REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR POLICY, PLANNING AND CORPORATE SERVICES

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT RECORD

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide an update on work to enhance the Nottinghamshire Historic Environment Record and to improve public access.

Information and Advice

2. The requirement to have an up to date Historic Environment Record (HER) is written in to the National Planning Policy Framework. The data held in the HER underpins the decision making process for statutory plans and programmes.

3. County 'Sites and Monuments Records' (SMRs) started to be developed from the 1960s and all English Counties and many Unitary Authorities now have such a record. The Nottinghamshire Sites and Monuments Record began as a card index of information on all aspects of the archaeology of the county, ranging in date from the Palaeolithic period (i.e. the last Ice Age) to World War II, and in type from single pieces of pottery to large complexes of industrial buildings. Computerisation began in 1986 and much of the data is now held electronically, although the information held also includes maps, reports, photographs and slides, books, plans and surveys. In April 1996 the County Council formally adopted the SMR as the recognised repository of this information for Nottinghamshire. The parallel Historic Buildings database has since been amalgamated with the SMR, and the database now qualifies as an Historic Environment Record (HER) under the national standards and guidance.

4. The database currently contains over 18,000 records of archaeological sites and historic buildings, with new information continually being added. Maintenance of these records is very important, not least because access to an up to date Historic Environment Record is a requirement of the National Planning Policy Framework.

5. The information on the HER is used by national agencies, local authorities, professional and amateur archaeologists, researchers, students and schools in addition to the County Council's own use. However current arrangements for access to the Record are limited, and in particular the data is not available online. Online availability of HERs has been seen as desirable by Government and English Heritage for some years. Many HERs are already available on-line and demand is increasing, with expectations from users of all types that such access is available.

6. The database currently uses Access 2010, in conjunction with the MapInfo Geographical Information System (GIS). Although the database is stable and functions well, it is not supported by IT for maintenance and updates, and therefore it is not being kept up to date technically. A "live" link between the database and GIS would also improve functionality immensely. More ambitious aspirations for development to improve customer access cannot be carried forward in the current setup and as a result the County Council is restricted in providing a full HER service to customers and partners.

7. The current work programme being taken forward in conjunction with IT and Procurement is to move the HER onto an Exegesis system. This is one of only two commercially available systems and is used by the majority of English local authorities.

8. The Exegesis system will provide a live link to GIS, speeding up work processes and allowing full access to all data. Most importantly, it will enable the HER to be available online, thereby meeting the national guidelines and increasing accessibility for the majority of customers, particularly for communities and local groups who will be able to access it from their own location.

Other Options Considered

9. Further options considered as part of the cost benefit analysis included:
   - Do nothing – this would leave the HER unsupported, unlinked to other internal systems and inaccessible to the public online. There would be a high risk that the database could fail in the future.
   - Develop an in-house system - this would allow the final product to be tailored specifically to need and to be updated in response to future requirements. However the project would require a considerable amount of time and resources during development and for future improvements, from both the Conservation and ICT team and there is no capacity currently to undertake this work. There would be no payments to external bodies, but Access licences etc. would still be required. It should be noted that Access is no longer a standard product that ICT support. Online access would also have resource implications.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

10. Access to an up to date Historic Environment Record is a requirement of the National Planning Policy Framework. There is also an increasing demand for access to the information held in HERs from members of the public, local interest groups, the education sector and others. The proposed move to an Exegesis externally hosted system would bring Nottinghamshire into line with surrounding local authorities, reduce the risk of the database failing, reduce the requirement for ongoing internal IT support and significantly improve customer access. It would also provide an opportunity to enhance the HER in the future through the provision of online access to photographic records and reports, for example, thereby increasing the accessibility of the service to external customers and the public. The proposal is in line with the County Council's Digital First programme.

Statutory and Policy Implications

11. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (Public Health only), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults, service users, sustainability and the environment and ways of working and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Financial Implications
The initial start-up cost for purchasing the system and all the necessary licences and for transferring the data is £34,000. The funding for this development work has been held within the Historic Environment Record budget until the necessary approvals for the business case could be secured from IT and Procurement. The annual maintenance cost for the licences etc is £10,000 and this funding has been made available from within the overall Departmental budget.

Public Sector Equality Duty implications
The improvements to the HER will increase accessibility to the information for customers who are unable to travel to County Hall.

Implications for Service Users
The proposals will significantly improve access for all users of the HER, providing 24 hour online access to much of the information held within it.

Ways of Working Implications
This is in line with the County Council's Digital First approach to customer services and is the start of an ongoing process of moving elements of the HER such as photographs and reports into a digital format, which can then be made available online.

RECOMMENDATION/S

1) That members note the work being undertaken to secure the Historic Environment Record and to improve accessibility for service users in line with national standards and guidelines and with the County Council's Digital First approach.

Jayne Francis-Ward
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For any enquiries about this report please contact: Heather Stokes, Team Manager Conservation (0115 9932592, heather.stokes@nottscc.gov.uk).

Constitutional Comments [CEH 31.12.14]

12. The report is for noting purposes only.

Financial Comments [SEM 17/12/14]

13. The financial implications are set out in the report.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

- None

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

- All