Rother Local Plan 2020-2040 (Regulation 18)

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Comment

Rother Local Plan 2020-2040 (Regulation 18)

Proposed Policy HER1: Heritage Management

Representation ID: 25402

Received: 16/07/2024

Respondent: Bexhill Museum

Representation Summary:
We argue that effective delivery of Policy HER1: Heritage Management, in particular objective (vii) is dependent on active support for storage and study of 'above and below-ground archaeology' and that this needs a policy paper of its own to meet this objective. We suggest reviving the Rother Museum Services policy document, last published nearly 20 years ago, modernising its brief and expanding its stakeholder roster. This will establish a clear policy-led framework for activities that drive the understanding of the district's heritage and the establishment of supported spaces for storage, display and study of historical records and artefacts. This is vital for contextualising research and public engagement with Rother's unique heritage - before and after '1066 and All That'.

Full text:
Described as 'Heritage Assets' in the National Planning Policy Framework, many thousands of statutorily designated and non-designated buildings and archaeological assets contribute positively to the physical, historic and socio-cultural character of Rother district. As the draft local plan correctly notes, they all warrant retention and interpretation, and point seven of the seven-point draft Policy HER1: Heritage Management is very clear on its objective to "Ensure appropriate archaeological research and investigation of both above and below-ground archaeology, and retention where required".

What is less clear is how Rother will "ensure" this outcome. The text of HER1vi is unchanged

from the 2014 Local Plan Core Strategy, and in the ten years since the substantial house & road building developments across the District have indeed delivered archaeological research and investigation of national, even international significance. But during that ten years there has been little in the way of policy detail or active support for the practice beyond 'ensuring' the minimum deliverables required of the developers and the archaeological teams they employ, and almost nothing in the way of active support for retention of finds "where required".

In the last ten years advances in archaeological practices such as carbon dating, non-invasive survey techniques and digital information exchange have made the retention of finds far more rewarding for archaeological researchers. What is lacking is support for physical spaces for retention, research and investigation. Neighbouring districts such as Chichester have led the way in supporting joint storage, display and study space projects that combine partners at local and national level while meeting local heritage management policy objectives. The Rother Local Plan should aspire to match this level of commitment.

Rother's museums and cultural communities are well placed to make the most of the diverse and highly documented archaeological finds coming into their care – where space permits. They are also best placed to draw the lines between the "above and below-ground archaeology" mentioned in the Rother draft. This is central to the practice of 'understanding place', Historic England's model for evaluating the historic environment. In line with this, Rother museums and cultural providers can enable "understanding how the past is encapsulated in today's landscape, explaining why it has assumed its present form and highlighting its more significant elements".

District wide policy on museums' role in heritage management and placemaking used to be enshrined in a borough-wide Museum Services Policy document, which has not been produced in nearly 20 years. We suggest reviving it, modernising its brief and expanding its stakeholder roster, and establishing a clear policy-led framework for activities that drive understanding the local and regional significance and character of Rother's history, through the establishment of supported spaces for storage, display and study of artefacts, historical records, contextualising research and public engagement in Rother's unique heritage, before and after '1066 and All That'.

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