

**Unlocking the UK’s Sound Heritage**

**Brief for a Conservation Plan**

February 2016

## Introduction

The nation’s sound collections are under threat, both from physical degradation and as the means of playing them disappear from production. Global archival consensus is that we have approximately 15 years in which to save our sound collections by digitising them before they become unreadable and are effectively lost.

“Save Our Sounds” is the British Library’s ambitious programme to preserve the nation’s recorded sound heritage including; music, oral history, wildlife sounds, drama, dialect and urban sounds.

This brief relates to one strand of that programme which has secured HLF grant funding - “Unlocking the UK’s Sound Heritage”. The aims of the HLF project are to;

* Preserve the UK’s most at risk audio heritage by digitising 160,000 items from sound archives across the UK
* Increase access to the UK’s at risk audio heritage
* Raise awareness of the importance and value of the UK’s sound heritage
* Create ten sustainable centres of excellence in digital audio preservation around the UK

We are working with a range of partners including libraries, museums, record offices and archives across the country, grouped into ten geographical areas:

1) East of England (hub in Norwich)

2) London

3) Midlands (hub in Leicester)

4) North East of England (hub in Newcastle)

5) North West of England (hub in Manchester)

6) Northern Ireland (hub in Belfast)

7) Scotland (hub in Edinburgh)

8) South East of England (hub in Brighton)

9) South West of England (hub to be confirmed)

10) Wales (hub in Aberystwyth)

A considerable amount of work has already been done to identify the heritage assets, the significance of those assets and identify the type of recordings that are most at risk.

The British Library has recently published a national audit of sound archives - <http://www.bl.uk/projects/uk-sound-directory>. This audit gathered information on over 1.8 million items held in over 3,000 collections. While not comprehensive, the results offer the most informed picture of the state of the nation’s sound collections ever collated and we expect it to form part of the Conservation Plan. The British Library holds an additional 1.5 million sound items. The national sound audit is, in effect, a gazetteer of the sound archives in the UK. The audit is helping us and our hub partners to select the 160,000 sound items that will be included in this HLF project.

1. **The objectives for this brief**

We are looking for a consultant to research and write a Conservation Plan that will form part of our stage two HLF application. The Conservation Plan will provide valuable knowledge about the current situation and help us plan for the future. We will use it to plan for the long term preservation of the UK’s sound heritage and help us prepare the project’s Management and Maintenance Plan.

The work that needs to be done now is to:

* Understand and document current practice in caring for the physical carriers, e.g. reel to reel tapes, cassettes, discs and so on, both at the BL, the hub partners and in the wider heritage community.
* Understand and document the current practice in storing digital and digitised recordings both at the BL, the hub partners and in the wider heritage community.
* Assess the existing level of knowledge about the care for and use of recorded sound heritage among the UK heritage professionals with responsibility for audio collections.
* Assess the skills needs and research current opportunities for professional development of audio preservation engineers.
* Assess what constitute best practice in terms of in caring for and using sound heritage, as understood by the international professional audio archival community.
1. **Method**

We expect the consultant to begin by working with existing BL staff to review existing research and agree the best way to create the Conservation Plan. We then anticipate the consultant undertaking the following activities;

* Gathering information from the wider heritage profession about existing practice and knowledge about historic sound recordings. This is likely to take the form of conversations with various stakeholders, e.g. curators at the British Library, the hub partners and others. In addition, it may also take the form of an online survey.
* Researching current storage and conservation practice for the physical carriers for recorded sound at the BL, the hub partners and others. Pull together existing knowledge and record the degree to which they currently meet the agreed standard, PD5454. Given the number of institutions holding sound archives it will only be possible to collect evidence from a selection. Our aim is to get a better idea of the current situation.
* Research current digitisation practice where it exists, and the degree to which it meets current accepted standards such as those set out in IASA TC03 and TC04.
* Collecting the conservation policies from the British Library and the hub partners. Review what the policy documents say about recorded sound both in physical and digital formats.
* Survey existing training opportunities. Since the long term preservation of historic sound recordings depends on people with the necessary skills the project includes plans for the professional development of audio preservation engineers.
* Discuss the findings with the project team and make recommendations for future action which will systematically improve the ongoing care of UK audio heritage. Identifying risks and opportunities is likely to be a very important part of this Conservation Plan. The conservation plan should make recommendations in general terms as well as specific actions for the BL and hub partners.

The consultant is expected to develop the details of an appropriate method and explain it in the response to this brief.

1. **Project timetable**

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| --- | --- |
| Responses from interested consultants: | **To be received by the British Library by midday on Monday 14th March 2016** |
| Invited consultants to present proposals to British Library selection panel  | **Wednesday 23rd March 2016**  |
| Consultants begin work  | **By Monday 4th April 2016** |
| Draft Conservation Plan  | **Friday 9th May 2016 (6 weeks after starting)** |
| Present the Conservation Plan to the HLF Project Board at the British Library  | **Thursday 12th May 2016 – 11.30am -12.30pm** |
| Deliver the final version of the Conservation Plan | **Monday 27th June 2016 (12 weeks after starting)** |

1. **The budget for this work**

The total budget for this research is **£20,000 + VAT**, inclusive of your expenses and participants’ incentives.

The selected agency will be paid 50% of the total costings on delivery of a draft Conservation Plan (**9th May 2016**) and the remaining 50% at the completion of project (**27th June 2016**).

1. **Outputs and Format**

The chosen consultant will need to provide:

* A full Conservation Plan, with recommendations. The document must meet the HLF requirements and the document must follow the structure suggested, i.e.

Executive Summary

Introduction

Section one – Understanding the Heritage

Section two – Statement of Significance

Risks and Opportunities

Policies

Adoption and Review

Bibliography

Appendices

10 printed copies and a PDF which can be made available online.

* A PowerPoint summary of the main findings
1. **Assessment of consultants’ proposals**

We are inviting interested agencies to submit their proposal electronically to us by **midday** on **Monday 14th March 2016**. Proposals should be sent online to our Central Procurement Unit. We will invite selected bidders to present their proposals and discuss the development steps on **Wednesday** **23rd March 2016.** The details of the subsequent commission will be dependent on these discussions. Interested consultants should provide a proposal indicating the methodology, process to be used, and the costs. The costs should include a breakdown showing:

* Research for and writing of the Conservation Plan
* Liaison with us, for agreeing on the elements to be tested and with which stakeholders
* Costs for any fieldwork
* Costs for ten paper copies of the report, an electronic full report, and presentation costs for coming into the British Library, and presenting findings to the group.
1. **Project liaison**

Internal commissioners: **Hannah Jenkins (Programme Manager, SOS)**

 **Richard Ranft (Head of Sound and Vision)**

**Sue Davies (HLF Project Manager, SOS)**

Project co-ordinator: **Will Prentice (Head of Technical Services & Processing, Sound and Vision)**

Contact: **Sue Davies (HLF Project Manager, SOS)**

**sue.davies@bl.uk** **and 020 7412 7271**

1. **Next steps**

Please submit your proposal to this brief by **midday on** **Monday 14th March 2016.**

Your proposal must indicate the methodology and process to be used and the costs of the work, as indicated above.

Criteria that will be considered in selecting the agency/consultancy will be as set out in the table below.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Criteria** | **Method of evaluation** | **Weighting** |
| Previous experience of preparing Conservation Plans for HLF applications | Track record of consultant(s). Client References.  | 25% |
| Knowledge of recorded sound and/or sound archives | Content of proposal and evidence of previous experience of working with recorded sound and / or archives.  | 30% |
| Ability to present clear, concise results | Quality and clarity of proposal. Suitability of proposed methodologies. Understanding of project requirements and context | 25% |
| Value for money | Comparison of submitted charges, costs, day rates etc. | 20% |