

Rescue

The British Archaeological Trust

15a Bull Plain, Hertford
Hertfordshire, SG14 1DX

Telephone: 01992 553377

Office hours: Tuesday and Friday mornings.
Otherwise please leave a message on the
answerphone.

rescue@rescue-archaeology.freeserve.co.uk

www.rescue-archaeology.org.uk

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Please see below the response of RESCUE, The British Archaeological Trust to the consultation “ submitted by Jo Caruth, Hon. Secretary.

Over and above core funding, what do you think are the top three challenges for museums and galleries in England over the next decade and how could these be addressed? Please write in a challenge in each box on the left and on the right indicate how it could be addressed.

It should be noted that reduction in core funding is at the heart of the challenges that face Museums and the challenges below are inextricably linked to funding issues and it is disingenuous to try and separate them.

1a. Adequate storage and curation facilities for existing and future archaeological material, particularly resulting from excavations carried out as part of the development process (house building, infrastructure projects, quarrying etc). Planning requirements under the NPPF (National Planning Policy Framework) include the secure deposition of archive material (finds and documentation) for posterity as an essential part of the process. At present much is held in temporary, inaccessible and inappropriate conditions by archaeological contractors, wasting resources that could be better invested in a more long-term solution. RESCUE, the British Archaeological Trust has been documenting a steady decline in available archaeological storage over many years; for example recently the East Riding of Yorkshire Museums Service said that it could no longer accept archaeological archives, a situation that has been the norm for much longer in some counties such as Kent. A survey by the Federation of Archaeological Managers and Employers in 2012 found that archaeological contractors were holding over 9000 homeless archives <http://www.famearchaeology.co.uk/wpfb-file/fame-report-on-archaeological-archives-final-pdf/> and in 2013 Surrey conducted its own survey of the county and found there were 3000 boxes of finds and paper records archives held by contractors. For a summary of the reasons for maintaining archaeological archives see a paper on our webpages (<http://rescue-archaeology.org.uk/2010/11/16/crisis-facing-our-national-treasures/>) and for a discussion in print of the storage issues see Chapter 13 in *Rescue Archaeology, Foundations for the Future, 2015*, eds Paul Everill and Pamela Irving.

1b. Local, regional and national recognition of the necessity to provide this resource in a planned and efficient fashion in partnership with local authority archaeologists and archaeological contractors. Adequate resources from the various sources, including the commercial developers, must be reliably channelled into securing this resource which is the surviving evidence for the parts of our unique and irreplaceable heritage that are revealed, investigated and destroyed during development.

2a. Recognition that the best and most successful displays and other educational material are founded on a good knowledge of the source material both within and beyond the individual collection. A current tendency in local authority and other museums to define curation in terms of general museum skills rather than specialist knowledge will diminish their capabilities and reduce their positive contribution to the heritage sector, including tourism, that is of huge economic value.

2b. Appointments and career progression for curators should encourage specialist knowledge, based on the existing and potential collections held by the individual museum, as well as more general museum and educational skills.

3. Maintenance of opening hours and access to collections and archives. Museum opening hours are being reduced (e.g. at the Hive in Worcestershire) across the country which is limiting access to the collections and archives.

Over and above core funding, what do you think are the top three opportunities for museums and galleries in England over the next decade and how could these be best exploited? Please write in an opportunity in each box on the left and on the right indicate how it could be exploited.

1a. In archaeology there will be an increase in excavation and recording as more development and infrastructure projects (eg HS2) get underway. This will produce new knowledge and material that can be communicated to the public in innovative ways. Archaeology has a proven track record of appeal across social and cultural boundaries that could benefit the museum sector.

1b. Museums that are adequately resourced in terms of storage, curation and display skills can work with the commercial sector from the early stages of an archaeological project and benefit from the resources available to it.

2a. There are an increasing number of research projects based around archaeological objects (related in some cases to the successful aspects of the Portable Antiquities Scheme, based at the British Museum <https://finds.org.uk/research>). Access to the archaeological material stored in museums must be a key element of this process; benefits include contact with a range of specialists and the greater understanding of the material and new interpretations that will inform display, as well as the wider social benefits of new research for understanding our history.

2b. Making stored collections accessible stimulates local interest and involvement including volunteering; the London Archaeological Archive and Research Centre (LAARC) at the Museum of London is one good example.

What do you think needs to be done to ensure the financial sustainability of the museums and galleries sector in England over the next decade?

National government should publicly recognise the value of the heritage sector to the economy and intervene to prevent the damaging closures of museum and gallery facilities by local authorities who are not bound by statute to maintain them. The curation of archaeological material is a responsibility for the long term, not the decade, and should not be jeopardised for relatively small-scale economies.

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Government should fund museums and galleries":

- **Agree strongly**
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Disagree strongly
- Don't know

Museums form a vital role, engaging communities with their past, enhancing individual experience, contributing to a sense of place and not least, a focus for heritage tourism, a key part of the local economy over much of England. In addition Museums are the best place to store archaeological archives ensuring they are properly curated for the future and available to researchers on request.

We know that a lot of excellent work is already going on throughout the museums and galleries sector in England. We would welcome examples of recent best practice in the following areas:

a. Partnership working, including with museums, cultural, education and business sectors		
b. Shared services, including storage and conservation		
c. Diversifying income, including from commercial activities, fundraising and sponsorship		
d. Digital including collections management, digital services and programming		
e. Programming including exhibitions, education and outreach		
f. Diversifying workforce and/or audiences		

Is there anything else you would like to tell us about the wider museums and galleries sector in England and how it could be better supported by government or other statutory bodies, including the Arts Council England, Heritage Lottery Fund and Local Authorities?

RESCUE regrets the lack of mention within the Review of the issues around archaeological archives. This suggests that government is unaware that this key element of our heritage is at serious risk.

We would like to know a bit more about the museum, gallery or sector body you work for or volunteer with. represent a:

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Other : RESCUE, the British Archaeological Trust is a non-political organisation dedicated to supporting archaeology and archaeologists in Britain and abroad (www.rescue-archaeology.org.uk) We do not receive any state support and are entirely dependent on the contributions of our members to support our work.