

Meeting:	Cabinet	Date:	10 December 2014
Subject:	Historic Environment Record (HER) Project		
Report Of:	Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Culture		
Wards Affected:	All		
Key Decision:	No	Budget/Policy Framework:	No
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Appendices:	None		

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To outline and seek approval to pursue a proposed project to combine the City Council's Historic Environment Record (HER) with the Countywide HER run by the County Council Archaeology Service and for the HER to be jointly operated in future under a service level agreement.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 Cabinet is asked to **RESOLVE** that:

- the approach of linking the City HER with the County Council HER be supported;
- authority be delegated to the City Archaeologist to:
 - Produce a project design in partnership with the County Council; and
 - Approach English Heritage (EH) for funding for a temporary post to undertake the required data transfer.
- authority be delegated to the Head of Legal and Policy Development, in consultation with the Head of Planning and the City Archaeologist, to negotiate and enter into a Service Level Agreement for the joint operation of the HER

3.0 Background and Key Issues

- 3.1 The requirement for, and role of, a Historic Environment Record is outlined in the National Planning Policy Framework, which states in paragraph 169:

'Local planning authorities should have up-to-date evidence about the historic environment in their area and use it to assess the significance of heritage assets and the contribution they make to their environment. They should also use it to predict the likelihood that currently unidentified heritage assets, particularly sites of historic and archaeological interest, will be discovered in the future. Local planning authorities should either maintain or have access to a historic environment record.'

- 3.2 The Gloucester City Historic Environment Record (HER) is database maintained by the City Archaeologist. This database, which is managed via a GIS system, records all known archaeological sites, find spots and excavations within the district. The primary function of the HER is to provide supporting information for planning decisions (essentially it forms the evidence base for the advice given by the City Archaeologist). Information from the HER is also provided to consultants and specialist acting on behalf of developers to inform the production of archaeological desk-based assessments or heritage statements. These documents are often either commissioned by developers as part of their due-diligence site-assessments or required by the City Archaeologist in support of an application. In 2013, there were 18 such development led enquires of the HER and there have been 15 so far this year.
- 3.3 The HER is also a public resource, the City Archaeologist uses the database to answer enquiries from the general public and from academics wishing to study archaeological sites in Gloucester. There were 21 such public enquiries in 2013 and there have been 15 so far this year.
- 3.4 Gloucester has some of the most important archaeological remains and historic buildings in the UK. These include the remains of two Roman fortresses and an extensive Roman city – all of national importance. Not to mention the important Saxon and medieval heritage. It is clearly vital that those remains are conserved and protected as the City develops and the first and most fundamental aspect of this is the maintenance of good-quality and up-to-date records.
- 3.5 The Council seeks to ensure that it has the proper resources available in order to discharge its duties in this area. Following an audit of the City's Historic Environment Record in late 2012, the City Archaeologist noted a number of areas in which the City's HER could be improved to meet the requirements of the DCMS and EH Guidance. The key issues identified are:
- The need for a stand-alone, searchable database;
 - Lack of information regarding the location of some known archaeological sites;
 - The need to ensure that a comprehensive archaeological data is available; and
 - The HER does not contain information regarding the 'built heritage' of the city – predominantly regarding Listed Buildings.
- 3.6 In view of the above issues the City Archaeologist is keen to investigate possibilities for improving the City HER.

4.0 Alternative Options Considered

- 4.1 Following the audit the City Archaeologist has reviewed a number of options for improving the HER. Three main options were considered:
- i. The adoption of the **HBSMR** system: The HBSMR (Historic Buildings, Sites and Monuments Record) system is a database system linked to GIS which has been developed by the spatial database management company Exegesis in partnership with English Heritage and ALGAO (Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers). This is the most commonly used system in England and is apparently used by approximately 75% of HERs in England. The advantage with this system is that will undoubtedly be fit for purpose and will continue to be maintained and updated for the foreseeable future. A potential draw back with this system would be running cost and licence fees. Set up

costs for buying HBSMR software and training are likely to exceed £6000 with annual licence and support costs in excess of £1,500.

- ii. The adoption of the **HER Wales** system: A shareware system developed by a private programmer for the Welsh Archaeological Trusts. This system includes a full selection of database and recording options and has been developed and improved since 2005. As well as the supporting database the system incorporates its own GIS (INK GIS) which comes included. This is very similar in functional terms to Map Info and can export data to both Map Info and Arc Map (and import data from both). The system is entirely shareware, this means:
 - o There are no licence costs (so we could run more than one copy);
 - o The software could be re-written and updated in-house if so desired;
 - o We would not be tied in to any contracts or to the original developer of the software.

Because the system is now used by six different organisations there is a wide community to contact for advice and assistance. Costs for setting up this software are likely to be very low – in the region of £600 and ongoing support would be charged on an as-and-when basis rather than as a flat fee. However, concerns have been raised about the use of privately developed software – these relate to the quality and the long term support and development of the product.

- iii. The creation of a joint HER with the **County Council**: This is a bespoke system developed in-house by the County Council. This is a fully developed system which has been in use for over ten years and has recently been updated.

5.0 Reasons for Recommendations

5.1 Creating a joint HER with the County Council has a number of advantages over other options, in terms of cost, practicality and functionality;

- **Cost:** The creation of a joint HER would carry *no additional cost* for the City Council and would, in fact, generate limited income. The County Council currently charges for commercial HER searches (via an automated charging system). Once a joint HER was established this charge would be extended to cover Gloucester City. It is envisaged that the County Council would keep about 20% of this charge to cover their costs, leaving the City Council with income of about £100 per search. The City Council would then invoice the County Council on an annual basis. Based on previous years, this would generate a modest income for the City Council of about £1,000 per year.
- **Functionality:** The City Archaeologist has been testing access to the County Council HER over the last year. The HER is accessed over a remote desktop connection (the same system used for SAP by Human Resources). This has worked well and has demonstrated the feasibility of the approach.
- **Practicality:** A key advantage of creating a joint HER is that the County Council system already holds a considerable amount of data for Gloucester. This will greatly reduce the time it will take to undertake a data transfer. Also the creation of a joint HER will provide the City Archaeologist with data outside the City's immediate boundary – this is very useful when advising on planning applications on the edge of the City.

6.0 Future Work and Conclusions

- 6.1 If the recommended approach is agreed, the City Archaeologist would produce a project specification which would be submitted to EH in early December. Assuming the project is approved, the Council would seek to appoint a year-long temporary post to undertake the required data transfer work. This post would be employed by the City Council but based in Shire Hall with a desk and computer provided by the County Council. The post, including on-costs, would be 100% funded by EH.
- 6.2 The data migration works would take place over the course of the following year and the joint HER would formally be adopted 6 months into that project. Once the project was complete the temporary post would end and management of the HER would be undertaken jointly under the terms of an agreed SLA.

7.0 Financial Implications

- 7.1 EH has agreed to fund the production of a Project Design which is currently being drafted. Should EH approve this design they would, in principle be agreeing to fund the project itself (approximately £30,000). Match funding would be provided by the City and County Councils in officer time and IT support. Obviously, this funding has not been confirmed as yet, but the project would only proceed if funded by EH. There are therefore no costs for the City Council and once established the HER should generate a modest income.

8.0 Legal Implications

- 8.1. A service level agreement would need to be agreed between both authorities. A draft has already been seen and commented on by Legal Services but the County Council's legal team has not yet approved the document.

9.0 Risk & Opportunity Management Implications

- 9.1 This project represents an opportunity to substantially improve the quality of the City Council's HER at no cost to the City Council. It also represents a chance to generate a modest level of income which could be fed back in to monuments management or outreach projects. It is the only approach identified which will enhance the HER with no start-up or ongoing cost implications.
- 9.2 The main risk associated with this project is that once the City dataset is integrated onto the joint HER it would be time consuming and expensive to remove the data and to transfer it into a different system. Should for any reason the County and City wish to stop maintaining a joint HER at any point in the future, there would be a cost implication arising from any such change. It must be stressed however that such an eventuality seems unlikely and should be mitigated by an appropriately worded SLA.
- 9.3 Ownership of the data and similar issues would all be covered by the SLA and is not considered to be a risk.

10.0 People Impact Assessment (PIA):

10.1 No negative impacted identified.

11.0 Other Corporate Implications

Community Safety

11.1 N/A

Sustainability

11.2 N/A

Staffing & Trade Union

11.3 .N/A

Background Documents: None