



IHBC RESEARCH NOTES

Market Intelligence: Local Authority Conservation Specialists Jobs Market 2020

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Executive Summary

- The Institute's data set now covers about 1,980 posts continuously over 23 years since 1998.
- The year of 2020 was notable in two particular respects: the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic that saw no posts advertised during the month of April; and a high proportion of fixed-term posts related to High Street Action Zone (HAZ) projects. This had a particular influence on the assessment of the overall range and type of vacancies in 2020.
- Recruitment is now consistently well below than in the first decade of the century. Although the overall number of posts advertised in England rose by 15% compared with 2019 (but down 22% from 2018) when HAZ posts are factored in the total of permanent vacancies has fallen to levels not seen since the Recession 2009-2013.
- One third of all recruitments to HAZ posts came in October and November.
- The number of posts re-advertised within six months in England remained low (at three).
- The average median salary advertised for advertised posts in 2020 was £34,487 a rise of 2.9% on 2019, the approximate average increase in each of the last three years. Average full-time earnings in the UK in 2020 were £31,461.
- The number of local planning authorities identifying IHBC membership as essential or desirable for applicants and as a benchmark for professional status and competence, has noticeably fallen again to 55% (having reached 71% in 2016).

- Only 3% of local planning authorities continue to specify membership of the Royal Town Planning Institute alone as a job requirement rising to 23% when membership of any or all other allied professional institutions such as RIBA and RICS are included.
- Only one post in 2020 specifically requested membership of CIfA as a potential qualifying requirement.
- It was noticeable that for project related jobs, Prince 2 had become a more frequent requirement than in the past.
- Development management advice, appeals and enforcement continued to dominate prioritised job functions and a low level of diversification of workload functions has continued to be evident.
- With the proportion of fixed-term posts being significant in most English Branch areas (in East Midlands accounting for four of the five posts advertised) caution should be exercised and not too many conclusions could be reached on regional variations in salaries.
- Only three posts were advertised in the North (covering Cleveland, Cumbria, Durham, Northumberland and Tyne & Wear) and only four in the South (Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Hampshire, the Isle of White, and Oxfordshire). None of these were HAZ posts.
- Recruitment for posts in North Branch continued to be low (four in 2019) while the drop in South Branch from 2019 was marked down from eighteen in 2019).

NB: although the IHBC is active across the United Kingdom the analysis in this Research Note relates solely to information gleaned about England's Local Authorities. (see paragraph 1.4)

1. Background

1.1 This annual review aims to compliment the information gathered in the regular series of Local Authority Conservation Provision Studies undertaken since 2006 by IHBC.

1.2 The Institute's data set concerning advertised local authority conservation posts has been compiled since 1998. This now comprises data on about 1980 posts going back 23 years. [\[1\]](#)

1.3 The current Note summarises the job vacancies in the calendar year 2020 to assist the Institute to assemble a picture about the trends in the local government jobs market in some detail including workload requirements, qualifications, levels of remuneration etc., specific fixed-term nationally supported project posts; together with regional variations and other long-term trends.

1.4 The Institute monitors vacancies on a weekly basis and although this covers Scotland and Wales (but not Northern Ireland), the statistics in this Note relate to England only unless otherwise stated. This is because the

total of vacancies annually for the other two Home Countries are statistically insignificant and insufficient in number to separately delineate the meaningful statistical trends defined for England.

1.5 Since 2015 the IHBC has attempted to capture data were initial attempts to recruit staff were unsuccessful within a six-month period and it became necessary for the local planning authority to re-advertise the post. In practice most re-advertisements took place within three months or less.

2. Size of the market

2.1 Posts advertised in England grew steadily in the late 1990s and in the early 2000s exceeded 120 per year with a peak of 158 per year in 2003-4. Thereafter there was a year-on-year fall until at the depth of the Recession there were only 26 per year for two years in succession (2011 and 2012).

2.2 Subsequently, advertised vacancies only returned to 1990s levels in one year (2015-16) and since 2014-15 has averaged about a half to two-thirds of the numbers advertised in the late 1990s and this has also been significantly distorted by two further factors: [a] a cessation of all job advertising in April 2020 as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic; and [b] twenty-seven fixed-term High Street Action Zone [HAZ] posts comprising nearly 40% of all the vacancies resulting in the remainder (including some other fixed-term posts) being among the lowest numbers of permanent positions in 2020 seen since the recession of 2009-2013.

2.3 It is now evident that the local authority jobs market has not, and may not in future return to its historic levels and vacancies (with the exception of 2015-16) and have, broadly speaking, flatlined at a notably lower level that may reflect the well-publicised general loss of professional capacity after 2006, the shrinkage in local authority employment structures, the merger of councils and associated restructures and sharing of services. This may be further affected by the post-pandemic economy and its impact on local authority finance and resources.

2.4 In 2020 only three posts in England were re-advertised within a six-month period (two within 3 months, one within 6) and so it is not possible to draw any conclusions about the ease or difficulty of recruiting suitably qualified and experienced heritage professionals – and although this may be slightly less of a problem than in recent years it may also be reflective of fewer vacancies overall. No temporary HAZ posts needed to be re-advertised during the year.

3. General salary levels

3.1 Salaries are almost invariably expressed as a range. [2] Employers usually expect successful candidates to be appointed at the bottom of the quoted scale and progress upward on the basis of qualifications and experience. [3]

3.2 None of the vacancies in 2020 appeared to define salary milestones related to career progression with specific targets to be met. Examples in past years had included the requirement to gain an additional post-graduate qualification and/or professional institutional recognition - such as full membership of the Institute.

3.3 The average starting salary in England in 2020-21 was £32,299 with the average finishing salary £36,674 giving a median salary level of £34,487 an increase of 2.9% over 2019-20. [4] Average earnings in the UK in 2020-21 were £31,461. [5]

3.4 The caveats regarding potential distortions in national salary averages are:

- a) "career grade" posts with untypically low starting salaries usually recruiting newly graduated staff, or unusually high-end salaries (typically senior management positions) mainly within London councils and;
- b) regional variations where higher salaries have been paid in London and the South-East throughout the period of this data set.

3.5 The numbers of posts advertised annually also has a bearing on regional variations. Higher numbers of posts in any one year tend to decrease regional anomalies overall, but in 2020 as noted above, this variation in recruitment has been distorted by the pandemic and the proliferation of HAZ posts and some circumspection about regional variations is therefore necessary. Further comment about regional salary variations is made in Section 7 below.

4. Balance of permanent posts to temporary & part time posts

4.1 Twenty or more years ago the vast majority of advertised vacancies in local planning authorities were permanent and full time. Fixed-term posts were usually related to grant-aid schemes, often part funded by government centrally [6], or by the former English Heritage [7], or by the former Heritage Lottery Fund [8], or were short-term posts [9] required to cover for example, maternity leave [10] (some of these posts also being part-time).

Permanent	24	34.79%	<i>40</i>	<i>67.79%</i>
Fixed term only	36	52.17%	<i>13</i>	<i>22.03%</i>
Fixed term and part time	3	4.34%	<i>3</i>	<i>5.08%</i>

Part time only	6	8.69%	3	5.08%
TOTAL	69	100%	59	100%

4.2 In 2020 the number of fixed term posts increased substantially, mainly attributable to HAZ Officer recruitment, accounting for 27 of the 36 posts advertised (i.e. almost 40% of all vacancies). Of the remainder four were to cover for maternity leave but the remainder covered core functions generally lasting no more than two years.

4.3 No clear reason could be discerned for local authorities to specifying part-time working and the posts are widely geographically distributed and no job shares were advertised in 2020 although one part time post was to be shared between two rural district authorities. There is little evidence in job descriptions to suggest that local authorities are unable or unwilling to fund full-time posts but shared services between two or more authorities or the merger of two or more authorities are becoming more common and this aspect is kept under annual review.

5. Qualifications and expertise

5.1 The stated educational requirements for posts varied significantly in 2020 as set out in Table 2. These posts usually, but did not always, refer to full membership of the IHBC (or that applicants should be explicitly working towards full membership) but did not necessarily make explicit if membership was essential or merely desirable.

	2020		2019	
Degree	19	27.53%	7	11.86%
Degree + Post Graduate Qualification	6	8.69%	-	-
Degree + Post Graduate Qualification + IHBC	3	4.34%	6	10.17%
Degree + Post Graduate Qualification + RTPI	-	- - -	1	1.69%
Degree + IHBC as the principal standard	26	37.68%	29	49.15%
Degree + RTPI membership only	3	4.34%	4	6.79%
Qualification	2	2.89%	2	3.38%
Qualification + IHBC	3	4.34%	4	6.78%
Post Graduate Qualification + IHBC	1	1.45%	3	5.08%
Post Graduate Qualification	-	- - -	1	1.69%
Other: A-Level, HNC6-7 etc. only	6	8.69%	2	3.38%
	69	100%	59	100%

5.2 In 2020 it was notable that educational requirement seemed to be more simplified or streamlined than in previous years with many recruiters only requiring education to a degree standard (i.e. without specifying the subject) and a further decline in a requirement for this to be accompanied by IHBC membership.

5.3 Also noticeable was a rise in the number of posts requiring qualification in PRINCE2 [\[11\]](#) required for effective project management for eleven posts, all of fixed term duration and 6 of which were for HAZ projects.

5.4 In addition to the requirements shown above, many local government recruiters specified the requirement of education to degree standard in any one of a range of disciplines (e.g. Building Conservation, Planning, Architecture, Urban Design or Surveying); but decreasingly advertised posts did not state the need for a specific qualification in a heritage related subject but specification of IHBC membership may be considered a sufficient proxy.

5.5 In 2016 the Institute was able to draw satisfaction from an expectation that 71% of applicants would be expected to be full members of IHBC (or uncommonly, working towards full membership). This suggested strong brand recognition for the Institute related to a recognised set of competences and professional status. In 2017 and 2018 this fell back to a disappointing 58% and although the percentage had risen in 2019 to 69% it disappointingly fell again in 2020 to barely half (55%).

5.6 A small number of recruiters to conservation posts (usually in planning departments) continue to specify membership of the Royal Town Planning Institute alone [3%] but this rises to 23% when membership of any or all other allied institutions inc. in particular RIBA and RICS. Only one post in 2020 specifically requested membership of CIfA as a qualifying requirement.

5.7 In recent years the proportion of posts specifying the need for a post-graduate qualification has fallen back and without necessarily the identifying this as being in building conservation and not necessarily in association with IHBC membership. While a post-graduate qualification can reflect validation of a specialism, in an increasing fluid job market and given the nature of changing career paths, it is not clear if this indicates added value to employers.

6. Roles & responsibilities

6.1 Evaluation of the workload priorities as set out in job descriptions always need to be approached with caution. The allocation of percentages of time to individual tasks is almost never indicated nor are these

priorities necessarily adhered to in practice once the post holder is appointed.

6.2 The priorities set out in the job advertisement do not always tally with those in the formal job specification – which is inevitably more wide ranging [\[12\]](#) and may express overall long-term management objectives for the service rather than just immediate short-term priorities. It is not possible to capture all the functions of job specifications but priorities and some trends can be discerned.

6.3 The recruitments process is sometimes the opportunity to update a job description to permit specific priorities to be refocused. However, in practice it is inevitable that short-term, time-limited, high priority workload such as development management advice usually takes priority over large-scale, long-term workload such as the heritage-at-risk issues, new conservation area designation and character appraisals or compliance and enforcement unless these are the clear and principal focus of the post.

6.4 It is increasingly evident from job descriptions that local authorities are generally requiring their conservation specialist appointees to prioritise a distinctly limited range of functions and certainly fewer than a decade ago. This contraction of roles does not necessarily represent good practice or what the Institute considers should constitute a well-balanced service essential for the proper exercise of statutory functions and/or the effective and appropriate management of the local historic environment. [\[13\]](#)

6.5 In deconstructing the requirements of permanent posts, development management advice or direct DM casework (and associated appeals and enforcement) continued in 2020 to account for the highest workload priority with 60% of job descriptions (up from 2019) identifying this as the key priority.

6.6 This continues to suggest, taken with other significant functions referred to below, that the broadening and rebalancing of workload essential for more proactive than reactive services is not being borne out by the objectives local authorities see for their heritage service. For example, less than 5% of jobs identify advice to owners, occupiers and the general public as any priority.

6.7 Only a low percentage of conservation areas have any form of appraisal and/or management plan [\[14\]](#) and an even fewer number have documents that meet national current best practice standards. [\[15\]](#) Conservation area appraisal and review is the second most frequently identified workload priority (38% of posts) but under 10% made this the leading workload priority, noting that this many be related to the function being large-scale and long-term (in contrast to most development

management cases) requiring the commitment of a consistent and sustained level of resources.

6.8 Although Historic England has encouraged prioritisation of heritage-at-risk (particularly since 2017) action to address the matter has not been widely reflected in job descriptions since. In 2020 only 21% of job descriptions identified this as a workload element (similar to 2019) with no council placing it any higher than a tertiary priority. As with conservation area appraisal and reviews, heritage at risk requires consistent and sustained level of resource commitment and as such is unlikely to address the problem properly unless affording it a high priority over an extended period.

6.9 The only other notable (secondary or tertiary) workload priorities identified in 2020 job descriptions were advice on policy formation (19%); project-based initiatives (17%) and local listing (14%) and it will be interesting to see if this last item is accorded greater priority if greater protection is afforded to non-designated heritage assets consequent to a declaration of intent by the Secretary of State at the end of 2019.

6.10 As noted in the past this summary of the workload of local authority conservation specialists does not necessarily imply that important activities are not already being done or that a wide range of other tasks are never undertaken (i.e. those generally regarded as necessary for a balanced conservation service) but usually reflects the level of a council's commitment to heritage management in relation to the quantum of its heritage assets. [\[16\]](#)

6.11 Full job descriptions accompanying vacancies often include multifarious miscellaneous heritage management tasks required of the new post-holder. These can encompass offering technical and policy advice to owners and occupiers, providing heritage input into local plans, identifying buildings for listing [\[17\]](#) and local listing, preparing Article 4 Directions and so on, but they may not necessarily represent the actual priorities as seen by the authority's professional management team or elected councillors.

6.12 During the latter part of 2019 a ministerial announcement was made that more funding would be made available to offer more protection to undesignated heritage assets [\[18\]](#) without any legislative provision to do so. During 2020 the number of permanent posts identifying local listing as workload was 14% but never higher than a tertiary priority.

7. Heritage Action Zones

7.1 As noted in paragraph 4.2 above, almost 40% of all the posts advertised in 2020 were fixed term vacancies attributable to HAZ Officer recruitment with 21 of the 27 being advertised after the one-month break

coinciding with the first Covid-19 lockdown and during a period of significant economic damage to the High Street.

7.2 The duration of appointment varied from 18 months in one instance to 48 months [19] with most being at 36 months (7); 42 months (9) and 48 months (7).

7.3 Although salary ranges were stated, it is thought upward progression from the starting salary would not proceed to far in the relatively short span of the appointments. There was a reasonable consistency to average starting salaries at £32,111 finishing at £36,763 (a range of £4,651) but with two notable departures. The starting salary for the East Suffolk DC HAZ Officer [East Anglia] was £4,200 less than generally on offer for 90% of the HAZ positions, while the Sandwell MBC HAZ Officer [West Midlands] was £9,700 more than the general starting salary. Both were 36-month appointments.

7.4 The regional distribution of the HAZ posts is shown in Table 3.

Region	HAZ Officers	Total posts in Branch
East Anglia	5	12
East Midlands	4	5
London	1	7
North	-	3
North West	3	7
South	-	4
South East	2	7
South West	5	9
West Midlands	3	8
Yorkshire	4	7
Total (& Average)	27	69

7.5 Particularly noticeable is that 4 out of the five posts in 2020 in the East Midlands were HAZ appointments and although there were none in North or South Branches and only one in London elsewhere, they were significant as for example in the South West and Yorkshire.

7.6 Nearly twice as many HAZ posts were advertised in the second half of the year as in the first (the April recruitment freeze notwithstanding) and one-third of all HAZ recruitments taking place in October and November.

8. Regional variations

8.1 Given the preponderance of fixed-term HAZ posts in several Branches and the low number of permanent posts overall (42) the question of regional salary variations it is considered that an any evaluation of regional salary trends requires extreme caution in comparison to past years as the turnover of permanent posts in all Branches was low.

8.2 The overall figures for 2020 are set out in Table 4, but as noted above under the particular and very unusual circumstances when the total job vacancies within any one IHBC Branch area are small this data is not necessarily a less reliable guide. The median salary overall in England for 2020 is £34,487 and that for each Branch is set out below and can also be compared to the median salary for HAZ posts of £34,437.

Region	Sample	Median (£)	Variation (%)
East Anglia	12	32,275	- 6.41%
East Midlands	5	35,187	+ 2.03%
London	7	39,943	+ 15.82%
North	3	30,956	+ 10.24%
North West	7	33,398	- 3.15%
South	4	33,343	- 3.15%
South East	7	36,060	+ 5.56%
South West	9	33,409	- 3.12%
West Midlands	8	30,540	- 11.44%
Yorkshire	7	34,448	- 0.11%
Total (& Average)	69	(34.487)	

Note: Paragraph 7.3 caution on some small sample sizes

8.3 Notwithstanding the caveats above, as might be expected median salary scales in London (where only one HAZ post was advertised) have generally been consistently higher than in other regions, reflecting higher living and travelling costs. Those figures (and to a lesser extent those in the South East have historically and consistently influenced the national averages since data was first collected in 1998.

9. Concluding Note

9.1 The jobs market for local authority conservation specialists contracted in 2020 and the anticipated gradual rebuilding of capacity from the low point of 2011-12 onward has not clearly materialised.

9.2 The pressure on local government finances in 2020 exacerbated by the pandemic and the short term emergence of Heritage Action Zone posts continued to be reflected the resourcing and standards of outward facing operation of local authority heritage services and this will no doubt continue to be felt in the short term.

9.2 The Institute intends to web-publish a further market intelligence report on the local authority conservation specialist jobs market 2021 in early 2022.

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Endnotes

1. Between 1998 and c.2009, information concerning local authority vacancies were drawn principally from the weekly pages of *Planning* magazine. Thereafter the decline in planning related posts, the switch to a fortnightly publication of *Planning* coupled with the development of the IHBC's web-based jobs pages saw the advertising of conservation posts move almost exclusively from the former to the latter. Although posts may occasionally be advertised elsewhere, the data in this Note drawn from these two sources is thought to be near definitive.
2. Occasionally only a fixed starting or finishing salary is stated. Ranges are usually also given even where appointments are short-life or fixed term.
3. In the past salary progression was also on the basis of an annual increment within the overall scales but the individual remunerative steps within the quoted range is usually short.
4. To compensate for the effect of unusually low or unusually high ends of salary ranges a comparative analysis is also made by subtracting the three highest and three lowest starting and finishing salaries during the year from the overall sample. This nevertheless generates very similar figures to the overall averages above i.e. generates a typical "smoothed" starting salary in 2019 of £31,234, a finishing salary £35,801, and a median of £33,522.
5. Figure from the High Pay Centre an independent, non-partisan think tank focused on the causes and consequences of economic inequality, with a particular interest in top pay.
6. For a time a number of temporary or fixed-term jobs were also funded by the Planning Delivery Grant - particularly to meet the requirements of Best Value Performance Indicator 219 on conservation area appraisals. This national performance indicator was trialled in 2004-5 and introduced in 2006 but abandoned by central government in 2010. Some authorities undertook a programme of appraisals in anticipation of a future national

requirement for service uplift, while others simply used the indicator as a pretext to justify additional resources for conservation services. The problems with the indicator were various, not least not actually being an indicator [i.e. not encouraging service improvement]. Many authorities also had such a backlog of appraisals to complete do they could not justify the long-term resource commitment.

7. Such as fixed -term Buildings at Risk Officers
8. Now the National Lottery Heritage Fund [NLHF]
9. Projects ranging from 12 to 54 months duration
10. Usually 12 months (although sometimes states as 9 months)
11. PRINCE2 is a process-based method for effective project management demonstrating the fundamental skills needed to become a successful project manager, standing for **PR**ojects **IN** Controlled **E**nvironments
12. Usually with a catch-all requirement to encompass "such other duties as may be required from time to time" or similar phraseology
13. See for example IHBC Guidance Note: Annual Conservation Management Statements – Best Practice GN2014/2 accessible at: https://ihbconline.co.uk/toolbox/guidance_notes/consManag.html
14. Estimated to be about 25%
15. Estimated to be about 10%
16. See IHBC Guidance Note GN2014/3 Oct 2014 Planning Authority duties in the provision of appropriate specialist advice in England, accessible a https://ihbconline.co.uk/toolbox/guidance_notes/index.html
17. It would appear that some local authorities are unaware of the procedures under which Historic England will now respond to requests to list buildings when this is not a specific urgent threat.
18. Via "local communities" and implying a new tier of statutory protection
19. Corresponding in area to the relevant government/RTPI etc. regions