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The Assessment, Management and Recording of Heritage Assets—A Strategic Approach (Worcestershire Case Study)

External Consultation

Background to the project

Over the course of the late twentieth century a range of planning policies has been introduced that, in varying degrees, has required developers to assess and offset the impact of construction with regards to archaeological remains deemed to be of significance. Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service (WAAS) and Worcester City Council have, like the majority of local authorities across England, provided specialist advice to planning authorities to enable policy to be delivered effectively and the historic environment to be appropriately managed. However, as these policies have changed, so have archaeological prospection techniques, data sources and advisory resources. The underlying evidence bases, such as HERs, have consequently expanded in response to the huge amounts of information that has been generated not only by developer-led archaeology, but wider research, characterisation studies, and integrated mapping such as Lidar and historic maps.

WAAS and Worcester City Council have been commissioned by English Heritage to assess the effectiveness of archaeological mitigation since 1990, identifying strengths and weaknesses in various methodologies with regards to identifying the broad range of archaeological remains that may be encountered, whether applied in rural or urban contexts. The results shall be used to provide an evidence base to improve evaluation and mitigation. Using Worcestershire case studies, the project will provide an assessment format that can be applied more broadly across England as whole.

Historic buildings are outside the remit of this project, which focuses on below-ground remains.

What has been achieved so far?

To date the project has looked at every archaeological evaluation carried out in the Worcestershire (including Worcester) and, where that work has progressed beyond the evaluation stage, assessed how effective the evaluation was in predicting the nature and extent of archaeology found during the further mitigation.

We have assessed whether the mitigation strategy is appropriate, for example, is a 4% sample a reasonable balance between cost and knowledge? Are we consistently missing certain periods or types of sites in evaluations that are being picked up in excavations? If so, does this mean that we are consistently failing to pick up certain sites in evaluations where we haven't also got other periods/types to trigger further investigation?

Please see the full project design for a clearer understanding of the project scope and methodology. A full analysis will be available in the Spring and a short summary of the initial findings is included with this questionnaire.

External consultation

As a contractor/consultant/partner who works regularly within Worcestershire, we would like to receive your feedback on the project, the methodology and the proposed changes. We have listed some specific questions but any feedback on the project or any suggestions regarding the curatorial strategy would be welcome.

The full analysis of the evaluations has not yet been completed and we will be consulting further on this after the project has completed. This early consultation is required in order to gain feedback from you in case you feel that there are any questions that we should be asking of the data as part of the project.

The need for change

WAAS specifically requires changes in the curatorial approach to development control in the future. The consequences of significant budget cuts have resulted in less staff time available for development control advice to the district councils. WAAS, therefore needs to think critically about the advice that we provide and where it can be best targeted. The results of this project, along with an analysis of the time taken to perform the various tasks within development control work are being used to assess where we can be more effective, reduce cover and where we need to target more of our efforts.

Changes about to be implemented

- WAAS has compiled generic briefs for watching briefs, building appraisal, building recording and desk based assessments which will be available for download. These will be issued for all non-complex sites. The letter sent to the district planners advising on the requirement for further information or advising the implementation of a condition, will contain more information than it does now including any details of specific requirements for individual sites. This letter will be passed on to developers or their contractors along with a copy or web location of the particular brief required.
- Bespoke briefs will still be written for all evaluations, excavations and any other site that is more complex than the generic brief allows.

Changes being considered

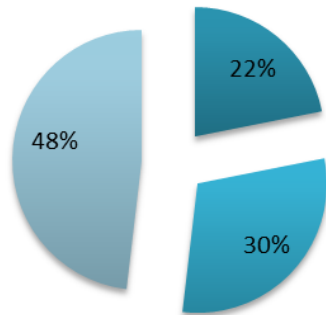
- Greater consideration given to non-intrusive surveys such as geophysics and field walking. This will involve a developing a better understanding of how these may be implemented more effectively.
- Develop a better working relationship with those contractors used to carry out geophysics surveys. This will allow curatorial staff to interpret results more efficiently and effectively.
- Develop a better strategy for identifying sites that produce little finds or large features e.g. prehistoric. This strategy will be informed by both the results of this project and by consultation with contractors.
- More consideration given to research frameworks where they exist.

Sample Analysis

A total of 338 evaluations from the County and 163 evaluations from the City have been recorded since the early 1990's. An initial analysis of 164 evaluations was prepared for the purposes of this consultation. The full analysis will be available in the final report.

Site Potential

■ High ■ Medium ■ Low



Each site was assessed on its level of potential once the evaluation had been carried out. The terms used are defined as:

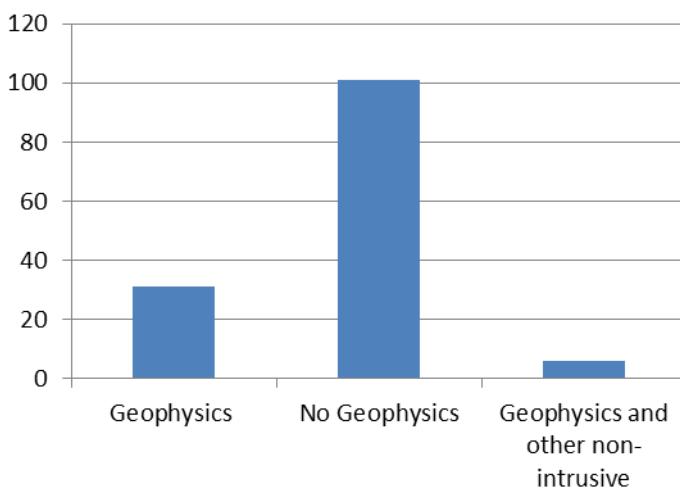
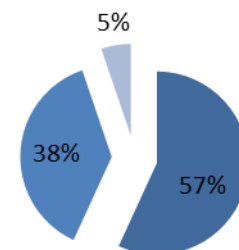
- Low – little or no archaeological deposits were found.
- Medium – archaeological deposits were found. In this instance, the deposits were recorded and the extent mapped.
- High – high level of archaeological deposits found. These sites were deemed at evaluation stage to need further archaeological work.

The type of trenching chosen for each evaluation was also recorded. For the purposes of this project, the terms are defined as:

- Standard grid - location of trenches based on a random sampling strategy.
- Targeted grid - location of trenches based on geophysics plot or known archaeological remains e.g. cropmarks.
- Constrained grid - location of trenches constrained due to buildings or other obstacles e.g. services.

Trench Type

■ Standard Grid ■ Targeted Grid
■ Constrained Grid



Evaluations were also assessed on whether they included geophysics or other non-intrusive work such as fieldwalking or metal detecting.

Questions

1. Are there any questions not laid out in the project design that you feel we should be exploring?
2. Are the generic briefs adequate and do they lay out what is required of you as a contractor/consultant clearly enough for you to develop a WSI?
3. Do you feel that phased programmes of work are effective?
If not, why not?
4. Do you think that current evaluation strategies are effective?
5. Are there other methods of surveying etc. that could be employed to assist in identifying sites, particularly those of prehistoric date?
6. Do you have any comments on the development control process in Worcestershire as a whole?

For further information on the project and to view the
project design contact:

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