

HistBEKE Project Summary

The University of Liverpool's HistBEKE (Historic Built Environment Knowledge Exchange) project is funded by Historic England, and has been set up to try and help everyone who works with the historic built environment to increase their knowledge and understanding of the assets that they work with. The objective of the project is to develop a research agenda and knowledge exchange framework for the historic built environment which aims to:

- enhance decision-making processes through wider access to current knowledge
- set an agenda for further knowledge enhancement to enable more effective management and decision-making
- establish a sustainable and collaborative network to maintain the framework into the future

This is a collaborative project, and the team are keen to work with as many people and organisations as they can from across the sector.

Summer 2017 Baseline Survey

A survey to gather data which would provide a baseline level of awareness of research frameworks, as well as themes and topics for discussion our Autumn 2017 workshops, was sent out to the built heritage sector in England in the summer of 2017. It was open from 18th July until 25th August and during that time 1246 people opened the survey link, with 441 fully completing the survey. This survey built on the results of research undertaken by [Pye Tait in 2014](#) as part of a review of research frameworks, which included a similar online survey that achieved 436 responses.

A report outlining the results of the HistBEKE baseline survey has been published on our website here: https://histbeke.org/project_documents/. The key findings, however, are as follows:

- The majority of those who responded to the survey are aware of research frameworks, but only just under a third have used them in their work
- Research Frameworks are most commonly used for: assessing significance, focussing research, defining project briefs or specifications, and when contributing to management or conservation plans.
- The building types that are most commonly the focus of respondents' work are also those which they felt would benefit from additional research
- Other themes and topics identified as those which would benefit from additional research included: building survey/recording/research, historic building conservation, and materials science/analysis
- There is overall agreement that a framework for the built historic environment would be of benefit to the sector, enhancing in particular areas of work such as assessing significance and preparing heritage statements

- Almost all respondents (97%) agreed that the framework should be an online resource

Autumn 2017 Workshops

The results of the survey helped to define the themes and topics for discussion at regional focus group workshops in the Autumn of 2017. Seven focus group events were held in York, Manchester, Birmingham, Newcastle, Bristol and two in London to discuss the potential of the HistBEKE framework. At these workshops, we gathered suggestions and recommendations for how it could be structured and what it may cover, including knowledge gaps identified by those working in the sector. They thus provided an opportunity to discuss how a knowledge exchange framework for the built historic environment might work in practice.

The key outcome of the workshops is that we will be recommending to Historic England that HistBEKE (if it continues to be called that) has two main elements:

1. A Knowledge Exchange – a ‘one-stop-shop’ website that anyone can access for information on building types, conservation techniques, craft skills, materials etc. This should effectively be a Google-style search engine which would provide links/signposts to resources.. This would be a wiki-style page that will potentially be open access so that anyone can update it.
2. A research agenda and strategy to fill any knowledge gaps and thus add to the knowledge exchange above. This would be managed by a network/forum/stakeholder group (all still to be confirmed) rather than an open access wiki.

Expanding on this, there were 6 key recommendations that were made by attendees at all seven workshops, which are:

- The knowledge exchange should provide a ‘one-stop-shop’ for all information on the built historic environment (recent research, current projects, guidance, publications etc)
- It should be user-friendly – easy, simple and clear
- It must be kept current / up-to-date and responsive to new research using a wiki-style web platform (with a dated record of changes)
- It should include links to MA and PhD thesis archives / repositories
- As a separate element to the knowledge exchange, a research agenda/framework should be provided for setting research questions and strategies
- The knowledge exchange should act like a gateway, providing links / signposts to information, rather than providing information itself

Further information and the full lists of suggestions can be found in the summary report available here:

<https://histbeke.files.wordpress.com/2018/03/histbeke-autumn-2017-workshops-summary-final.pdf>

Spring 2018 Survey

The baseline survey and focus group workshops provided a us with a number of recommendations for the structure of the HistBEKE framework; as well as building types to prioritise for knowledge enhancement, and many other ideas and suggestions. These will form the basis of the final recommendations that we send to Historic England. We have therefore created a survey to help us record your thoughts which can be accessed here: <https://survey.liv.ac.uk/Histbeke2018Survey>

We're keen to make sure that the suggestions that were made at the workshops, as well as those within comments in the previous survey, and anything emailed or Tweeted to us, reflect the needs of everyone in the sector. Responses to our survey, therefore, will help us to refine our recommendations to Historic England, and we hope will mean that HistBEKE is something that is useful and relevant to everyone who works in or with the built historic environment.

Please also let us know if there are any knowledge gaps that we have missed, or if you have any other suggestions for how the framework should be both developed and managed.

Next steps

The project team would be grateful for your feedback, particularly in relation to the recommendations and identified knowledge gaps. If you would like to make any comments on these, or the project in general, please send them to Stella Jackson (stella.jackson@liverpool.ac.uk), or get in touch with us via Twitter on @HistBEKE.

The results of the seven focus groups workshops, along with the those of the two surveys survey, will form the basis of the recommendations that the project team make for the development of the framework. Before these are finalised, however, the key recommendations will be made available for comment on our website, following which they will be confirmed and submitted to Historic England.

Stella Jackson
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