses which will be wholly negative. I believe that you should look on the relatively modest expenditure involved not as a cost to local taxpayers but as an investment in the cultural infrastructure of our community that is amply repaid in a wide variety of ways.

Yours sincerely

How to structure your campaign

There is great value in individuals acting alone to campaign for local heritage services but the impact can be greater if a number of people join together either formally or informally to campaign on a particular issue. At the informal level encourage friends, family and work colleagues to write to councillors on their own account and to raise such issues on the doorstep at election time. If you have time and opportunity, try to attend relevant council committee meetings and to raise points pertaining to the issue. The times of committee meetings will be posted on local authority websites although it can be difficult to find the right one. If you are unable to attend, you ought to be able to table questions by letter or e-mail, referring to the appropriate section of the agenda which should be available on-line.

Local archaeological, historical and heritage groups are thriving in Britain, in part thanks to Lottery funding but principally because of the high level of interest in the past. If you are a member of one of these, try to make sure that the society as a body makes representations to the local authority whenever cuts are planned. If several similar or complementary organisations exist, make sure that they all write letters. It might be useful to call a meeting of like-minded groups and individuals – perhaps asking one or more Councillors to attend. Ensure that you have a good chairman to lead discussion. Most of our local museums cover a wide range of subjects and cuts or closures may affect an art gallery or natural history department just as much as they will history and archaeology. Make sure the local wildlife groups and other relevant groups are also active in opposing the cuts. A broadly based campaign will be more effective than one which politicians can write off as narrow or sectional in its remit.

National organisations also have a role in campaigning and, not unsurprisingly as this document has been written by RESCUE, we would encourage you to join RESCUE at the earliest opportunity. When it comes to campaigning, politicians look at the membership of campaigning groups and assess their significance on that basis. This is of particular importance in cases which where public enquiries are involved. If you don't feel that RESCUE represents your interests then consider joining another group such as the Council for British Archaeology. If your interests are more closely related to specific aspects of the built or rural environment then there are wide range of groups which you may find relevant. These include the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, the Georgian Society, the Victorian Society and the 20th Century Society, Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) and the National Trust all of whom do excellent work in their own areas and with whom RESCUE has, on occasion, collaborated.

Facebook and, to a lesser extent, other social networks have been highly effective in organising local and regional campaigns on particular issues. You may find a relevant group already in existence or you may want to start one yourself. Share links across groups to spread the word more widely.

Fact pack

This section is intended to provide some guidance on the resources that are available in various areas and is organised in sections covering the specific angles that you might want to take when addressing a particular issue.

Websites containing useful information have been listed under various headings below but a good starting point is often the HELM website, part of the larger English Heritage site. Information for general users can be found here: <http://www.helm.org.uk/server/show/nav.19747> and there are pages of relevance to specific user groups, including members of local authorities.

The planning system: rules and obligations

At present the key planning policy document is *Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment*, better known as PPS5. This replaced the better known PPG15 and PPG16 in 2010 and itself will be replaced by the *National Planning Policy Framework* later in 2011. When this happens we will update this document but for the time being, PPS5 is the one to look at. The full text and a practice guide can be found here: <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/planningandbuilding/pps5> Such documents are never light reading but it is less daunting than it appears and well worth looking at before you draft a letter or meet with a councillor. A summary of its main objectives and content can be found here: <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/professional/advice/government-planning-policy/a-new-planning-policy-framework>.

The Campaign to Protect Rural England provided useful advice for campaigners here: <http://www.planninghelp.org.uk/> .

European conventions

Three European conventions are of relevance here. The European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage, better known as the Valletta Convention has been in force since 1992 and as a signatory, the British Government has to abide by its Articles. As with PPS5 it is less daunting than it may appear. Skip the preamble and go straight to the Articles which are straightforward and clearly phrased. The document can be downloaded from here: <http://conventions.coe.int/treaty/en/treaties/html/143.htm>

The Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (better known as the Faro Convention) sets out rights and responsibilities enjoyed by EC citizens in respect of their cultural heritage. The text of the convention can be read here: <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/EN/Treaties/Html/199.htm>

Also of relevance is the European Landscape Convention better known as the Florence Convention. It is somewhat longer than the Valletta Convention and while it is not specifically concerned with archaeology, some of its provisions might be of relevance in specific circumstances. It can be downloaded here:

<http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/cultureheritage/heritage/landscape/>

Economic regeneration and benefit

The common cry of those hostile to archaeology and the historic environment is that it represents a luxury that the country cannot afford and that it must be sacrificed in the interests of economic regeneration and development. This is a wholly fallacious argument and one that is satisfactorily contradicted by some useful documents and surveys. Of these, the annual *Heritage Counts* report is perhaps the most useful.

Heritage Counts is an annual survey of the role of the heritage sector in wider social and economic spheres. It is carried out on behalf of the Historic Environment Forum and the results are available through the English Heritage website. The ninth such survey and the latest one available covers 2010 and, rather usefully, the theme is the economic impact of the historic environment. The front page is here: <http://hc.english-heritage.org.uk/>

The site contains a wealth of facts and figures which clearly demonstrate the very positive effect of investment in the historic environment in terms of returning a profit both locally and nationally. This should be the first stop when you have to argue against those who say that heritage protection represents a cost to the economy or a luxury that we can't afford. In fact, as the figures clearly show, the historic environment represents a significant source of income for the nation as well as for local and larger businesses and makes a very healthy overall contribution to GDP.

As a major investor in the historic environment, the *Heritage Lottery Fund* (HLF) has also carried out research into the value of the historic environment. A summary of the results can be found here: <http://www.hlf.org.uk/news/Pages/InvestinginSuccess.aspx>

While the full text of the report is here:

http://www.hlf.org.uk/aboutus/howwework/Documents/HLF_Tourism_Impact_single.pdf

A search on the internet can also bring useful documents pertaining to specific regions or localities. Looking at Hadrian's Wall for example, this document sets out the economic benefits for the area in the year 2008-9: http://www.hadrians-wall.org/ResourceManager/Documents/11-09%20AGM_33_633954424580163750.pdf

Education and training [Note – this section is under development and will be updated shortly]

The historic environment and archaeology in particular are widely acknowledged to be of great importance in education. The Historical Association exists to promote the value of history in education and their website may contain information of value if an educational service provided by a museum is under threat (<http://www.history.org.uk/about/>)

The Culture, Media and Sport Committee

The Culture Media and Sport committee is the principal House of Commons Committee which deals with matters related to archaeology, museums and the historic environment. In March 2011 it published an important report on the funding of arts and heritage and this includes not only the

conclusions of the committee itself (which were favourable towards heritage and critical of some aspects of government policy) but also two additional volumes of written evidence submitted by various bodies, including RESCUE. The main report can be read here:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmselect/cmcomeds/464/46402.htm>

and the government's response is here:

http://www.culture.gov.uk/images/publications/Govtresponse_ArtsHeritagefunding-CM8071.pdf

And finally ...

This document is not intended to be complete in its present form and will be updated in the near future with more suggestions and ideas. We would be particularly interested from hearing from campaigners in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland so that we can extend the details as appropriate. We would also be particularly interested to hear of any campaigns that have been successful so that we can include the lessons learned here and circulate them amongst other campaigners.