

## Response to Southport Group's consultation document by the Diggers' Forum, IfA Special Interest Group for Fieldworkers

### Introduction

This response has been collated by the DF Committee after comments received from both the Committee and members. It has been structured as requested in the initial consultation document for ease of reference.

1. Do you think that the SG visions are the right ones?
  - The Diggers' Forum welcome that the report specifically mentions the poor pay of professional archaeologists in the contracting sector; and the report appears to be indirectly concerned with raising pay through increased professionalisation and training. For the Southport Vision to work on any level, and if we are to maintain a viable body of professionals able to deliver on improved standards and community involvement, then the heritage industry must address the endemic problems of pay and career progression that exist in our profession. All parties in the debate over pay and conditions have expressed their desire to improve the profession in this regard.
  - The Southport Group report specifically relates to '*planning-led investigation in the Historic Environment*' which includes all aspects of the historic environment (including archaeology) of both a destructive and non-destructive nature. The report properly acknowledges that heritage belongs to all and that the value of the historic environment lies in its appreciation and understanding by the wider population. The Diggers' Forum is in complete accord with this view.
  - The Diggers' Forum is also committed to the principle that archaeology is a valuable and finite resource and that it should be protected even if this may mean restricting access to some aspects of archaeological work. Effectively, it's not about professional versus amateur, but rather about professionalism versus unprofessionalism, which can be found in community work and professional units. A drive towards professionalism with better standards more rigidly enforced would be of greater benefit to all parties.
  - We welcome the recommendation to establish regional archaeological centres such as the current LAARC, although we note that funding of the LAARC is not currently secured beyond the end of the current financial year.
  - We also welcome the clear message that a strong curatorial and HER service is essential for the entire system to operate although again there are issues regarding lack of funding for these services in the future.
2. If you do, do you think we have made the right recommendations to achieve them?
  - Whilst the recommendations of the Southport Group are presented as a cohesive toolkit in the draft report, it is highly unlikely that the recommendations will be implemented *en bloc*, especially given the scale of current cuts to HER and curatorial roles which are essential to underpin the aims. It is all very commendable to call for regional archive centres, however in an increasingly unstable funding environment is such a provision realistic?
  - The Southport Report has some very laudable aims which we fully support, however once those aims that cost money are removed, then what are we left with? We need

to ensure that if the recommendations are implemented on a piecemeal basis that the overall vision runs through each and every recommendation to prevent unintended consequences from partial implementation.

- We are extremely concerned about the effect of the key phrase '*public participation should be the norm not the exception*' on the archaeological profession. This sentence underpins much of Section 3 of the report, however there is no explicit definition of what this public participation should involve and at what level, and this is a serious flaw in both the report and its recommendations.
- We are particularly concerned that in the proper desire to enhance public knowledge and participation in archaeology (which is one of our fundamental *raisons d'être* as archaeologists) the Southport Group report does not seriously and adversely affect the professional archaeological sector. This may be by inadvertently undermining hard-won professional standards or through unintended consequences allowing unscrupulous employers or developers to do inferior work 'on the cheap' using volunteer labour. This report after all is concerned with developer-led investigations: we may have moved on from PPG16 and the fundamental tenets embodied in preservation *in-situ*, however that principle is still enshrined in the Valetta Convention and in PPS5 and still underpins all commercial archaeological work.
- The Diggers' Forum believes strongly that *all* intrusive archaeological work should be carried out to professional standards, whether it is part of the planning process or not. It should be *the nature and scope of the required work* (clearly stated in a WSI and approved by curatorial staff), *not the status of the participants*, that sets out the requisite standards to be adhered to for each investigation. It is not a matter of professional versus amateur; it is a matter of *professionalism versus amateurishness* in whatever form it exists. All developer-led work **MUST** be done to the highest professional standards and there must be no excuse not to do so. *Professional-quality work must be the lowest common denominator. No excuses and no exceptions.*
- We also wish to express our concern over the reference (3.2.4) that we could perhaps 'do less better', the report acknowledges that care should be taken with interpreting this phrase, however the DF is concerned at its use as it will be easy to take this out of its qualifying context. In the pre-PPG16 era irrecoverable damage was done due to selective and partial archaeological excavation: rigorous excavation and sampling strategies are essential. If selective strategies *are* going to be applied then there needs to be clear, effective and transparent standards and guidance on a local, regional and national basis. This currently heavily relies on curatorial staff within planning departments drawing on regional and local research frameworks. Alternative gatekeepers *may* be available, but again, we are here concerned with developer-led archaeology and if this recommendation is put in place we will be further relying on strong and effective developer-control archaeologists at a time when they are under most threat.
- We are concerned by the expressed aspirations for the commercial sector to involve non-commercial organisations in all areas of heritage management. We are concerned that whilst it is not *intended* to revert to pre-PPG16 excavation using volunteers with insufficient funding or expertise to carry out a professional job, this *may* be a consequence of the recommendations. Professionalism is about working to standards, with affiliation to a suitable professional body such as the IfA or IHBC – via ROs, IfA grades (or similar) and NVQ. Good practice within the historic

environment requires equal standards to be applied by all participants. We must not open the door to lower quality work.

- Is the Southport Group consultation likely to be able to persuade all stakeholders that this is possible in a development environment that is tougher than ever and a planning environment where curatorial roles are being eroded and HERs are being shut?

3. If you don't, what alternative visions would you like to see included?

- The Diggers' Forum would welcome inclusion in any future consultations at the earliest opportunity. We represent those archaeologists who work out on site and we can bring their experience and views to the table. It is our members who see the *reality* of the policies created at higher levels, and who deal with the benefits, flaws and loopholes on a daily basis.
- There is a need for detailed curatorial input through the use of briefs and monitoring to ensure that volunteer, community-led and public participation is appropriate and does not undermine professional practise - particularly on sites where commercial constraints are of paramount importance. The report should also recognise that poor practise leads to the degeneration of the historic environment that we are trying to protect.
- The IfA policy on volunteering is mentioned in the text, however it is not specifically outlined. The recommendations which relate to the use of unpaid labour (volunteers) must specifically include reference to this document and refer to it on each occasion. The need for the input of properly validated professional expertise should be emphasised wherever public participation is mentioned.
- We need to openly acknowledge that there are already good examples of public participation on planning-led projects large and small with many community archaeology projects run by commercial units as well as the entire amateur and research excavation sector. Within planning-led archaeological investigations the requirements for community participation should be written into the brief and WSI for each project. We need to accept that developer-funded archaeology is not always the best place for such projects. We also need to acknowledge that there is not a one-size fits all solution to public participation and that many sites will not be suitable for public involvement on-site during archaeological investigation. To acknowledge this, the Southport Group should include an appendix offering explicit guidance as to what they expect from 'participation' from each typical sized project, as this could vary from information on a hoarding to volunteers working on site under professional supervision.

4. What other recommendations would you make to achieve these visions?

- That the employers, trade unions and professional organisations urgently meet to resolve the ongoing crisis in archaeological pay and careers.

- We call for urgent clarification of the meaning and scope of the phrase '*public participation should be the norm not the exception*'.
- That public participation in planning-led archaeology is governed by professional standards and guidance and that standards are applied equally to all participants. There must be no negative effect on standards of work as a result of more inclusive participation. Trained and dedicated community archaeologists could be the intermediaries called for, with recognised structures of professionalism through the CBA or IfA and 'embedded' in units and heritage organisations.
- That public participation in planning-led archaeology is not won at the risk of any negative impacts on archaeological pay and conditions which are already at levels that threaten the viability of the profession. Public participation should be at a level appropriate to the site and there needs to be more specific guidance on this issue.
- That the Southport Group summarise the IfA standards on volunteering as an additional recommendation and that all recommendations are augmented by the appropriate professional guidance and codes of conduct and that these remain linked.
- That professional pay reflects the extra responsibilities in mentoring voluntary participation: archaeologists' and supervisors' wages will be increased to reflect the extra responsibilities and skills required to mentor untrained staff and structured training programmes to be provided for this extra responsibility.
- All areas of public participation should be discussed fully at all levels of the job. That is the way to develop proper structures and professional training in community archaeology, especially for those who put themselves up as Community Archaeologists. They may not necessarily be diggers, but should be trained in this specialism (as they are beginning to be), peer reviewed, as are diggers and units, and *fully committed* to a public educated in what and how archaeology is done in their community, and most importantly WHY.
- That changes to the structure or practice of the profession are not put in place without properly funded and tested checks and balances already being in position.

The Diggers' Forum acknowledges that there are many very capable archaeologists in the non-contracting sector: many of our members started their careers through volunteering and we know many former professional archaeologists who continue to excavate on an amateur basis having left the profession. Our views are not based on protectionism of a flawed and under-funded system, but on the underpinning beliefs we hold about the value of archaeology and its importance. Volunteers *do* have a place on site, and *can* do valuable and high quality work, but this needs to be within a proper professionally recognised and accredited system with high quality curatorial oversight and properly funded resource centres. This is what archaeology and our heritage deserve.

Whilst the current situation is far from ideal and we are certainly not where we would want to be as a profession, we have achieved much in the twenty or so years since PPG16 and we should both acknowledge this and protect what is good, whilst looking to move forward. The consultation acts as an opportunity to define what the right direction for the profession should be: if we look at what the report desires it is no more than what is already seen as best practice by many archaeologists and heritage organisations. The recommendations aim to roll out best practice across the industry. This is admirable but perhaps suggests that

we already have the answers, we just lack the environment to *make best practice the best option*. The heritage industry needs to examine the reasons why best practice is not the norm at present and to develop ways of making this the case in the future.