

Bedern Group: Digital Preservation and the Historic Environment

What is the Bedern Group?

The Bedern Group is an alliance of the key agencies concerned with the preservation of the intellectual record of the historic environment of the UK, convened under the auspices of the Digital Preservation Coalition. The founding members comprise the Archaeology Data Service, English Heritage, the RCAHMS and RCAHMW, who first met in the Bedern Hall, York in October 2011.

What are we doing?

The Bedern Group believe that digital information is an asset that can deliver lasting value, but only if it is properly managed. The combined collections of the Bedern Group represent a rich resource for research and education, creative, cultural and commercial activity within the historic environment.

Protecting the historic environment is not a simply concern with buildings, monuments and landscapes. It requires a specific commitment to the preservation of the intellectual heritage that makes it possible for this and future generations to enjoy, understand, manage and create value from the physical traces of the human past. In previous centuries it was possible for this record to accumulate slowly through the collection of archives and publications. Such documents are stable and have a long shelf life if properly managed. This is especially important for archaeological research where investigations can be destructive. The resulting archives are effectively the only traces that remain of the primary evidence for the past, giving them a unique importance.

An Uncertain Digital Legacy

New technologies have radically changed how archaeological records are created and distributed. This brings significant economies and opportunities for research, teaching and management. Already a significant proportion of our holdings are electronic and it is clear that, as we move forward, a time is coming when our accessions will be almost exclusively digital. Whilst welcome this brings implicit pressures of technological obsolescence, as well as the need to adapt to new scales, new complexities and new expectations. Digital resources need different types of intervention to ensure their integrity and utility in the long- term. Significantly, these actions are not only different from conventional preservation but they need to come much earlier in the lifecycle of creation and use.

Digital Preservation for Management, Access and Research

It is our shared view that digital preservation is a necessary function for the protection of the historic environment, ensuring effective management, meaningful access and reliable, verifiable research.

- Digital preservation makes possible better management of the historic environment. It enables coherent policy development and informed decision-making.
- Digital preservation supports meaningful access to digital resources for the public and for the profession.
- Digital preservation is necessary to support credible research.

The Bedern group is committed to working together. The challenges we face are greater than any one agency and the opportunity for mutual support and learning are great. As well as improving our preservation services, mutually supportive policies will help ensure the clarity of approach and expectations among the many stakeholders with an interest in our work.

Therefore, the Bedern group will work together to resolve issues of policy or practice in the preservation of digital resources, and in this way ensure that the access we provide to digital data will deliver a lasting impact.

About this document:		
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Draft 3	06/08/2012	Comments received
Draft 4	08/08/2012	Commented copies compiled – final copy for meeting