

Southport Group

Making PPS5 work: realising the benefits of planning-led investigation of the historic environment

Position Statement (draft)

(to be presented at workshops in January 2011)

The Group – what are we about?

While PPGs 15 and 16 provided us pretty much with the current structure for the sector in England, they did not deliver maximum public benefit every time – benefit for clients in terms of social responsibility or corporate targets, or educational benefit and enjoyment for the public, or benefit for us as a sector intellectually and professionally.

PPS5 represents one of the most significant opportunities in decades for archaeologists, our client sector and the public to get more from the work we do in the historic environment.

So what did we get in the new PPS that has changed things?

- we got historic environment as a strong contributor to the sustainable development agenda, to stronger communities, to education, to quality of life and the economy
- we got a series of linked concepts: Understanding; Significance; values as set out in the English Heritage Conservation Principles document which draws on the Burra Charter including communal values and archaeological interest
- instead of 'preservation by record' we got a focus on the idea that understanding of significance should play the key role in investigation recording and dissemination, as well as in creating sustainable places
- we got integrated 'heritage assets'
- we got public participation
- we got the concepts of proportionality and selectivity
- we got the obligation for developers to publish
- we got the requirement for developers to use experts

We also now have huge pressure, straight away, on resources - especially for LPAs, maintaining and maintaining access to HERS - and developers for whom pre-planning costs and viability tests, including market testing, could increase significantly.

We also still have ways of working born out of PPG15 and 16 which failed to deliver consistently on public benefit over the last 20 years, and we need to make sure we have and use new working methods to replace them.

And we also have a gap – a need for new products – such as Statements of Significance and assessments for integrated heritage assets that formerly had been dealt with very separately.

So operating the way that we do, we would fail to meet the vision and requirements of the PPS. In order to deliver we need to achieve a major ground shift in culture and focus.

- from data collection to knowledge creation
- from a cost to an asset
- from a fragmented to a collaborative approach
- from market failure to reliance on expertise and quality from an industry to a profession
- from a state where archaeologists offer to decontaminate sites, to where they enrich communities and build futures through understanding
- from inconsistent quality to consistent delivery through consistently applied intellectual and management processes for understanding, recording, sharing and deriving value from heritage assets.

This is the opportunity we face as a sector. This might mean having to

- focus effort where it will have best effect – even if it means doing fewer sites, and doing them better
- finish the job properly – getting value from the archives through sustained public participation
- do things the right way – to the right standards, evenly applied across the UK

The Group - who are we?

Delegates at the IfA conference in Southport in April 2010 commissioned a working party of individuals working in the historic environment to think creatively and radically about how we practise and how the PPS may best be implemented. They are the Southport Group. The Group is made up of individuals (Mike Heyworth, Chris Gosden, Liz Peace, Stewart Bryant, Pete Hinton, Adrian Olivier, Duncan Brown, Adrian Tindall, Karen Bewick, Roger Thomas and Taryn Nixon, Jo Evans, Matthew Slocomb and Frank Kelsall). But between us we can reach

- ALGAO and the local authority and archaeology curatorial sector in England
- the contracting and consulting sectors
- university-based archaeologists
- archives and museums
- the property and development sector
- the civic and amenity societies and groups, spatial advocacy groups

The Project

The Group has spent the months since the conference developing a project, and refining its scope with major stakeholders, including English Heritage. The aim of the project will be to propose ways in which we can improve practice, to make sure we deliver consistent excellence in public benefit. The objectives of this project will be

- to facilitate the rapid improvement of practices developed under PPG 16 and the relevant elements of PPG 15 into those which are fit for purpose under PPS5
- to stimulate a more collaborative approach within the sector

- to focus the sector on understanding and enhancing cultural significance
- to find ways to promote participative knowledge creation
- to build the expectation of professionally accredited quality
- to help the property sector create opportunities for better archaeology

The main deliverable will be a report, containing recommendations for a framework of guidance and other products that would help realise the aspirations of PPS5.

It will contain the specification for the tools and rules we will need for the job – ie the revised advice and guidance (for planners, the archaeological sector and others) on how to realise public benefits from archaeology, new methods for assessing significance and sharing it, new ways for measuring our performance, and new structures for working across the sector and with the development industry.

The workshops

The workshops we will hold in January are the method by which the Group will download at high-speed, collate and report the bright ideas from different parts of the sector for improving practice. Part of the process will happen online, where the workshops will reside for a month after they take place. Comments and opinions will also be invited online.

Each workshop will aim to produce a range of ideas for products, as well as assessment of the deliverability of each product in the current economic context and in the future. The workshops will focus on the requirements of PPS5 for improved delivery in the following key areas

- A. better research focus in delivery
- B. better opportunities for public participation and involvement in decision making
- C. improved quality of publication and explanation
- D. proper compilation and transfer of archive material and improved access to archives
- E. better quality in delivery
- F. clearer focus on client (funding) body in terms of product and proportionality
- G. addressing fragmentation in the sector

Market failure

Of course archaeologists have already demonstrated their capacity to excel in all these areas. But we have been operating in a highly competitive, unregulated market that can penalise those that seek to add value to the lowest common denominator.

When an unregulated market fails to deliver consistently the public benefit that government policy intended, it is termed by economists *market failure*. When this happens, government has a responsibility to intervene.

Market failure typically involves

- *asymmetry of information*: where purchaser has limited understanding of the service or product compared with the provider

- *credence goods*: where the purchaser has to take on trust that the service will be fit for purpose, and, when the final products are delivered long after commissioning, that it will arrive at all
- *externalities*: where others, normally the public, are affected by or have a legitimate interest in a product or service negotiated between distant service providers and clients

We can see how reminiscent this is of commercial archaeology, where there is a lack of very clear obligations on all service providers to have appropriate, accredited expertise and to deliver services of defined quality explicitly for public benefit. For fear of failing to secure contracts, commercial archaeologists have frequently found themselves obliged to design and deliver projects that are far below the best they can offer – to the detriment of public benefit (not to mention of client returns and professional satisfaction to the archaeologist).

IfA in particular argued hard with government during the drafting of PPS5 that the public was not getting the public policy benefits envisaged by the PPGs as a result of market failure in commercial archaeology, and that government should fulfil its duty to intervene by requiring LPAs to ensure that work is undertaken by accredited, competent practitioners to recognised professional standards.

That argument was won. As a result, PPS5 places great emphasis throughout on expertise, it refers to professional standards, it directs readers to the IfA Register of Organisations and to professional membership, and it advises LPAs on their rights and responsibilities in ensuring work and the people doing it meet the required standard.

There's nothing anti-competitive in this. It's just that by making sure that defined public benefit is at the heart of the requirement, competition will be on quality and innovation, and not just on price.

But we need to consolidate the victory. PPS5 may not be long for the world, though its principles should carry forward in the NPF. And we hope that similar principles will inspire the reforms of the relevant planning guidance in Wales and Scotland too. That's why the project will also include an economic analysis of the past and likely future structure of the market in professional services for the investigating and understanding of the historic environment, and will make proposals for ensuring the market operates as policy demands in future.

Putting the project in context

There's a policy context. Southport Project is in full accord with the Government's vision on the potential of the historic environment, published alongside PPS5, which envisions that 'the value of the historic environment is recognised by all who have the power to shape it; that Government gives it proper recognition and that it is managed intelligently and in a way that realises its contribution to the economic, social and cultural life of the nation.'

Government and the historic environment sector now agree that the historic environment is a resource with huge potential for understanding identity and place, for contributing to the quality of life, for sustainable growth and for delivering a wide range of economic, social, cultural and environmental agenda.

And the other context – of course – is economic. The cuts to the public sector are brutal. Local authority historic environment services are our most precious assets and our most vulnerable. Above all we need them for screening planning applications and applying the necessary conditions. They have little enough time to police the sector at present, and will have less or none in future. We need to regulate ourselves. The parameters set by PPS5 now allow us to do that.