

Devon County Council Historic Environment Service

Members will have seen in the spring Newsletter that the staffing of this service was reduced in April. Ann Richards retired and was not replaced, and Frances Griffith reduced her working time to four days a month, handing over the role of County Archaeologist to Bill Horner. These reductions delivered the savings then being required of the group.

We now hear that in the context of the Council Council's 'Tough Choices' process (<http://www.toughchoices.co.uk/>) further cuts are being proposed: the deletion of another whole 'Archaeologist' post (the actual member of staff is still uncertain) and also the remainder of Frances Griffith's post.

The DAS Committee discussed these matters at its recent meeting and it was felt that these further cuts would seriously weaken the Service's capacity to protect Devon's historic environment, and that the cumulative effect of the two cuts in quick succession would be very damaging.

Our President, Professor Andrew Fleming, wrote the following letter to Councillor John Hart, Leader of Devon County Council, with copies to Councillor Roger Croad, Portfolio Holder for Environment, and Phil Norrey, Chief Executive.

This matter was briefly discussed at the DAS winter meeting on 15 November. Members may wish to write themselves or follow the link to the 'Tough Choices' consultation and offer their own thoughts about the value of the County service. It might be a good idea to write as soon as possible.



DEVON ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Cllr J Hart
Devon County Council
County Hall
EX2 4QD

Devon Archaeological Society
c/o Royal Albert Memorial Museum
Queen Street
Exeter
EX4 3RX

12th November 2011

Dear Councillor Hart,

Tough Choices

It has come to my attention that the Council is considering making staff cuts within its Archaeology Service as part of the drive to reduce costs and I have been asked by my Society's Executive Committee to write to express the Society's concern over the loss of capacity in this area.

Whilst the Society recognises that strictly non-statutory functions of the Council are the most vulnerable, I would nevertheless like to point out that the County is renowned for its heritage assets (reflected in over 73,000 entries on the Historic Environment Record (HER) and in the historic component of the county's wealth of designated landscapes –five AONBs and two World Heritage Sites) which form an extremely valuable resource in both sustaining communities and contributing to the local economy. This latter is recognised at national level by English Heritage:

“The ninth annual Heritage Counts survey reveals heritage plays a distinct and important role in the English economy. Visit Britain research identified heritage is a key driver of tourism, the UK's third largest export industry and a direct employer of 1.36 million people, rising to 2.6 million when the indirect impact of tourism is taken into account.” (*Heritage Counts, 2010*)

and also within the Council's own strategic objectives :

“We will...make Devon's economy more competitive and resilient using our heritage to support tourism

Our principles:

To deliver high quality services that care for Devon, its residents and environment. Our vision

... We will improve our roads and infrastructure, reduce waste and protect and safeguard our marvellous environment for future generations.”
(*Investing in our Devon: Strategic Plan 2009-13*).

“Countryside & Heritage: Devon County Council will promote the conservation, enhancement and management of biodiversity, landscape, maritime, cultural and historic interests through its estate, activities and through its work with others.” (*DCC Environmental Policy May 2011*)

“[The] historic environment is worth treasuring for its own sake, for the information and pleasure that it provides now and for future generations, but it is also of great importance to Devon’s economy. It is a major reason why people visit Devon and is also a key and growing factor in guiding regeneration.” (*Historic Environment: DCCs role and Action Programme*).

In addition to the contribution that heritage makes to the tourist industry, it also helps to support the rural industry through agri-environment schemes and projects initiated by the AONBs. Vital to the success of managing the county’s heritage for the benefit of tourists and residents alike, is the considerable knowledge, expertise and advice provided by the Archaeological Service, which has been built up over many years. Outwith the National Park Authorities and Exeter, the Service is the only provider of archaeological expertise within the County across diverse areas, such as land management and planning - and directly to many sectors of the community. I would also like to stress that in the world of strategic planning and development management the County’s HER and its specialist staff, provide a service that is required by Government in the new Planning Policy Statement 5. Moreover, the HER function has been made statutory through the Planning Acts, and is vital in delivering agri-environment schemes that are core to the UK Government’s policy in implementing the Common Agricultural Policy.

The Service has also developed important links to local communities through its out-reach work and practical support for local initiatives (such as participation in the Heritage Open Days and support of the Peter Orlando Hutchinson Project in the East Devon AONB). My own Society values greatly the contribution of your staff to the subject in the county, and we have a high regard for their quality.

I would therefore urge that the County Council reconsiders the role of the Archaeological Service in the context of the above and investigate further the effects of any reduction of capacity and expertise.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Andrew Fleming MA, FSA
President, Devon Archaeological Society

The Devon Archaeological Society was founded in 1928 to promote and encourage archaeology in the County of Devon