

## Historic Environment Records: Unlocking the potential

### What are HERs?

- Historic Environment Records (HERs) represent the most complete record of known archaeological and historic sites in their respective counties.
- Planning guidance states that local planning authorities should at least have access to, if not maintain, an HER that covers their administrative area. HERs are an important tool within the planning process.
- HERs are public resources which have a wide range of uses: e.g. land use planning, conservation, research, education and general interest. They are free to use to members of the public.
- HERs aim to help protect and inform future management, and enjoyment, of the historic environment.

### Who uses HERs?

- **Development Control staff** use HERs to monitor and assess planning applications and developments within their respective local authorities. Entries in to the HER database will flag up any potential areas of historic interest to Development Control.
- **Conservation Officers** are also starting to use HERs in a similar way, as more and more built heritage features get added to the HER.
- **Archaeological contractors and heritage consultants** often use HERs as a first port of call for desk-based research, to inform investigations that are required as planning conditions.

### What do HERs contain?

HERs contain information on everything from the Palaeolithic era right through to the 20<sup>th</sup> century; including:

- **Designated heritage assets**, such as sites on the Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest, Scheduled Monuments and Listed Buildings. The National Heritage List for England, which is maintained by Historic England, is the definitive list for designated heritage assets and can be accessed via this web link: <http://www.historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/>. The HER can also hold additional information on these assets other than the list description.
- **Non-designated heritage assets**, such as unregistered historic designed landscapes, unlisted historic buildings, industrial heritage remains, guide posts, bridges and other assets that add to the historic character of an area. These assets are considered to be locally or regionally important rather than nationally important.
- **Conservation Areas and Locally Listed Buildings**. These datasets are created and managed by the relevant District Councils, but the HER will also hold a copy of the data.
- **Buried archaeological remains.**
- **Upstanding earthworks and cropmark sites.**

- **Archaeological events.** In addition, HERs contain detailed information on archaeological events that have occurred in the county, such as excavations, watching briefs, historic building recording, and desk-based assessments.

#### **How does material get onto HERs?**

- **The planning process** often requires research or archaeological investigation into a site (known as 'archaeological events'), and the results of this are deposited with the HER.
- **Local societies and research groups such as County Gardens Trusts**, also make an important contribution to this library.

#### **Historic Landscape Characterisation**

- HERs often contain information on Historic Landscape Characterisation projects, which aim to characterise and record landscapes on a broad, usually county-based, scale. Types of landscape are characterised based on the way in which they were formed, their current and earlier land uses, and their physical appearance.
- HLC projects recognise that the landscape itself can be of historic importance (in addition to historic features within it). Interpreting and recording the historic character of a landscape is intended to allow the landscape itself to be managed and protected within the planning process.
- Can also be used on a more strategic level.

#### **Heritage Gateway**

- Information on these Historic Environment sites is held in a digital relational database, with accompanying spatial information allowing the records to be viewed on digital maps.
- Much of this digital information can be accessed via the Heritage Gateway website - <http://www.heritagegateway.org.uk>, which is a resource that is maintained by Historic England and pulls together a variety of national, regional and local datasets in to one place.

#### **Contacting your local HER:**

- The best place to find out which HER covers a particular area is by checking on the Heritage Gateway website - <http://www.heritagegateway.org.uk>
- At the Heritage Gateway you can find contact details and opening times of all the HERs in England.
- Each HER is maintained by a Historic Environment Record Officer (HERO), and most of these are aware of County Gardens Trusts, through the profile-raising work of the Gardens Trust's Historic Landscape Project Officers (HLPOs). The Heritage Gateway will give details of your HERO, or let the HLPOs know if you need help making contact with your HERO.