

Delivering public benefit from archaeology

The historic environment, like the natural environment, is a shared, irreplaceable resource. It is managed – and researched, cared for and conserved – on behalf of, and for the benefit of, society. Increasing understanding of the past is at the heart of everything archaeologists do and is, itself, a public benefit.

As professionally accredited¹ archaeologists we have accepted a responsibility to conserve the historic environment, to use it economically to provide reliable information and to disseminate the results of our work. We have also made an ethical commitment to promote the value of the historic environment and to engage with the public to include, inform and inspire.

What public benefit does archaeology deliver?

Archaeologists create and deliver public benefit in many ways. Knowledge gain - research which advances our understanding of the past and contributes to knowledge - is the core purpose of archaeological work and is, itself, a public benefit. By engaging and sharing that knowledge, community strength and identity can be enhanced. There is also evidence that engaging with the historic environment can make a significant contribution to community well-being and promote social capital, leading to improvement in health, wealth and education.

Participation in archaeological or heritage projects can also bring benefits for individuals through learning and development and the ability to acquire new skills. These projects have the ability to engage diverse groups of people, from refugee groups to the homeless, young offenders and injured service personnel, offering new skills, confidence, the opportunity to become an active citizen and to connect with a shared human past.

Public benefit can be created through

- **High quality research outputs:** publications, exhibitions, accessible archives or events engage people and generate interest in, and concern for, the historic environment
- **Interpretation:** how we tell stories is a key way to engage and inspire people
- **Improvements to quality of place:** archaeological work can leave lasting positive impacts on the landscape or lead to changes in management practices or valuation of landscapes. This can be through enhanced understanding of a monument or building through investigation/conservation/presentation or through the better understanding of the evolution of a place.

¹ See our fact sheet *What we mean when we talk about a professional archaeologist*
<https://www.archaeologists.net/profdevelopment>

- **Community:** archaeology can be a mechanism for developing community values, through increased pride and sense of place. Heritage activities may also provide opportunities for communities to better understand their areas.
- **Health and wellbeing:** therapeutic or social benefits can come from engagement in archaeological activities; for example, meeting people and being outdoors are all recognised health and wellbeing benefits
- **Skills:** from teamwork to technical skills, participating in archaeological activities supports skills development and engagement with learning at all levels
- **Economy and tourism:** areas can be transformed by well delivered public benefit via exhibitions, sites turned into visitor centres etc
- **Innovation:** archaeological research and interpretation can help develop new approaches to engagement and knowledge exchange; lessons learnt from the past can be used to develop and design ideas for the future

What does public benefit from archaeology look like?

There are many ways in which public benefit can be delivered. Here are some examples

At the planning stage

- Advocating for the incorporation of historic environment elements during masterplanning/design
- Advising on the investigation, interpretation, or retention of historic fabric as part of a new development

During the project - participation

- Involve community groups, period or thematic research groups, metal detecting clubs, Young Archaeologists, local schools etc in research, fieldwork, finds or archive work
- Dig for a day events for schools, community
- Training programmes for local groups and volunteers
- Digital participation

During the project - communication

- Site tours and/or open days
- Community talks
- Site blog, website, newspaper articles, podcasts
- Site noticeboard with details of latest discoveries
- Local exhibitions
- Community newsletter

After the project - communication

- Popular publications, leaflets, interpretation panels
- Reconstruction drawings
- Heritage trails
- Web-based publication, open access
- Facilitated access to archives

Expectations for professional archaeologists to deliver public benefit

Planning policy in the UK emphasises sustainable development that benefits economy, society and the environment and requires, among other things, the protection and enhancement of the historic environment.

The 2011 Southport Report (www.archaeologists.net/publications/reports) made a series of recommendations to enable the historic environment sector to make a *'deliberate, bold and consistent set of improvements to how it understands, investigates, records, involves communities and communicates the significance of historic environment assets in the context of the planning process, in order to realise the benefits to society'*.

Scotland's Archaeology Strategy (<http://archaeologystrategy.scot/>) sets out aspirations for a Scotland where archaeology is for everyone and a delivery plan to ensure that archaeology contributes to wellbeing, knowledge and telling Scotland's stories.

The Well-being of Future Generations Act (<https://futuregenerations.wales/about-us/future-generations-act/>) requires public bodies in Wales, including heritage bodies, to think about the long-term impact of their decisions, to work better with people, communities and each other, and to prevent persistent problems such as poverty, health inequalities and climate change.

The draft Archaeology Strategy for Northern Ireland has as its Vision *'we want archaeology to be accessed and valued by as many people as possible, led by a sector which is healthy, resilient and visible'*.

CIfA standards and guidance documents (www.archaeologists.net/codes/cifa) offer guidance to accredited professionals on how to deliver public benefit. This guidance covers all areas; from the perspective of the archaeological advisor, the archaeological consultant and through fieldwork. If archaeological work is not delivering public benefit it is not being undertaken to a professional standard.

The relevant extracts from the guidance are:

Standard and guidance for archaeological advice by historic environment services

- advisors should seek to ensure that archaeological investigation is directed toward providing benefit to the public, whether directly through participation and engagement in the process or indirectly through the increase in knowledge that the results of investigation provide to the local and wider community
- advisors should encourage collaboration between the local planning authority, the applicant and their agents to promote community engagement and participation in investigation where it is appropriate to do so, and at an appropriate stage of the investigation process

- community engagement both fosters public understanding and support for the historic environment and adds value to development-led archaeological work. It may include providing talks and presentations, guiding walks, arranging conferences, exhibitions, open days and living history events, providing school project work and learning resources, offering work experience and volunteering opportunities, and supporting community archaeology projects
- the extent of engagement should be proportionate to the scale, nature and circumstances of the work, and may vary from a brief media release at one extreme to a full-scale community project at the other. Health and safety, public liability or commercial confidentiality considerations may dictate the form of engagement that is possible, but in all cases, it should be demonstrated that the potential engagement of the community has been fully considered
- where appropriate to the nature and significance of the results, advisors may be able to promote the use of innovative forms of dissemination which produce wider public benefit than conventional methods of publication. These might include the use of different forms of media, exhibitions or events

Standard and guidance for commissioning work or providing consultancy advice on archaeology and the historic environment

- where possible, promote community engagement with the historic environment, seeking to ensure that archaeological investigation is directed toward providing benefit to the public, whether directly through participation and engagement in the process, where it is appropriate to do so, or indirectly through the increase in knowledge that the results of investigation provide to the local and wider community
- such engagement should be proportionate to the scale, nature and circumstances of the work
- where appropriate to the nature and significance of the results, promote in addition to formal publication the use of innovative forms of dissemination which produce wider public benefit than conventional methods of publication. These might include the use of different forms of media, exhibitions or events

Standards and guidance for archaeological excavation, for archaeological field evaluation, and for an archaeological watching brief

- a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) should set out how public benefits may be achieved by means of engagement, participation and/or dissemination of the results both during and after the project, as appropriate to the scale, nature and circumstances of the work. Health and safety issues, public liability and commercial confidentiality, while important considerations, should not be used as a barrier to public engagement without clear justification for doing so

Case studies

There are a huge variety of case studies which demonstrate the range of ways to deliver public benefit. Some examples of these which can be accessed from the CIfA website are

- The Archaeologist 109 - Birmingham Park Street Burial Ground: ethics and community engagement, Mary Ruddy www.archaeologists.net/archaeologist (requires login)
- CIfA2019 recordings – the theme for the CIfA2019 Annual Conference in Leeds was Archaeology: values, benefits and legacies www.archaeologists.net/conference/2019 including
 - The Sherford Community, old and new: changing client’s attitudes to community engagement, Gareth Chaffey (www.youtube.com/watch?v=YSwEPTYmakA&feature=youtu.be)
 - Wellbeing and the historic environment: what now? Linda Monckton (www.youtube.com/watch?v=m7djVqB7s10&feature=youtu.be)
 - Developing projects with social impacts, Cara Jones (www.youtube.com/watch?v=MTel0sLVy0g&feature=youtu.be)
- CIfA2018 Brighton: The problem with archaeology is archaeologists, Neil Redfern (www.youtube.com/watch?v=YIrR3_6zEpc)
- 2019 Yearbook articles – the theme for the Yearbook was Research, impact and legacies www.archaeologists.net/publications/yearbook
- The Archaeologist 108 - Searching Mersea: coastal archaeology, oral history and rising sea levels, Lawrence Northall www.archaeologists.net/archaeologist (requires login)
- The Archaeologist 104 - Know your place, Peter Insole www.archaeologists.net/publications/archaeologist
- The Archaeologist 99 - Bristol’s brilliant archaeology, Kate Iles www.archaeologists.net/publications/archaeologist
- Celebrating Archaeology in Scotland 2019 (<http://archaeologystrategy.scot/2019/10/03/celebrating-archaeology-in-scotland/>)