

Enterprise for good:

changing perceptions of the added value and public benefit that archaeology contributes to sustainable development

Robin Holgate MCIfA (7480),
Archaeological Research Services Ltd

As professional archaeologists, being able to share the results of our work with a wide audience is one of our duties. Indeed, for some archaeological contractors, it is part of their mission and they undertake some wonderful projects (see 'Archaeology on Prescription' in TA 118). The popularity of *Time Team* and *Digging for Britain* television programmes demonstrates the keen interest in archaeology that many people have. Development-led archaeology since 1990, following the concept that the polluter pays, has not only become a major source of funding and means to advance archaeological knowledge and understanding, but should also be an opportunity to disseminate the results of archaeological investigations for public benefit.

Recently, though, there has been increasing pressure to undertake evaluation works and mitigation on large-scale developments both more rapidly and more effectively. An almost standardised approach of archaeological desk-based assessment followed by geophysical survey and a high percentage sample of trenching has resulted in repetitive results and more subtle archaeological remains no doubt being overlooked. Consequently, Archaeological Research Services Ltd is developing innovative non-invasive ways to locate and characterise below-ground remains to minimise the scale of ground works and their impact on the environment, for example through the pioneering application of geochemical analysis at a landscape scale, which recently won a



Demonstrating iron smelting at an on-site public open day: breathing life into an explanation of the archaeological remains of Iron Age metalworking. Credit: ARS Ltd

Pop-up display set up on site for a public open day. Credit: ARS Ltd



King's Award for Enterprise. We are also exploring ways of adding value to assist in delivering sustainable development.

Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) credentials are of increasing importance to developers in building trust with stakeholders and enhancing public perception. Companies who are commissioning public services are

beholden to secure wider social, economic and environmental benefits as a result of the Public Services (Social Value) Act that came into force in 2013. It should be axiomatic for developers to want to support community engagement with the archaeological work they are commissioning, and yet sometimes there is a reluctance to enable this to happen. How can we change the perceptions of those

developers so that they see archaeology as being able to provide value and benefit for their own organisations and the communities where they are working, rather than as an unnecessary cost and inconvenience?

One starting point is to establish a rapport and trust with a client from the outset, so that the work should not be seen as an incumbrance merely to assist in securing planning permission or discharging conditions of planning consent. The results of our work, if presented accurately and dynamically, can help promote the positive economic and social impact of a development scheme, as well as enhance a company's reputation as an 'enterprise for good'. As a minimum, making information available on the archaeological work through social media and on a company's website should be encouraged, as well as on-site information boards if the site is publicly visible and it is appropriate. The potential for undertaking face-to-face engagement and dialogue with those who live and work in the area should also be explored. Three practical examples of this are consultation with the local community on a proposed development, enabling schoolchildren to participate in archaeological excavations, and enriching the lives of the local community through site open days and talks.

Proposals for any large-scale development can benefit from public consultation. Producing pop-up displays in a community venue in the form of photographs and plans mounted on boards, and a table of objects staffed by one or more archaeologists who can explain the archaeological issues and answer any questions, takes minimal resources to plan and execute. Quarry companies, for example, can often appreciate the value in consulting the local community when planning to open new or extend existing mineral extraction sites. Whenever we undertake these events with these companies and other developers, dwell time by visitors to our stands is often far longer than at other displays and the responsible approach to archaeology can provide an important way of winning over local communities.

Enabling schoolchildren to visit a site and participate in our work is especially rewarding for everyone. Whenever an



Public interaction: using pop-up archaeology displays to liaise with local communities about a development scheme in their neighbourhood. Credit: Simon Bryant



Getting local schoolchildren on board: discussing archaeological discoveries with schoolchildren provides opportunities for developers (in this case the quarry manager) to present their site in a positive light. Credit: ARS Ltd

excavation is taking place over a reasonable length of time, and especially towards the end of a summer term, local primary and junior schools have the opportunity to plan a visit by a class or year group that will fit in with their curriculum studies. Trips ‘outside the classroom’ are memorable, especially if schoolchildren can participate in specific activities such as archaeological excavation. Timing and planning are key but, if a site can be made safe, a pre-visit meeting and careful consideration of a teacher’s risk assessment with site managers can facilitate a highly successful trip. A follow-up session, including object handling, by an archaeologist in the school would reinforce key learning points from visiting the site. Subsequently, one of the quarry companies we worked with produced a ‘good neighbours’ leaflet featuring the archaeological discoveries from the site, and which was distributed locally.

Arranging open days for the public to visit excavations, especially as the fieldwork is drawing to an end, is an opportune way to enable local residents and the wider community to find out more about archaeology and the development scheme on their doorstep. A site tour, on-site activities and a stall with displays of objects are all key ingredients for a successful event. Demonstrating craft activities similar to those which occurred at the site enhance interpretation of the site. For example, we built a furnace and smelted iron at an Iron Age site where we found the remains of metalworking furnaces, and we have also had children making coil-built pots like those found on the site. Follow-up presentations in a community venue and to local history and other local groups provided further information on the site, including to those who could not attend the open day.



Involving schoolchildren in the archaeological process. Credit: ARS Ltd

Members of the public enjoy finding out about how people lived in the past through archaeology: it enhances their association with the places where they live, work and spend their leisure time. Besides its popularity, archaeology can add value to a company’s reputation, for example by showing their consideration of the needs of local communities and adding to their

ESG achievements. Encouraging construction and development companies to realise the benefits that archaeology offers and to support us in staging public engagement activities will help create an archaeology-positive economy. This would contribute significantly towards establishing a sustainable future for everyone.

Robin Holgate

Robin is Head of Publications and Value Creation at Archaeological Research Services Ltd. He worked as a field officer with the University College London Institute of Archaeology Field Archaeology Unit (now Archaeology South East) in the mid-1980s. He then joined Luton Museum Service, initially as Keeper of Archaeology and subsequently as Museum Director, and also established Luton Borough Council’s Archaeological Development Control Service and HER in 1996 when the Council became a unitary authority. Before joining ARS Ltd he was Assistant Director at the Museum of Science & Industry (MOSI) in Manchester, and was instrumental in establishing the Manchester Science Festival. He obtained his DPhil, focusing on Neolithic settlement and economy of the Thames Basin, at the University of Oxford. He served as chair of ClfA’s Registered Organisation Committee 2013–2020.

