

Mr Paul Drury,  
President  
Society of Antiquaries of London  
Burlington House  
London  
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22 March 2021

**Re: CIfA response to the *Future of Archaeology* manifesto**

Dear Paul,

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Society's *Future of Archaeology* manifesto. CIfA staff have discussed the paper with our Advisory Council and consultation advisors. This discussion stimulated a range of responses, which we have summarised below.

CIfA wishes to welcome constructive discussion on the future of our discipline, to recognise the principles which underpin the paper, and to highlight the opportunities we perceive for creating positive change within archaeology. We look forward to further discussions on these topics with SAL and the wider archaeological sector. However, we also wish to be clear about concerns that have been strongly expressed by the profession. Finally, we wish to describe how we think that we can seek to build on the Society's proposals.

**1. Introduction**

- 1.1. This SAL Manifesto is the most recent of several initiatives in the last decade which have focused on putting public benefit at the heart of a sustainable and successful archaeology sector. The paper acknowledges that it draws from the Southport Report, the Howell Redesdale review of Local Authority Archaeology Services, the British Academy's Reflections report, and the current Historic England & CIfA-led 21st-Century Challenges for Archaeology Programme (21CAP). All these initiatives have recognised that the status quo is not perfect and have produced recommendations for improvement.
- 1.2. In the past decade, the sector has responded to real threats to its existence and sustainability; notably cuts to local authority historic environment services, a crisis in archaeological archives skills and capacity, and deregulatory planning reform. The sector has also undertaken a huge amount of work exploring possible ways to improve archaeological practice in response to various opportunities and threats.
- 1.3. In the context of external threats, caution is not always possible. We recognise the reasons why SAL has published this provocation. Some in the sector may now perceive that some of these threats have receded, and with them the appetite to entertain change.

Nonetheless, ClfA believes that there is a need for change, and that there are opportunities to achieve it. To this end ClfA welcomes all discussion of ideas, even if these discussions may be challenging.

- 1.4. ClfA is very keen to encourage SAL to be an active part in the discussions of how to seek change in the sector. All of the 'principles' highlighted in the SAL report are represented in some form in the ongoing process of the 21CAP programme. As SAL is a member of the programme's steering group, we look forward to discussing and advancing that programme collaboratively with you.

## **2. Concerns**

- 2.1. In our consultation with our Advisory Council there was strong recognition of the need for change, along with support for aspects of the Manifesto. However, we need to convey the level of offence that has been provoked by the SAL report expressed to us. In general terms, we regret that aspects of the Manifesto's drafting process, publication, tone, promotion and content have been unhelpful.
- 2.2. In particular, the use of hyperbole and misguided generalisations have undermined the credibility of some important arguments, and have created more controversy than debate. A more generous, less superior tone of voice would have served the Society and the sector better, and encouraged more colleagues to think less defensively about change.
- 2.3. Our Advisory Council was concerned that the report does not take adequate account of existing good work in the sector, with various unfortunate omissions and a failure to display nuanced understanding of progress in recent years, such as that towards the sustainability of archaeological archives, or a deeper understanding of public benefit.
- 2.4. We also note that the report does not recognise large parts of the archaeological sector. Given the report claims to envision the 'Future of Archaeology' it is disappointing that marine and coastal, environmental, buildings, and community spheres of the discipline are not mentioned. In many cases, much of the content could have been directly relevant.
- 2.5. We recognise that these issues may be because this is a high-level document mainly concerned with development-led archaeology in the terrestrial planning system. Nonetheless, the perception among many has been that the report would have been fairer if it had addressed the future of the discipline in a more holistic way, as its title implies.
- 2.6. Members of our Advisory Council who are also Fellows of the Society stated that they were disappointed that the report had not been discussed with the Society's membership before publication, hindering sector-wide input, which – if done differently – could have ameliorated much of the perception of a top-down imposition of a 'solution' rather than a more open deliberative process. Advisors were also surprised that the report did not discuss which other options for structural change were considered, and why they were rejected.
- 2.7. We also regret that the Society has launched the report directly on Parliamentarians before further discussion. In particular, it was unwise to assert to politicians that developer-led

archaeology does not provide value for money, rather than that there is much scope for providing better value. Although this is a legitimate contention for debate between archaeologists, at a time when others in the sector are working to ameliorate proposed planning changes that could allow many developments to go ahead with no archaeological provision, this is not a helpful public position for the Society to adopt.

### **3. Our proposals**

- 3.1. In making the above critique our intention is to ensure that our next steps can be positive, more collaborative, and responsive to sector needs and available opportunities.
- 3.2. We recognise the potential benefits that a hypothetical 'regional' hub structure could bring for archaeology, as well as some potential difficulties. These benefits and this model are worth discussing as one possible option for change. However, changes to local government may not at present be moving in that direction and it will be important to work with the grain of local government reform.
- 3.3. To this end, the forthcoming Government review of local government in England is likely to be an advocacy priority for the sector. ClfA recommends that the sector remains alert to opportunities to introduce improvements, on regional or other scales (eg new unitary authorities and 'city regions'), in the 21CAP programme. The programme includes research into the pros and cons of existing local government service delivery (this work package is being led by ALGAO) and exploration of different options (this work package is being led by ClfA). We will also be promoting work that is already well advanced which is exploring 'whole life' solutions to archaeological archives, supporting research into synthesis and research strategies, drawing on projects such as the Englaid and the Roman Rural Settlement projects, and determining which changes are needed to ClfA Standards and guidance that underpin the ethical code to which professional archaeologists subscribe.
- 3.4. We are particularly keen to pick up the threads of the Manifesto which discuss cultural change in archaeology. Drivers for archaeology's development include climate change adaptation, changes to landscape management and agendas for diversity, inclusion and decolonisation. If archaeology is to contribute fully to society's response to these and other issues, the discipline must become more outward looking and consider its relationship with, and value to, the public. Cultural changes could manifest in encouraging the development of procurement models that reward quality over cost, full implementation of the Valletta Convention and other steps towards correcting elements of market failure. To get there, we need to foster a more collaborative, less divided, less risk-averse, bolder, more confident activity, and that requires changes in behaviour and tone.

### **4. Concluding points**

- 4.1. We support the Society's right to put forward ideas like those in this Manifesto. However, it is important to do this in a way which enables archaeologists to get behind shared principles. We must also tread delicately where there may be implications from what we say, giving due respect to archaeological colleagues for great achievements in imperfect structures,

and refraining from giving damaging messages to politicians that undermine sectoral advocacy.

4.2. Now that the Society's ideas have been publicly aired, we hope that the Society will open its doors to constructive debate and potential development of these ideas. We therefore invite SAL

- to engage more closely with the 21CAP work programme from now on
- to draw on the resources and expertise of its Fellows to develop new ideas, and to encourage them to use their influence to debate and collaboratively to achieve proactive change in the sector.

With best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Hinton', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Peter Hinton  
BA MCifA FSA FRSA FSA Scot FIAM  
Chief Executive, CifA