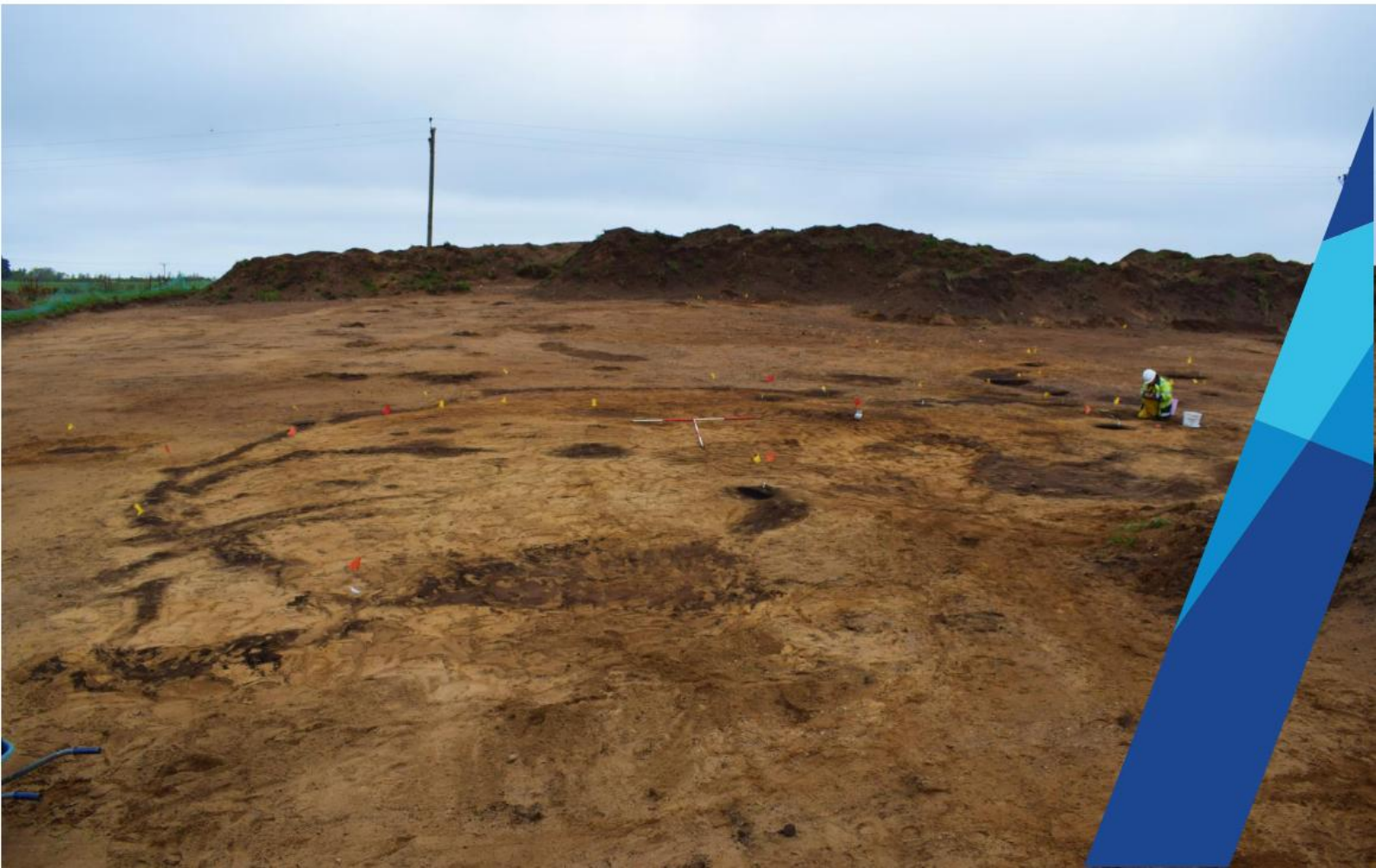
Aberdeenshire COUNCIL

From mountain to sea

Moray Council Archaeology Service

2021/22 Shared Service Agreement Annual Report

May 2022



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1 Summary

2021/22 Shared Service Agreement Annual Report

Period covered: 1st April 2021 – 31st March 2022

The Archaeology Service has the role of protecting, managing and promoting the historic environment of not only Aberdeenshire but also, via Shared Service Agreements, Aberdeen City and Moray Councils, and via a Service Level Agreement, Angus Council. The Archaeology Service has 3.8 full-time equivalent staff, forming part of the Specialist Services Team within the Planning and Economy Service.

With the continuation of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Archaeology Service continued to work remotely, with the reintroduction of site visits (on a limited basis). The existing robust processes and systems in place, prior to the lockdown, ensured the Service maintained business continuity, and allowed the team to provide ongoing advice and support to critical national infrastructure projects, contractors, and Police Scotland at the height of the restrictions, along with the usual planning and land management consultations.

The Archaeology Service has continued to deliver a service of archaeological advice, guidance and support to Moray Council via a Shared Service Agreement with Aberdeenshire Council, for a total annual cost of £15,000. During the course of the year the Archaeology Service responded to a total of 232 Planning Applications and 98 other consultations (an increase of 14.5% on 2020/21); provided advice to developers and Council staff as required; responded to enquiries from the public; represented Moray Council on six national Groups and Boards; helped to develop various local and national policies which have a direct influence on the management of the historic environment for the area; and continued to maintain and expand the Historic Environment Record for Moray, which underpins all of the above work.

The performance indicators below show an increase in the number of planning applications responded to by the Archaeology Service in the 2021/22 period. The average planning application response time has increased during this period, rising to 11.53 days (from 8.22 days in 2020/21), with 83.62% of planning applications responded to within 14 days. This slower response time is as a result of the increased number of pre-application consultations responded to as detailed below.

2021/22 saw a significant rise in the number of Pre-application, Masterplan and Major Pre-Application Consultations received from Moray, with the number of consultations more than doubling. Looking in particular at the increase in the number of Pre-application Consultations received, this would appear to reflect a change in approach from Development Management teams to frontload the planning system for improved service and efficiency. The Archaeology Service is fully supportive of this approach, recognising the value to developers and the planning process of identifying and addressing archaeological issues at an early stage.

The increase in number, and complexity, of Pre-application Consultations being assessed did lead to an increased workload, but this was not accompanied by an additional staff resource within the team to accommodate this change.

The work of the Archaeology Service is driven by Aberdeenshire Council's Archaeology Strategy 2020-23 which provides a structured approach to service delivery over the three-year period. The Archaeology Service enables Moray Council to satisfy the relevant requirements of Our Place in Time – The Historic Environment Strategy for Scotland (2014), Scotland's Archaeology Strategy (2016) and National Planning Framework 3.

2 Consultations

As well as responding to direct consultations, the Archaeology Service reviews all 52 Weekly Planning Lists for each of the four local authority areas we cover for any potential archaeological impact that would require appropriate mitigation. Throughout the 2021/22 period the number of planning applications submitted to the local authorities remained high, comparable with figures from 2020/21.

In the 2021/22 period, the Archaeology Service dealt with and/or commented on the following applications in Moray:

2.1 Planning Applications

In 2021/22 the average consultation response time rose to 11.53 days, an increase of 40% from 8.22 days in 2020/21. Within the same period, the total percentage of planning application consultations and weekly lists responded to within 14 days has decreased from 99.53% in 2020/21 to 83.62% 2021/22.

The period 2021/22 saw an increase in the number of planning application consultations (direct and indirect, from weekly lists) in Moray. As noted above, there was also a significant increase in the number of Pre-Application, Major Application & Masterplans dealt with, increasing by 205% from the previous year. The large amount of pre-application consultations with the same staff resource has produced an increased workload for the team which has resulted in the reduction of the planning application consultation response times.

Although there was a slight decrease in the number of mitigations put in place during the 2021/22 period, it is worth noting this does not directly correlate to a reduction in workload as mitigations can take several years to complete. Post-decision work which accompanies mitigations, comprising dealing with enquiries from applicants and contractors, producing written briefs, and assessing necessary documentation (including WSIs, reports, post-excavation analysis proposals) can relate to planning applications from the current year *and* those approved in previous years.

Planning Consultations		
Performance Indicator	2021/22	2020/21
No of Planning Applications dealt with	232	214
Average response time to a Planning Application	11.53 days	8.22 days
No of archaeological mitigations put into place	66	87
Percentage of Planning Application Consultations or Weekly Lists responded to within 14 days	83.62%	99.53%

Note: The Archaeology Service not only responds to direct consultations, but also examines all 52 Weekly Planning Lists for any potential archaeological impact that would require appropriate mitigation.

Other Planning Consultations		
Performance Indicator	2021/22	2020/21
No of Pre-Application, Major Application & Masterplans dealt with	55	18
No of CNPA planning applications dealt with	0	2

2.2 Other Applications

Performance Indicator	2021/22	2020/21
Scottish Rural Development Plans (woodland creation) (No dealt with)	9	15
Forest Plans/Felling Applications (No dealt with)	28	21
Utility & Other Checks (No dealt with)	6	18

3 Public Access and Community Involvement

3.1 Moray Historic Environment Record

The Archaeology Service continues to actively maintain, develop, enhance and expand the Historic Environment Record (HER) database for the Moray region. The database not only forms the basis of our core consultation work, but is also publicly accessible allowing local residents, visitors and researchers to learn about the cultural heritage of the Moray region.

Performance Indicator	2021/22	2020/21
No of Records Held in Database	9,976	9,785
No of New Records Created	191	2,200
No of Existing Records Updated	1,829	3,576

Note: As reported in last year's Annual Report, a significantly higher number of new sites were created and edited in the HER in 2020/21 as part of a widescale project in advance of changes to the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (Scotland) Order 1992.

3.2 Website and Social Media

The Archaeology Service continues to grow and develop its online presence both through the website and through social media outlets and uses these platforms to engage and inform local residents and visitors to the area about the cultural heritage of the Moray region.

Website & Social Media Statistics	2021/22	2020/21
No of Archaeology Service Website Users	49,388	39,400
No of Twitter Followers	5,681	5,483
No of Instagram Followers	1,020	957
No of SketchFab Views (online 3D models of assets)	8,700	7,600
No of YouTube Views	177	567

Note: These numbers are not broken down into individual Local Authority areas.

3.3 Support for Community Projects

The Archaeology Service is happy to offer support and guidance to archaeology community projects. In the 2021/22 period, we were not approached by any community projects in the Moray area; this is reflected in the table below.

Performance Indicator	2021/22	2020/21
No of Community Projects Supported	0	0
Funding Contributions to Community Projects	£0	£0
External Funding Raised by Community Projects	£0	£0
No of Volunteer Days Created	0	0
Economic Value of Volunteers	£0	£0

4 Policy Work

4.1 Moray Local Development Plan

The Archaeology Service continues to assist the Policy Team as and when required in assessing potentially allocated sites for their potential impact on the historic environment, developing supplementary guidance, and advising on suitable mitigation for future developers.

5 Other Work

5.1 Collaboration with National Organisations

The Archaeology Service in 2021/22 represented Moray Council on the following Local and National Boards and Groups:

- Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers (ALGAO: Scotland)
- Scottish Historic Environment Record Forum
- Scotland's Strategic Archaeology Committee
- North East Scotland Heritage Network
- Cultural Heritage Community Engagement Research Group
- Built Environment Forum Scotland

The Archaeology Service has continued to be involved in developing and implementing Scotland's Archaeology Strategy by being the named local authority representative on Scotland's Strategic Archaeology Committee.

The Service has contributed to the new overarching national policy reviews being undertaken by Historic Environment Scotland, the review being undertaken by Scottish Government for National Planning Framework 4 and the draft Local Development Plan Regulations and Guidance. The Archaeology Service is considered a key partner in this work and provided evidence to the February meeting of the Scottish Government's Local Government Housing and Planning Committee.

5.2 New Guidance: Peatland Restoration

During 2021/22, the Archaeology Service produced new '*Peatland Restoration and the Historic Environment Guidance*' which was formally launched in March 2022. It was created in response to the Scottish Government funded Peatland ACTION Project, and an apparent gap in information about potential impacts on the historic environment which peatland restoration work may cause.

The guidance has been adopted across the whole of Scotland by NatureScot, Peatland Action, Historic Environment Scotland, and the Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers (ALGAO). Dr Tom Gardner, Historic Environment Scotland, said of the document, *"The newly ratified Peatland*

Restoration and the Historic Environment Guidance marks a crucial step in recognising and mitigating against the possible impacts of peatland restoration on heritage assets. Importantly, the guidance document also recognises the critical importance of peatland restoration, not only in the struggle against human induced climate change and biodiversity loss, but also in safeguarding heritage assets put at risk by peatland deflation and erosion. Finally, the work represents a triumph of stakeholder engagement, with broad-reaching consultation responses reflecting the views and passion of all involved."

5.3 Continuous Improvement

The Archaeology Service has continued to review and revise its operational manual and procedures to ensure consistency in working practices, and a robust approach to business continuity.

During the last year the Service has also been involved in moving its networked filing system to the new Aberdeenshire Records Centre within Office365, and the associated Document Management System for Environment and Infrastructure Services in SharePoint. This has involved review and consolidation of several tens of thousands of documents in line with the latest best practice for retention and disposal.

5.4 Training & Engagement

An informal training session was held in July 2021 with the Development Management Team from Moray Council. This was a virtual event, with an officer from the Archaeology Service attending an online team meeting. An update on some archaeological highlights from recent development sites in the Moray Council area was provided, followed by an opportunity for the Development Management Team to ask questions about specific sites and aspects of archaeology in the planning process.

The Service also undertook a customer survey during 2021/22, seeking views on the public's awareness of, and engagement with, the historic environment. While the survey focussed on the public's thoughts on the heritage and historic environment of Aberdeenshire, 25% of those completing the survey were non-Aberdeenshire residents. The results therefore can be considered to offer an insight into general public perceptions of the Archaeology Service itself as well as the region's heritage. It was encouraging to note that 93% of those responding agreed or strongly agreed that heritage and the historic environment made a positive difference in their lives. It is also worth noting that when asked to name a favourite site in Aberdeenshire, five sites in Moray were named: Burghead fort, the World War II Coastal Defences along the Moray coastline, Castle Hill in Cullen, Elgin, and the Sueno Stone in Forres. The results of the survey will continue to be reviewed and will help inform the Archaeology Service's promotional work in future. A summary of the results can be found in Appendix 1.

Appendix 1

Customer Survey Summary: *Aberdeenshire's Historic Environment - what does heritage mean to you?*

Aberdeenshire's Historic Environment - what does heritage mean to you?

Review of Survey

The online survey was active during the month of September 2021, to coincide with Scottish Archaeology Month and Doors Open Days. It had 12 questions, seven of which were mandatory and five optional; two questions allowed respondents to give free text replies.

At the beginning of the survey, a brief introduction was included about Aberdeenshire Council Archaeology Service along with a summary of the purpose of the survey. For clarity, definitions were provided for the terms *Historic Environment* and *Heritage* – key terms which feature in the title and through the questions of the survey. Two demographic questions were included, questions 10 and 11.

The survey was hosted through the *Engage Aberdeenshire* survey platform. It was promoted externally on the Aberdeenshire Council, Archaeology Service, Ranger Service and Environment Team (Built) social media channels, by Visit**Aberdeen**shire, and was shared by various national historic environment organisations. It was promoted internally on *Arcadia*, *Yammer* and the Planning & Economy Weekly Highlights Report as well as being circulated to all elected members.

The purpose of the survey was to:

- engage with a wide-ranging audience
- understand how residents of, and visitors to, Aberdeenshire interpret, value and engage with their heritage and the historic environment
- raise awareness of the Archaeology Service and its work
- gather data to help inform future promotional work of the Archaeology Service

In total, 359 completed responses were received. Of these, the highest number of responses by age-group was from the 55-64 year olds (30%) while 9% were aged under 35. Only one response was received from the 12-17 age group, and no responses from under-12s. Of those who responded to the survey, 75% live in the Aberdeenshire Council area.

The results of the survey offer a valuable opening insight into people's awareness, understanding and connection with heritage and the historic environment in Aberdeenshire. The survey shows that the Archaeology Service could do more to promote itself and its existing resources. The responses received will be taken into consideration when prioritising future promotional activities (social media posts, leaflet themes, interpretation boards), and the Archaeology Service will continue to support and promote engagement with historic environment and heritage activities throughout Aberdeenshire.

The survey results will be shared internally, with elected members and colleagues in other services (including the Environment Team, Ranger Service, Economic Development, Live Life Aberdeenshire, Corporate Communications) as well as with external organisations, such as Visit**Aberdeen**shire.

There follows a summary of key findings and review of the survey.

Aberdeenshire's Historic Environment - what does heritage mean to you?

Survey Key Findings

359 PEOPLE SHARED THEIR VIEWS DURING SEPTEMBER 2021

93% AGREED OR STRONGLY AGREED THAT HERITAGE & THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT MAKE A POSITIVE DIFFERENCE TO THEIR LIVES

80% OF PEOPLE KNEW THAT ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL HAS AN ARCHAEOLOGY SERVICE

TOP 5 FAVOURITE HISTORIC SITES BY TYPE:

1. CASTLES
2. HILLFORTS
3. STONE CIRCLES
4. HISTORIC BUILDINGS
5. CHURCHES & GRAVEYARDS

"We're fortunate in Aberdeenshire to have many amazing historic sites that we can visit"

"I love visiting old graveyards, castles & museums to learn more about the history of the area"

"My heritage. My identity."

"Almost everywhere you travel there are historic items, most with a story behind them."

75% OF THOSE WHO RESPONDED ARE ABERDEENSHIRE RESIDENTS

13% VISIT HERITAGE OR HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SITES IN ABERDEENSHIRE SEVERAL TIMES A WEEK

44% OF PEOPLE TAKE PART IN HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT / HERITAGE ACTIVITIES

29% FELT THAT HERITAGE & THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT HAS A POSITIVE IMPACT ON THEIR HEALTH & WELLBEING

THE TOP 5 FAVOURITE HISTORIC SITES WERE:

BENNACHIE HILLFORT

DUNNOTTAR CASTLE

TAP O'NOTH HILLFORT

EASTER AQUHORTHIES STONE CIRCLE

DUNNIDEER HILLFORT & CASTLE