

Urban Sites

Heritage and Archaeological Assessment

The NPPF¹ states “Where a site on which development is proposed includes, or has the potential to include, heritage assets with archaeological interest, local planning authorities should require developers to submit an appropriate desk-based assessment and, where necessary, a field evaluation.” We regularly provide these for clients across the UK.

Cities with deep layers of archaeological deposits

Certain long-lived urban centres (e.g. York, Canterbury and London) can have very deep layers of archaeological deposits. These can extend to several metres. Each period of settlement (Roman, Medieval and Post-Medieval) has added its own series of layers. Rarely were earlier layers of activity removed and so these cities sit upon centuries of activity. Archaeological remains can be encountered directly below the modern surface (e.g. tarmac or concrete) often at a depth of 500-1000mm below the existing ground surface. Where basements or cellars have been created, deposits will have been removed, yet that can mean a basement floor sits directly above ancient remains. We use many sources of data to help us accurately predict what may lie beneath.

Identifying previous development disturbance

The creation of cities inevitably involves the destruction of archaeological remains even as new phases of activity (archaeology) are created. We research borehole records, review nearby development and archaeological investigation/s along with our own site inspection in order to build an understanding. Frequently, there is a mix of destruction and survival and recognising both processes, and how they manifest on a site is key. Large modern buildings with basements may seem to be obviously destructive to below ground remains. However, islands of archaeological deposits can survive within a building constructed using piles even when a basement car park is present. Such buildings do also compact archaeological deposits and their foundations do remove them. There can be effects on the local hydrology, which may also have affected the survival of organic archaeological remains. We consider all of these factors to give clients a fully informed understanding.

On sites such as Robert Street (Westminster) our team were able to pick up the likelihood of well preserved, waterlogged structures below an existing

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2>

Who often uses this service?

- Commercial Property Developer
- Residential Property Developer
- Homeowners extending at basement level

Why use this Service?

- To fulfil a requirement of the local planning authority
- Recognise the level of destruction/preservation on a site
- To inform design, especially in terms of understanding the depth of archaeological sensitivity

Relevant Project Examples

- 91 Dean Street, Soho
- 36-37 High Street Canterbury
- Former Odeon Cinema, Foundry Street, Stoke-on-Trent
- 16 Lansdowne Road, Notting Hill

Professional Standards and Guidance

- Standard and guidance for desk-based assessment. Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA)
- The Setting of Heritage Assets Standard 2. Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning: 3 (2nd Edition)

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basement. We worked with the structural engineer and architect to agree a way of preserving these in situ while ensuring new piles, lift shafts and services could go in elsewhere within the plot.

Setting of Heritage Assets

Many of our historic urban centers' contain Conservation Areas and Listed Buildings. Such buildings will have a setting and the degree to which that setting contributes negatively or positively to their significance is a key point. We have experience in assessing the significance of heritage assets and in recognizing and distinguishing the role played by setting in that significance. We carry out a site visit to the development plot, and we visit heritage assets which may potentially be affected. We carry out bespoke setting assessment of each asset which has the potential to be affected. In so doing our clients are informed on this important topic.

Geoarchaeology near River Systems

Most cities have a river running through the historic core. Not only does this mean layers of buildings and roads have built up over many years, it also means that traces of once wide rivers or smaller tributaries may exist. Some cities contain completely buried (forgotten) rivers. Such locations may contain rich geoarchaeological and environmental remains. We are careful to consider this and to point it out to clients where we see indicators.

Industrial Archaeological remains

The Industrial period in the UK is one in which the changes to society both here and internationally were immense. Our cities and towns were transformed by the changing workplace and the growth of population needing housing, schools, hospitals, places of worship, cemeteries and other facilities. Traces of this period exist above and below ground and these are increasingly valued and considered within planning applications. We are experienced with recognising the potential for such remains

Go ahead and ask.....

If you would like to talk over a site or any of the topics mentioned above, please give us a call or send an email. We are happy to help out with some preliminary observations on archaeology and heritage.

Find out More:

<https://www.abramsarchaeology.co.uk/>

<https://www.abramsarchaeology.co.uk/blog-commercial-archaeology>

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