

Archaeological works

A guide for construction companies
and householders



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Project types covered:

Extensions to existing houses

Single-plot new builds

Several new houses

Commercial developments and extensions



Investigations into the Brighton Dome complex. © Archaeology South-East/UCL 2023



Construction site warning sign. © Philip Brookes



Construction site and heavy digger. © Paul Maguire

Public interest in archaeology

Archaeology is the study of the physical remains of our past. There are periods of the human story which have no historical records, or for which records are scarce. Archaeology represents one of the main sources of information on these vast periods of time. Even when we have historical records, the information which can be understood via archaeological remains can deepen our understanding of the way people lived. Studying the bones of individuals can tell us about people's diet and health. Analysis of pollen and other organic remains can help us understand the way a landscape was used and tell us what species of plants and animals were present.

Each new piece of work has the potential to add information to our collective growing story. Planning policy across the UK recognises the importance to our society of archaeological remains and the information they contain. This recognition underlies the ways in which archaeological work is done and, therefore, informs this guide. Every professional archaeologist accredited by ClfA and every ClfA Registered Organisation has agreed to a *Code of conduct* which acknowledges their duty to act in the public interest. The *Code* recognises that archaeological remains are a valuable resource which should be managed carefully, and, where such remains are removed or disturbed by development, archaeologists must record them on site and follow that with an appropriate level of processing, analysis and reporting.

The amount of work on and off site varies according to the scale of a project and the type of remains found. However, there is a common thread with all such investigative projects. Investigation on site is followed by processing of what was found, analysis of that material, reporting of the results and archiving of the material and information gathered. This information is then made available for the public interest.

That interest begins long before the report is issued and members of the public may show interest in your project at a much earlier stage. It is very common for archaeologists to be asked by interested members of the public about their work and findings during a project. Being prepared for this public interest and finding positive ways to respond to it are important considerations and your professional archaeologist can help you to respond appropriately.

Whom is this guide for?

This guide is for builders and homeowners in the UK who are

- modifying or extending a property
- building a single or very small number of homes or other new build/s
- where there may be archaeological considerations.

For those involved in larger-scale housing development, infrastructure or power-generation projects, please refer our guide *Professional archaeology: a guide for clients* (www.archaeologists.net/clientguide)

Planning systems and archaeology

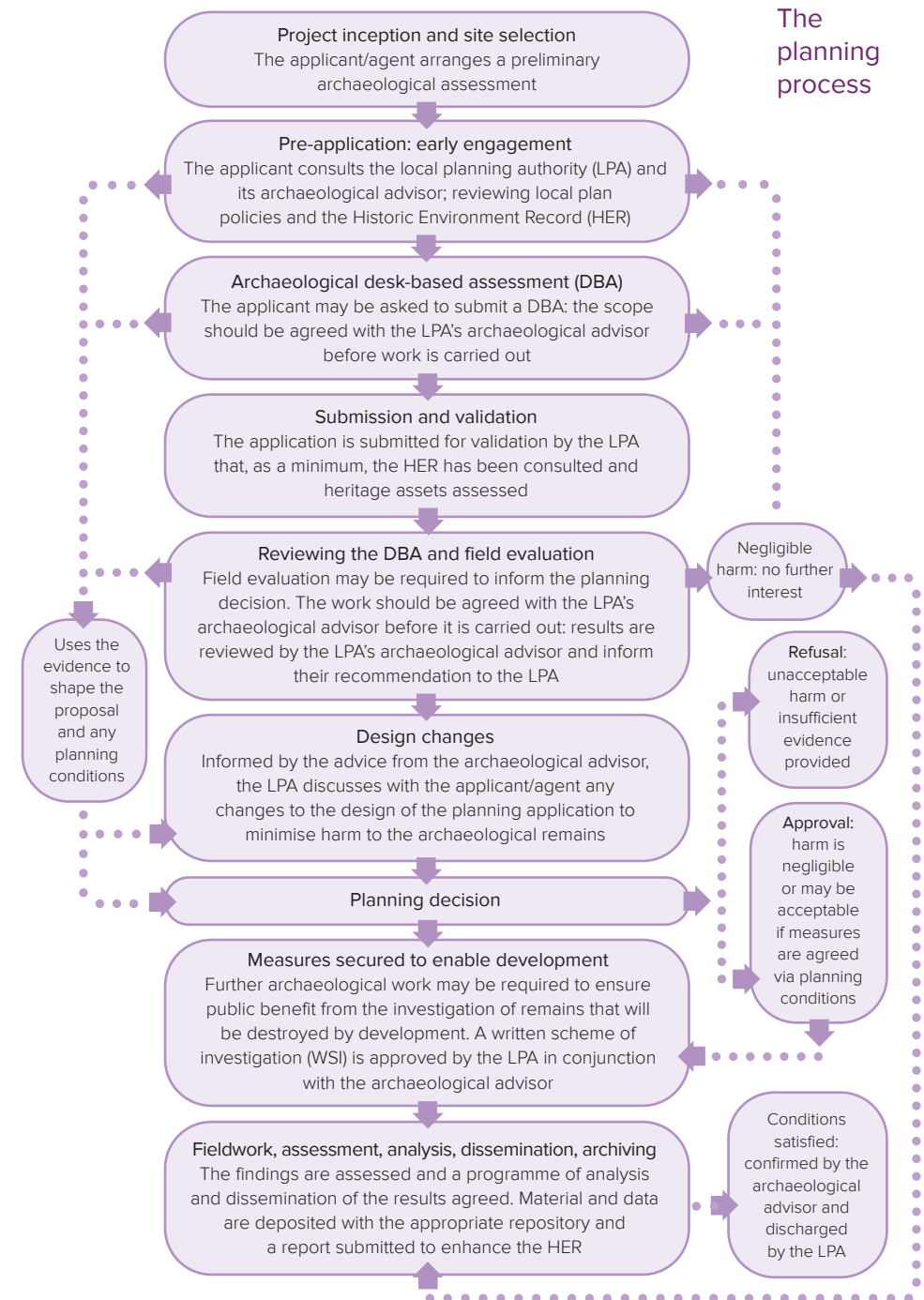
The planning systems in the UK – depending on the nature of the proposed works and where they are – may require you to provide information with your planning application, so that the planning authority can make an informed decision about any archaeological work. If planning permission is given, there may be archaeological conditions applied to ensure that any archaeological remains are either protected or investigated (the latter being the more common outcome).

The processes for handling archaeology in the planning systems are often stepped, each stage informing decisions on the next. This is intended to ensure that where your development is likely to impact upon archaeological remains, appropriate works take place ahead of/during that impact (as appropriate). These processes also ensure that your development causes no avoidable harm and considers the interests of the local community. They also protect you from being asked to commission unnecessary work. Decisions about what to do involve expert judgement, and you may wish to have a professional archaeologist advise you. They may propose an alternative approach on your behalf, if appropriate.

The relevant local planning authority will generally have an archaeological advisor within or associated with it. That advisor may, if you get in touch with them, be able to indicate the potential scale of the archaeological work which you may need to carry out, even before you submit a planning application.

Any archaeological work you do commission can involve a wide array of approaches and techniques, which are explained on pages 16–19 of this guide.

Any archaeological works will need to be described and agreed in advance in a **written scheme of investigation (WSI)** – essentially a project design/specification. A professional archaeologist can prepare this for you. It sets out the planning and archaeological background, the reason for the approach agreed and what it is trying to achieve, and the methods to be used. It is vital to your project. When agreed by the planning authority via its archaeological advisor, it specifies what is required to satisfy the planning system. It provides the specification for the works you have agreed with your archaeologist, or a basis for procuring archaeological services on the basis of an agreed methodology.



Your archaeologist

You may wish to commission a professional archaeologist to act as your consultant, advising you on archaeology in the planning process. As with professional consultants in other sectors, they will act as a guide and/or critical friend, helping you to navigate a potentially unfamiliar technical area. They will help you to balance your interests with the requirements of planning policy and guidance, which protect the public interest. This approach is in accordance with ClfA's ethical *Code of conduct*.

They could also advise you on the most appropriate response to a request for more information about your site. They may work on budget setting and the management of both quality and budget, and help you secure the professional archaeologist or archaeology company best suited for any site work.

This organisation or individual will undertake archaeological works on site, analyse and report upon their results and deposit the archive. In so doing, they ensure that any new archaeological information generated by these works is made available to the public.

A ClfA-accredited professional or ClfA Registered Organisation will work to professional standards, undertaking works to an agreed WSI. Archaeological organisations may be large or small (including sole traders), and they offer different ranges of services. Some have multiple offices; others are local.



Roman coin. © Stephen Plaster

Communication

The importance of respectful and timely communication cannot be overstated.

Clear lines of communication should be established early between the developer, householder and the archaeologist/s involved in a project. Communication with the local planning authority archaeology advisor is also important, whether directly or via your archaeologist or consultant.

Those attending the site day to day (groundworks contractor and archaeologist) may not be directly involved in the payment of each other's services, and they may be working to different objectives. Weaving archaeological monitoring into builders' plans for use of labour and plant and for the arrival of materials on what can be busy sites is an additional task.

These competing demands and changing circumstances make it especially important to keep two-way communication going. The archaeologist must check when key groundworks are happening and ensure they attend on the correct, agreed days. The groundworks contractor needs to consider the availability of the archaeologist and facilitate their attendance.

The smooth communication needed will be considerably enhanced by a friendly pre-meeting, even if this happens through a video call. The exchange of names, telephone numbers and the title of key roles can be a significant advantage. So can a discussion of the archaeological method of work (the WSI), which otherwise doesn't always make it into the awareness of the construction team. Equally, the intentions of and likely challenges for a groundworks programme, also often expressed in a technical document, can be broken down into easily understood pieces. These simple measures build rapport and understanding and increase the opportunities for successful joint working.

Trust

Any technical specialist, such as an archaeologist, has an advantage which flows from the possession of knowledge, a technical vocabulary and a professional network associated with their specialist area.

This can make a developer or housebuilder feel uncertain about how time and money may be used and whether they are being put to good or even necessary use. While they may understand how long certain trades take to complete a piece of work and how much they will

charge for materials and labour, they may be less comfortable with archaeology, which they encounter infrequently and which has a variety of tasks, costs and options associated with it. Archaeology often deals with remains that lie underground, unseen and poorly understood.

Trust, built upon good communication and confidence, can be very reassuring. Therefore, using ClfA-accredited archaeologists, who are skilled professionals required to work to a code of conduct and agreed standards, and who are accountable to ClfA for their ethical behaviour, is strongly advised.

Trust is earned, and whether that comes from working on one or several projects together partly depends on the individuals concerned. Trust is central to the success of a project and every professional archaeologist should make building trust with their clients a priority.



Monitoring of groundworks on a small house extension. © Albion Archaeology

Cost

Archaeological costings for smaller projects tend to include the costs of labour, transport, equipment and materials.

Labour includes archaeologists on site and office-based support staff who help make the project work in a safe and timely way. From time to time, other specialist archaeologists may be needed, depending on what is found. The budget for analysis, reporting and archiving is also made up of labour and equipment/materials. Specialist archaeological assistance with analysis is normal at this stage.

Costing may be based on day rates and estimates or a fixed-price quotation, depending on how much can be known in advance. On smaller demolition or construction sites archaeologists attend 'as required' and provide an hourly or daily rate. Other elements of the project may be at a fixed price, but there are likely to be reasonable caveats and contingencies if certain assumptions prove wrong – notably the quantity and complexity of archaeological remains revealed.

It may be best to seek several estimates or quotations, partly to test prices and partly to find a good fit in terms of competence, approach and style of professional archaeologists. An archaeological consultant may be better placed than you are to advise on whom to appoint for the on-site and subsequent works.

Archaeological monitoring with significant unexpected finds

Occasionally very significant findings are made. Your archaeologist can help you manage what happens, starting with a meeting with the local planning authority archaeological advisor.

Typically, a new budget and timescale will be agreed to cover the appropriate investigation and recording of such remains. Opportunities to preserve such remains in situ (perhaps through the advice and design input of a structural engineer) rather than excavate them can be discussed at this time.

Other regulations and permissions

Work may bring you into contact with laws and regulations unrelated to the planning system: breaching some of them may be criminal offences. A professional archaeologist will be able to prevent you from inadvertently getting into trouble and will help you manage your way through the process.

Where works within or close to a Scheduled Monument are needed, you will need to obtain Scheduled Monument Consent (SMC). This will only be granted once the relevant body (depending on which part of the UK the site is in) has considered the reasoning behind why the works are needed.

There are well-established legal systems in the UK nations for the reporting of human remains on construction sites to the Police, partly to allow assessment of whether they are ancient or the result of recent foul play. Your archaeologist can help you stay compliant and to operate in ways which are respectful when human remains are disturbed.

Some types of objects are classed as 'Treasure'. What is and isn't ruled to be Treasure is complex, and the steps to follow when potential Treasure is found vary across the UK. Again, a professional archaeologist will be able to help you follow due process.

In Northern Ireland, all archaeological work requires a licence. Your professional archaeologist will need to acquire one for your project.



Battersea power station watching brief. © Archaeology South-East/UCL 2023

Further advice

Planning authority archaeological officer

If you have an archaeological planning condition attached to your works, the planning authority will have imposed it following input from its archaeological advisor. It is sensible for you to seek advice from that advisor in the first instance. Contacts can be found at the Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers; see <https://www.algao.org.uk>

Chartered Institute for Archaeologists

CIfA maintains registers of professional-accredited organisations and individuals (www.archaeologists.net/lookingforanarchaeologist). Having discussed your site or archaeological condition with the Planning Authority Archaeological Advisor, you should use these lists to appoint an archaeologist to help you. If you have been unable to speak with the Planning Authority Archaeological Advisor, you can still search for an archaeologist to advise you.



Construction site and digger. © Paul Maguire

Do these things:

Take advice early

The quicker that the local planning authority archaeological advisor is contacted the better.

The same is true of finding a professional archaeologist to be part of your team. The works can be built into their programme and that ensures you have the appropriate cover when you need it. It also means they are less likely to attend the site at the wrong time, potentially leading to an inefficient use of resources.

Select a suitable professional archaeologist

ClfA's Registered Organisation scheme is a unique quality assurance scheme. The Registered Organisation logo is a badge of commitment to professional standards and competence. These organisations are

Assessed – as the scheme encourages continuous quality improvement

Professional – Registered Organisations are bound by the ClfA *Code of conduct* and other regulations. They must work in accordance with defined policies and procedures and comply with current good practice

Accountable – When you employ a Registered Organisation you can be confident that it has been assessed and found to be professional

ClfA's Accredited Professional Directory contains the names and contact details of individual archaeologists who are accredited by ClfA and who have agreed to adhere to ClfA's *Code of conduct*.

By using a Registered Organisation or an accredited individual, you know that your archaeologists are committed to the professional standards required by ClfA and you can be confident they will meet your needs and the needs of the public (as represented by the planning authority). Note that only archaeologists and organisations who are accredited by ClfA can be held to account in the event of a complaint being made.



Roman spoon. © Wessex Archaeology

Agree a written scheme of investigation (WSI)

Make sure all the archaeological works on your project are undertaken in line with a WSI agreed by the planning authority (via their archaeological advisor), your archaeologist, and you (via your contract). This protects you and your project: any change to the scope of work must be done in line with the WSI, or a revised WSI will need to be agreed, stating why and how the approach is changing.

Build rapport with your archaeologist

Construction projects are reliant on teams working well together, to create safe working and efficiency. Mutual respect and open communication build rapport and amplify the opportunities for successful team working. Bring your archaeologist into the team along with other valued 'trades' who form part of your project.

Agree about money – day rates or a fixed price

Consider whether a 'rates' approach is best, or whether fixing costs is more important. This can be influenced by many factors, from the type of work to the individual attitude towards financial risk. Discussion with an archaeological consultant may help you to decide.

Things to avoid:

Don't leave the process of selecting an archaeologist to the last minute

This builds pressure for everyone and means decisions are made quickly by people unfamiliar with a project, the project team and the site. None of these constraints enhances decision making.

Don't stop communicating about the archaeology

Looking away from an issue like this is not helpful: it's really important to communicate openly and in a timely way. Then everyone involved can consider the best solutions in terms of timing, numbers of archaeologists and appropriate techniques. Keep channels open to the commercial archaeologist you have engaged to do the work and the local authority archaeological advisor who is monitoring it and signing it off. This enables timely decisions that help to control expenditure and avoid delays.



Surveying. © Vasilii Aleksandrov

Types of archaeological work

Pre-determination advice

A local planning authority may seek the advice of its own archaeological advisor on a planning application. That advice shapes the services you may need to commission.

Desk-based assessment

The planning authority may ask for a planning application to contain an archaeological desk-based assessment. It is generally the first technique to be used if there could be archaeological considerations, as it looks at what is already known from existing databases such as the planning authority's Historic Environment Record (HER), historic maps and many other sources. Its purpose is to assess the nature, extent and significance of archaeological remains that may be present, and what the impact of the proposed development would be. It relies on a professional archaeologist working to professional standards for such work. An assessment may not be needed if the development is on land that is already well understood, in which case the planning authority may have enough information to move to the next stage.



Excavated Trench. © mkfilm

Gathering new data via a field evaluation

A planning authority may require new data to be gathered, on site, via an archaeological field evaluation. This term covers a variety of techniques, including geophysical survey, test-pitting, trial trenching and more, depending on the site and any other works carried out (eg by geotechnical engineers). A professional archaeologist can help to explain and agree the specific approaches for the site.

Any archaeological works will need to be described and agreed in advance in a written scheme of investigation (WSI).

Archaeological planning conditions

Conditions may be placed upon planning permission. They may require that some remains are preserved, or that there is an archaeological investigation ahead of, or alongside, development works. Sometimes there is a mixture of these approaches. On smaller development projects, it is most common for archaeological remains to be investigated, recorded and then reported upon. This may happen as part of what is termed 'monitoring' or sometimes called a 'watching brief'.

Written scheme of investigation (WSI)

This document – essentially a project design – sets out the reasoning behind a particular type of archaeological work, such as a trial trenching evaluation. It will set out the planning and archaeological background, the methodology of the archaeological work and the research questions it is intended to answer.

It is vital to your project. When agreed by the planning authority via its archaeological advisor, it specifies what is required to satisfy the planning system. It provides the specification for the works you have agreed with your archaeologist, or a basis for procuring archaeological services on the basis of an agreed methodology.

While such works can be requested in order to inform a decision on a particular planning application, they can also be conditioned as part of a planning permission.

Monitoring or watching brief

This is a type of work frequently set as a condition on smaller sites with archaeological potential. It means the considered observation or monitoring of groundworks which may

reveal or disturb archaeological remains. ('Monitoring' may also refer to inspection of archaeological works by the planning authority's archaeological advisor.)

During demolition, such key stages include slab breaking and removal, utility removal and similar works that may reveal or disturb below-ground deposits. During construction, this may mean stripping of overburden for an access road, or digging foundation trenches, soakaways or utility trenches. If archaeological remains are revealed, the professional archaeologist in attendance must make rapid, clear decisions about the importance of the remains revealed and how to record them – in drawn, written and photographic form – and what material to recover for study later.

Generally, the archaeological investigation need go no lower and no wider than the construction works, so a foundation trench will not normally be enlarged for archaeological purposes, unless remains outside will be affected.

A site-based archaeologist will communicate with the planning authority archaeological advisor, who may attend the site if important or unusual remains are revealed. In such circumstances, an expanded form of investigation may be required.

Strip, map and sample

This technique describes the process by which an area of land is stripped of overburden. Archaeological remains are exposed, mapped (or planned), and discussed to agree how to investigate and record them.

The next stage on site is to sample the archaeological remains, in line with agreed sampling strategies. These generally involve excavating set percentages of each feature that has been revealed.

Such work often takes place while construction works continue elsewhere on the site.

Open area excavation

This technique describes a methodology whereby all, or most, archaeological remains in an agreed area are investigated and recorded. Open area excavation tends to happen when the presence of remains is predictable, either because of pre-existing knowledge or earlier evaluation works.

Reporting

While the focus of many developers and homeowners is, naturally, on the site-based stage of works, for the archaeological team, the value of the investigation comes largely from analysing the information gathered. That information comes in the form of their digital and hard copy records and the artefacts and other excavated material.

Following excavation there is a review of what has been found and what further study is needed.

Reporting requirements on that work may include a report describing what has been found and its significance. It is deposited in the Historic Environment Record (HER) to add to the pool of knowledge about an area.

Alternatively, reporting may comprise an assessment report and updated project design, which will describe the research value of more important discoveries. It also identifies what

further analysis and type of publication will follow, which may be substantial or minimal. Routes to publication can include archaeological journals or books. It can also mean dissemination through other sources including websites and/or social media.

Archiving

This is the process by which the digital and hard copy records are adequately organised and the recovered material sifted in line with agreed policies and deposited, often with a regional museum. The laws about ownership of material recovered vary across the UK, as do the requirements for the deposition of digital and physical material, and your professional archaeologist will tell you what you need to do. The archive is a publicly accessible legacy of the work that can be used as a key source of information about the past of a particular area, supporting future research and education projects.

What if? Examples of archaeological work in practice

Archaeological monitoring that reveals no remains

A project involves the excavation of footing trenches for a house extension, some utilities trenches and a new soakaway. The groundworks for the footings take place over two days and the soakaway and utilities connections take place on two separate days. An archaeologist, therefore, needs to attend on part or all of those four days. They need to travel to the site and back, load and unload equipment and download their records for the day. So, they use four days of labour (time) on the fieldwork element of the project.

A report and archiving process follows. The report describes the site as containing no archaeological remains.

In this scenario, the watching brief was done on a rate for time basis. The time on site was needed to fulfil the requirements of a WSI agreed as an archaeological planning condition. The report and archive allow the planning condition to be discharged.

Archaeological monitoring with archaeological discoveries

A project involves the stripping of a new access road and the cutting of foundation trenches for three new houses. The footings of one house go through some pits containing medieval pottery and animal bone: another pit is found on the new access road.



Mortlake Ware pottery. © Wessex Archaeology

A single archaeologist has been monitoring the groundworks and needs time to record the pits in the foundation trenches. This they can only do from the surface as the trenches are too narrow to work in safely, so they will not clean and hand excavate them, making this a relatively rapid task. The pit on the access road is easier to work on and can be investigated by hand. Following discussion between the archaeologist and the groundworks supervisor it is understood that the foundation trenches should be recorded first to allow concrete to be poured. The pit in the access road is fenced off to prevent pedestrian or vehicular movements over it: the archaeologist starts work here the following day. The archaeologist updates the archaeological advisor to the local authority, explaining what they are doing to record the remains they are encountering and the solutions they have agreed on site to make sure works were prioritised in the right way.

In this scenario, the archaeologist has cooperated with the groundworks team and has prioritised their work to minimise impact on the groundworks programme. The groundworks crew have allowed the archaeologist to work and have supported them.

The report which follows the fieldwork for this project requires time for studying the pottery and bones, and for explaining the nature and significance of the pits and their contents.



Hard hat on a construction site. © Irene Miller

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