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## Humber HER

# Where past meets present. The journey to a hosted environment for Historic Environment Records

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**V Bowns**

Senior Historic Environment Record Officer  
Humber HER

### Background:

#### Preserving the UK’s cultural heritage

The UK’s historic sites, buildings, and landscapes are a valuable but delicate and finite resource that requires vigilant safeguarding. Historic Environment Records (HERs) play a key part in the conservation, management, and promotion of this cultural heritage.

In England, there are over 80 Historic Environment Records, run by or on behalf of local authorities, each comprising the definitive source of information on the heritage assets of that locality. These inform the planning and land management processes that ensure the protection, conservation, and preservation of our heritage for future generations. HERs also support academic research, educational programs, tourism, and public outreach initiatives by providing access to research resources that are invaluable in the study of archaeology, local history, and architecture.

The HER for the East Riding of Yorkshire County Council and Hull City Council areas is managed by Humber HER, a team of four Historic Environment specialists. The HER includes over 20,000 archaeological and historic sites dating from the prehistoric period through to the 20th century, including the Hull City Walls, Hull Citadel, historic military defences, and maritime and industrial heritage.

Since 1998, Humber’s heritage information has been recorded digitally in a data management and GIS platform from ExeGenesis, an Idox Company. This well-established and trusted system is known as HBSMR, which stands for ‘Historic Buildings, Sites and Monuments Record’, and is the market-leading solution for HERs in the UK.

### Challenge:

#### Optimising performance, support and access

While operating HBSMR on-premise, Humber HER encountered several operational issues that resulted in a two-year backlog of work:

- Performance: as a result of poor network performance, the team was experiencing long load and data retrieval times. The team was accessing ageing local IT infrastructure which was no longer fit for purpose, and the system at one stage became unusable. The team needed a reliable and high-performing solution.
- Support arrangements: lack of in-house IT support locally for resolving technical issues meant lengthy periods without access to HBSMR. Remote support was not easy due to infrastructure limitations. The team needed access to immediate help to resolve any reported issues quickly, and to maintain their levels of service delivery.



Description: Iron Age Chariot Burials from a development site in Packlington. Photo credit: Humber HER

- Access: there were limitations in accessing data and systems via the in-house/on-premise infrastructure. The team needed a system to allow them to work remotely.

It was recognised that the hosted HBSMR solution would resolve these local issues. The key challenge was to effectively migrate from the on-premise HBSMR system to a hosted environment with minimal disruption to daily business. As such, there were several factors to consider as part of the migration project. For example; how to successfully transfer large volumes of data safely from the local server to Idox's infrastructure while maintaining data integrity; how to transfer licences; how to deal with security permissions and compliance; and how to efficiently manage technical changes to client's services.

#### Solution:

##### Seamlessly transitioning to a hosted environment

A migration project was initiated in December 2023 to transition Humber HER from an on-premise HBSMR environment to a thin-client-hosted Idox environment.

The specialist heritage team at Exegesis provided a range of professional services during the migration process to support Humber's migration. This included project planning, system development, UAT to go-live, system training, ongoing technical support, and the management of application upgrades.

As a result of the successful migration project, Humber HER's hosted HBSMR went live in January 2024.

V Bowns, Senior Historic Environment Record Officer, Humber HER said "Exegesis always provides a first-class service. What differentiates Exegesis from its competitors is its unrivalled experience in developing specialised solutions for heritage. These have stood the test of time, and coupled with the ongoing professional technical support we receive from the Exegesis team, are essential for the efficient running of our HER operations today and in the future".

#### Outcomes:

##### Speedier processing and increased performance

In migrating to the hosted solution for HBSMR, Humber HER estimates it

has increased productivity by 50%, and system usability by 80-90%.

Operational efficiencies include:

- Faster support responses from Exegesis as the HBSMR application and database are instantly accessible.
- Improved performance with the application and database hosted together on high-performance, high-availability infrastructure.
- Speedier system upgrades as the latest versions of the system can be rolled out without delay – minimising downtime and disruptions.
- Increased protection and security compared to the former on-premise solution, resulting in improved resilience and disaster recovery.
- Improved workflows for data sharing and exchange such as publishing secure WMS, WFS, and web views.
- Reduced ICT costs and resources since hosting removes the need for on-premise ICT infrastructure and local ICT support.
- The system can be accessed anytime and anywhere – even out in the field.

V Bowns concludes, "There's often a degree of apprehension when migrating to a new solution. For us, it was a hugely positive experience. The hosted HBSMR solution has surpassed our expectations for managing heritage asset information. Transitioning to this new platform was not only smooth but also transformative. We experienced a seamless process with minimal disruption to our workload. With its efficiency, we're successfully clearing our backlog and now deliver services more effectively than ever before. This solution has truly revolutionised our operations, shaping our present and future endeavours".

Crispin Flower, Head of GIS Applications, Idox, comments, "As a leading provider of GIS and data management solutions for environment, conservation and countryside, we are proud to support Humber HER in its transition to a hosted HBSMR environment. By seamlessly migrating to a hosted environment, we are supporting Humber HER to enhance its operational efficiency in preserving the UK's rich and historical heritage. Our unrivalled experience in developing applications to manage the historic environment, coupled with ongoing professional technical support, ensures that Humber HER can effectively manage its operations today and in the future. We are dedicated to delivering innovative solutions that not only meet our customers' needs but also align with broader sustainability goals, making a positive impact on both local communities and the environment".



**Call us now on 0333 011 1200 or email [marketing@idoxgroup.com](mailto:marketing@idoxgroup.com) to find out more about our solutions for heritage and conservation.**

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