



IHBC RESEARCH NOTES

Market Intelligence

Local Authority Conservation Specialists Jobs Market 2017

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Executive Summary

- The Institute's data set now covers about 1787 posts over the 20 years since 1998.
- In 2017 there was a further slight contraction in the number of conservation posts advertised in England from a recent high in 2015 – there having previously been a growth in capacity from a very low level prior to 2012. It is not clear if the recent decline is a trend or another temporary contraction of the public sector.
- The average median salary offered for advertised posts in 2017 was £31,624 a rise of 2.4% on 2016.
- It was noted with regret that during 2017 fewer local planning authorities considered IHBC membership as essential or desirable for applicants thus ending a recent rising trend. This is notwithstanding the strength of IHBC membership as a benchmark for professional status and competence. Authorities appear to be finding it more difficult to recruit suitably qualified and experienced candidates (as seen in the number of re-advertisements) and this may also be reflected in depressed starting salary levels.
- Development management advice, appeals and enforcement continue to dominate job functions but with a slightly greater diversification of workload.
- The 50th anniversary of the first designations of conservation areas did not appear to stimulate greater priority for conservation area reviews, appraisals and management plans.
- Regional variations in salaries in 2017 showed less deviation from the long-term historical differentials noted since 1998.

- Only four of the IHBC's ten English Branches had more than seven advertised vacancies, part of a general contraction of recruitment.
- Notably higher salaries continued to be paid in London, the South and the South East but salary levels for new posts were particularly depressed in the West Midlands and fell back in East Midlands while most other areas returned to being close to the national average, having fluctuated somewhat unpredictably over the last three to four years.
- More permanent full time posts (rather than part time and/or temporary posts) were advertised in the last third of 2017 but with correspondingly lower starting salaries.

1. Background

1.1 This annual review aims to complement the information gathered in the regular series of Local Authority Conservation Provision Studies undertaken since 2006 by IHBC with support from Historic England. [\[1\]](#)

1.2 The Institute's data set concerning advertised local authority conservation posts has been compiled since 1998. This now comprises data on over 1787 posts going back 20 years. [\[2\]](#)

1.3 The current Note summarises the job vacancies in the calendar year 2017 enabling the Institute to compile a picture about the trends in the market in some detail including job requirements, qualifications, levels of remuneration etc., together with regional variations and other long-term trends.

1.4 The Institute monitors vacancies on a weekly basis and although this covers England, Scotland and Wales (but not Northern Ireland), the statistics in this Note relate to England only, unless otherwise stated, as the annual number of vacancies advertised outside England is too small to allow for comparable analysis.

1.5 Over the past two years the IHBC has captured data on the extent to which local planning authorities were unable to fill vacancies and needed to re-advertise posts that could not be filled within a six month period - although in practice most re-advertisements took place within three months.

2. Size of the market

2.1 Posts advertised in England grew steadily in the late 1990s to a peak of 158 per year in 2003-4 before falling again year on year until the start of the Recession. By 2008-9 the annual level had fallen back to its 1999-2000 level (93 vacancies) but thereafter the decline was precipitous with only 26 vacancies advertised for all English local planning authorities in both 2010-11 and 2011-12.

2.2 Although there were encouraging signs by 2015 that the local authority jobs market had recovered quite strongly (growing by 34% over 2014) the market continued to slip back in 2017, declining by 11% from 2016.

2.3 A squeeze on Council spending on front line services in 2017 appears to be continuing despite the recent anticipation of an easing of expenditure by central government in 2018, but this financial pressure may also have related to the economic uncertainties of Brexit and its potential impact on the public finances in the medium term.

2.4 It was clear in 2017 that some authorities were struggling to recruit conservation specialists at the first attempt although the numbers of instances was lower than in 2016. Nevertheless, seven posts in England were re-advertised within three-months and a further two within six months.

2.5 It was noted in one case that a post with an identical job specification and salary was re-advertised after eight months but it is not clear if this had remained vacant throughout or the new post holder had left again shortly after being recruited.

3. General salary levels

3.1 Salaries are almost invariably expressed as a range. [\[3\]](#) Employers usually expect successful appointees to commence at the bottom of the quoted scale and progress upward on the basis of qualifications and experience. [\[4\]](#)

3.2 Only a very small number of posts set salary milestones in relation to career progression - such as gaining an additional post-graduate qualification or professional institutional recognition such as full membership of IHBC.

3.3 The average starting salary in England in 2017-18 was £29,287 with the average finishing salary £33,961. This resulted in a median salary of £31,624 an increase of 2.4%.

3.4 It should be noted that National averages might potentially be distorted in two ways:

- (a) by a small number of posts with unusually low starting salaries (typically graduate posts); or unusually high (typically senior management positions – mainly in London authorities); and
- (b) by regional variations (typically higher salaries paid in London and the South-East);

but as the numbers of posts increases the influence of such anomalies correspondingly decreases. The reasonable level of advertised posts in most regions in 2017 helped maintain the robustness of the data but if overall numbers of posts continues to decline this will become more difficult in future years. [\[5\]](#) Further comment about regional salary variations is made in Section 7 below.

3.5 It was notable that the general advertised salary levels were lower in the last third of 2017 corresponding with a higher proportion of permanent full-time (versus part time and/or fixed term) posts.

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

4.1 In 1998 the vast majority of vacancies in local planning authorities were permanent and full time. Where fixed term posts were advertised these were usually related to, for example, fixed-life grant-aid schemes (often part funded by government centrally, English Heritage [6] or the Heritage Lottery) or short-term posts as for example maternity cover [7] (some of these also being part-time).

4.2 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.[8]

	2017	2017 %	2016	2016 %
Permanent	36	56.25%	43	59.7%
Fixed term only	15	23.44%	13	18.0%
Fixed term and part time	3	4.69%	11	15.3%
Part time only	10	15.62%	5	7.0%
TOTAL	64	100%	72	100%

4.3 Notwithstanding the evidence of the latter part of 2017 there appears to be a growing trend for part-time posts but the reason for this remains unclear. It may relate to changes of the work-life balance of staff; local authorities unable or unwilling to fund full-time posts (or where a full time specialist is considered unnecessary; or shared services between two or more merged authorities; but this factor will be kept under review in 2018.

4.4 Of the 15 fixed term posts advertised in 2017, only two were related to Townscape Heritage Initiatives or other HLF supported projects compared to eight in 2016 [9] and four were for maternity cover (with several other posts both fixed term and part time for the same reason).

4.5 Two posts were created for Historic England's Heritage Action Zone initiative launched in March 2017; while two others were for Heritage at Risk initiatives of 24 months and 36 months duration respectively. It will be interesting to see if this trend continues in 2018.

Qualifications and expertise

5.1 The stated educational requirements for posts varied significantly in 2017 as set out in Table 2.

Table 2. Educational Requirements (where IHBC membership was also a consideration (2016 in italics))				
	2017		2016	
Degree	17	26.56%	<i>16</i>	<i>22.2%</i>
Degree + Post Graduate Qualification	4	6.25%	<i>1</i>	<i>1.3%</i>
Degree + Post Graduate Qualification + IHBC	5	7.81%	<i>14</i>	<i>19.5%</i>
Degree + IHBC as the principal standard	26	40.62%	<i>33</i>	<i>44.8%</i>
Degree + RTPI membership only	2	3.12%	-	-
Qualification	2	3.12%	<i>1</i>	<i>1.3%</i>
Qualification + IHBC	4	6.25%	-	<i>1.3%</i>
Post Graduate Qualification + IHBC	1	1.56%	<i>2</i>	<i>2.6%</i>
Diploma standard + IHBC	-	-	<i>2</i>	<i>2.6%</i>
Other: A-Level, B.Tec., NVQ etc. only	3	4.68%	<i>3</i>	<i>4.2%</i>
	64	100%	72	100%

5.2 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. Planning, Architecture, Urban Design, Conservation); but as in past years, almost half the advertised posts did not state the need for qualification in a heritage related subject. Some of these job descriptions solely stated that education to degree standard was required while the majority of the remainder specified IHBC membership instead.

5.3 In 2016 the Institute took some satisfaction from the fact that 71% of posts expected suitable applicants to be a full member of IHBC (or less commonly to be working towards full membership). This was up from 65% in 2015 and just under 40% in 2014 and suggested strong brand recognition for IHBC and the significance of a recognised set of competences and professional status. The corresponding figure for 2017 however fell to 56% a significant reduction and coupled with the problem of recruitment suggests that local authorities may be lowering the standard required of candidates in order to fill vacancies.

5.4 In recent years the proportion of posts specifying the need for a post-graduate qualification in conservation has remained generally static but more recruiters in 2017 specified this as a requirement but without the need for the associated full membership of IHBC. These are matters of some concern where professional heritage management standards are to be maintained.

5.5 Post-graduate qualification often reflects the validation of a specialism in an increasingly fluid job market and the nature of changing career paths but as was noted last year either this does not seem to indicate

added value to employers, or is being dispensed with, to avoid a barrier to recruitment.

6. Roles & responsibilities

6.1 Caution is always needed in evaluating the workload priorities set out in job descriptions as the allocation of time to individual tasks is rarely stated, nor are these priorities necessarily adhered to in practice. Furthermore 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 and may express overall long-term management objectives rather than short-term priorities. When post-holders change an opportunity is sometimes taken to update the job description to enable specific priorities to be refocused.

6.2 In practice it is inevitable that short-term, time-limited, high priority workload such as development management advice will usually take priority over large-scale, long-term workload such as the heritage-at-risk issues or enforcement.

6.3 During 2017 it was observed that newly appointed local authority conservation specialists are being asked to perform a more limited range of functions than had been seen in the last decade (and earlier) and this no longer represents what the Institute would necessarily consider should constitute a well- balanced workload essential for the proper exercise of statutory functions and/or the effective management of the local historic environment.

6.4 Development management (DM) advice or direct DM casework continued to be given the highest workload priority with (with 30% of job descriptions identifying this as the key priority but local authorities appear to be recognising that other tasks are also of significance and as noted last year there appears to be something of a rebalancing taking place leading to more broad based heritage services and the possibility of more proactive than reactive output. In particular, the slow emergence of Historic England's Heritage Action Zone initiative was detected as was a greater concern regarding Heritage at Risk (although the posts associated with these roles were all of a fixed duration).

6.5 The year marked the 50th anniversary of the 1967 Civic Amenities Act and the designation of the first conservation areas. Only a low percentage have any form of appraisal and/or management plan [\[10\]](#) and even fewer such documents conform to current best practice standards [\[11\]](#)

6.6 Despite this deficiency, only 7.8% of vacancies in 2017 identified conservation area designation, review or appraisal as the principal priority, and only 32% of posts identifies this work as any sort of priority notwithstanding, or perhaps because, what is usually large, scale, long-term workload requires a consistent level of resource commitment.

6.7 Last year it was noted that Historic England had placed increased emphasis on heritage-at-risk initiatives (including the training and use of voluntary groups to undertake surveys). It was noted however that this was not widely reflected in job descriptions with only 14% of job specifications (about the same as the previous two years) identifying this as a notable workload element.

6.8 The outline evaluation above does not necessarily imply that these specific activities are not already being undertaken nor that the other wide-ranging tasks that are generally noted to constitute a balanced conservation service are not needed [12] - such as offering technical and policy advice, local listing, heritage strategies or regeneration initiatives; it is just that their infrequency in job descriptions may not represent the priorities for the new post-holder as seen by of the authority's professional management team or elected councillors.

7. Regional variations

7.1 The IHBC's data sets make it possible evaluate regional variations in salaries for local authority conservation specialists in England and these figures for 2017 are set out in Table 3.

7.2 In seven of the English regions [13] in 2017 the number of advertised vacancies ranged from a low of three in Yorkshire to a high of twelve in East Anglia, a similar pattern to 2016 with the surprise exception of the South East where just two vacancies occurred.

Where the numbers were low as shown in Table 3, the figures generated by the small sample sizes obviously need to be treated with caution.

Table 3. Regional Variations in Median Salaries 2017			
Region	Sample	Median (£)	Variation (%)
East Anglia	12	31,477	- 0.46%
East Midlands	8	30,071	- 4.91%
London	6	36,157	+14.33%
North	5	30,279	- 4.25%
North West	4	31,570	- 0.17%
South	9	34,454	+8.94%
South East	2	33,913	+7.23%
South West	7	30,540	- 3.42%
West Midlands	6	26,459	- 16.33%
Yorkshire	3	31,175	- 1.41%
Total	64	(31,624)	

7.3 As might be expected median salary scales in London have generally always been consistently higher than in other regions, reflecting higher living and travelling costs. These have consistently influenced the national averages since data was first collected in 1998.

7.4 Pay in the South and South East over the long-term has also been consistently somewhat higher than the national average (possibly influenced by the proximity to London and high numbers of designated heritage assets) with 2017 salary levels in the South and South East returning to the long-term trend of higher than average after recent fluctuations not always attributable to the sample sizes.

7.5 Salaries in the South West and West Midlands have been consistently lower than the England average over a long period. Lower than average figures were noted in 2017 for the East Midlands and the North has also fallen below the national average.

7.6 As already noted the sample sizes can be too small to be meaningful but in the West Midland Branch the suppressed level of salaries for new posts follows a long-term trend for which no clear explanation can be offered.

8. Concluding Note

8.1 The local authority conservation specialist jobs market in 2017 has once again contracted after a consistent rebuilding of capacity from 2012 onward and it remains to be seen if this continues to be a temporary setback or a long-term contraction of the public sector.

8.2 The Institute will web-publish a further market intelligence report on the local authority conservation specialist jobs market 2018 in January 2019.

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Endnotes

1. Prior to April 1st 2015 this support came from English Heritage
2. 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.
3. Although occasionally only a fixed starting or finishing salary is stated. Ranges are usually given even where appointments are short-life or fixed term.

4. In the past salary progression was also on the basis of an annual increment within the overall scales but the steps within the quoted range is usually short.

5. 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 2017 of £29,201; a finishing salary £33,954; and a median of £31,577.

6. Such as fixed term Buildings at Risk Officers

7. Some of the posts covered being part-time in the first place.

8. 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 it not actually being an indicator [as it did not encourage service improvement]. Many authorities also had such a backlog of appraisals to complete that they could not justify the long-term resource commitment.

9. Includes Sunderland Pier Project, and ranges from 24 to 60 months duration.

10. Estimated to be about 25%

11. Estimated to be in the order of 10%

12. See IHBC Guidance Note: Annual Conservation Management Statements – Best Practice GN2014/2 Sept 2014 Accessible at: http://ihbconline.co.uk/toolbox/guidance_notes/consManag.html

13. Corresponding in area to the relevant IHBC Branch