



Built Heritage

Development and Archaeology

An NIEA Guidance Booklet

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An NIEA Guidance Booklet for the satisfaction of archaeological issues in planning conditions in Northern Ireland

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Introduction

With the general increase of development in Northern Ireland in recent years, archaeological information is frequently sought to inform a planning decision. In addition, more planning approvals routinely contain conditions requiring archaeological mitigation.

Planning Policy Statement 6: Planning, Archaeology and the Built Heritage (PPS6) sets out most of the Department's planning policies for the protection and conservation of archaeological remains and features of the built heritage and advises on the treatment of these issues in development plans.

This information leaflet is intended to give developers a brief outline as to how such information can be obtained and how planning conditions can be fulfilled.



Planning Proposals

In all cases the desirability of preserving an archaeological site and its setting is a material consideration in determining a planning proposal. This is much easier if archaeological issues are considered at an early stage.

Where an application is approved with conditions requiring archaeological work, it is essential that this is recognised and acted upon at an early stage to ensure the smooth running of the development works.

It is therefore in a developer's own interests to find out whether their site is known or is likely to contain archaeological remains before submitting a planning application. Informal discussions at this time will help to provide advance warning of the archaeological sensitivity of a potential site.



Sources of Information

Northern Ireland's Monuments and Buildings Record (MBR) is a publicly accessible archive of information on archaeological sites, listed and other historic buildings, historic parks and gardens, defence heritage structures, maritime and industrial heritage features.

This archive is maintained by Northern Ireland Environment Agency: Built Heritage and can be accessed on-line at **www.ni-environment.gov.uk** or in person at Waterman House, 5-33 Hill Street, Belfast. In addition to the MBR, many Area and Local Plans contain site-specific designations or information. Areas of Significant Archaeological Interest (ASAs) are designated in them, and Areas of Archaeological Potential (AAPs) in the core of historic settlements are identified. They also contain maps of parks, gardens and demesnes of special historical interest.

Other potential sources of information include the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, the Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland and the Ulster Museum. Local museums and historical societies will often have further relevant information.

Archaeological Assessment and Evaluation

An archaeological assessment may be sought to inform a planning decision. This is largely a paper-based exercise which will seek to establish the potential impacts of a development proposal on archaeological remains, or to establish the relative importance of those remains. An assessment should also include a site inspection by the developer's contracted archaeologist.

An archaeological evaluation can also be requested to inform a planning decision. This will normally involve further site surveys, including contour mapping or geophysical survey. On some occasions it will also include limited, targeted archaeological excavation. This is different to full excavation of an archaeological site, and may only be carried out by an archaeologist specifically licensed under the Historic Monuments and Archaeological Objects (NI) Order 1995 (the Order).

Archaeological assessments and evaluations assist the Department in reaching a planning decision. They also inform prospective developers of any archaeological 'risks' on their sites, and can help establish options that will minimise both the destruction of the archaeology and delays or expense for the developer.



Archaeological Mitigation

Where planning permission is granted for development that is likely to affect archaeological remains, the Department will normally set specific conditions requiring archaeological mitigation. While the Department's preferred option is the physical preservation of such remains, it recognises that it will not always be possible to achieve this. In the course of site works it may still be possible to achieve the physical preservation of remains by minor amendments of the scheme or building solutions. Excavation is often labour-intensive, expensive and time-consuming. Preservation of the remains means that future generations will have a resource to explore and enjoy, and it should also save the developer time and money in their scheme.

Developers should note that, like most other planning conditions, it is the developer's responsibility to ensure the conditions are fulfilled. Developers will normally need to commission the specialist services of an archaeologist or archaeological consultancy to carry out the mitigation on the developers' behalf. An archaeologist involved in any works that require reductions or excavations of present ground levels, even temporary reductions, will need to be specifically licensed for those works under the provisions of the Order.

Developers should also be aware that the on-site excavation recording is only one part of archaeological mitigation. Most projects will require a period of post-excavation works to include the study of what was found, specialist reports and the preparation of a final report on the archaeology.

Unexpected discovery of archaeological remains

In spite of the best research, there may be occasions when the presence of archaeological remains only becomes apparent once an approved development has actually commenced. Developers should note that, even if archaeological mitigation is not specified in their planning conditions, they are obliged under the Order and in the standard Form of Contract to report any archaeological objects which are revealed on site. Further, a Departmental Inspector has a right of entry to investigate a site if there is good reason to believe that it contains archaeological remains, whether or not they were previously known or have been reported. For more guidance, see PPS6.

Human remains

It may happen that development activities lead to the unexpected discovery of human remains, in which case the developer is also responsible for informing the PSNI and the coroner.

If the remains prove to be archaeological in nature, the developer's contracted archaeologist (or, if there was no archaeological requirement, the Department's Inspectors) will usually be prepared to inform the relevant authorities on the developer's behalf, and their professional statement will usually be sufficient to forestall a police investigation and coroner's inquest. This can be done only after an archaeological investigation of the remains has been carried out.



Procedures

Where any intrusive archaeological works are required, either to inform a planning decision or as mitigation, there is a procedure to be followed by developers and their contracted archaeologists.

In these cases, a level of archaeological mitigation will be necessary.

This can include:

- an evaluation, to determine the likelihood and nature of archaeological survival;
- a watching brief, where an archaeologist monitors topsoil stripping and other intrusive works to identify possible archaeological remains and deal with them appropriately; or
- an area excavation, where the site must be archaeologically investigated to reveal and record the existing features.

The developer will be responsible for providing the necessary archaeological expertise on site. There are archaeological companies and individual specialists who can be contracted for this purpose, and a list of practitioners can be forwarded upon request.

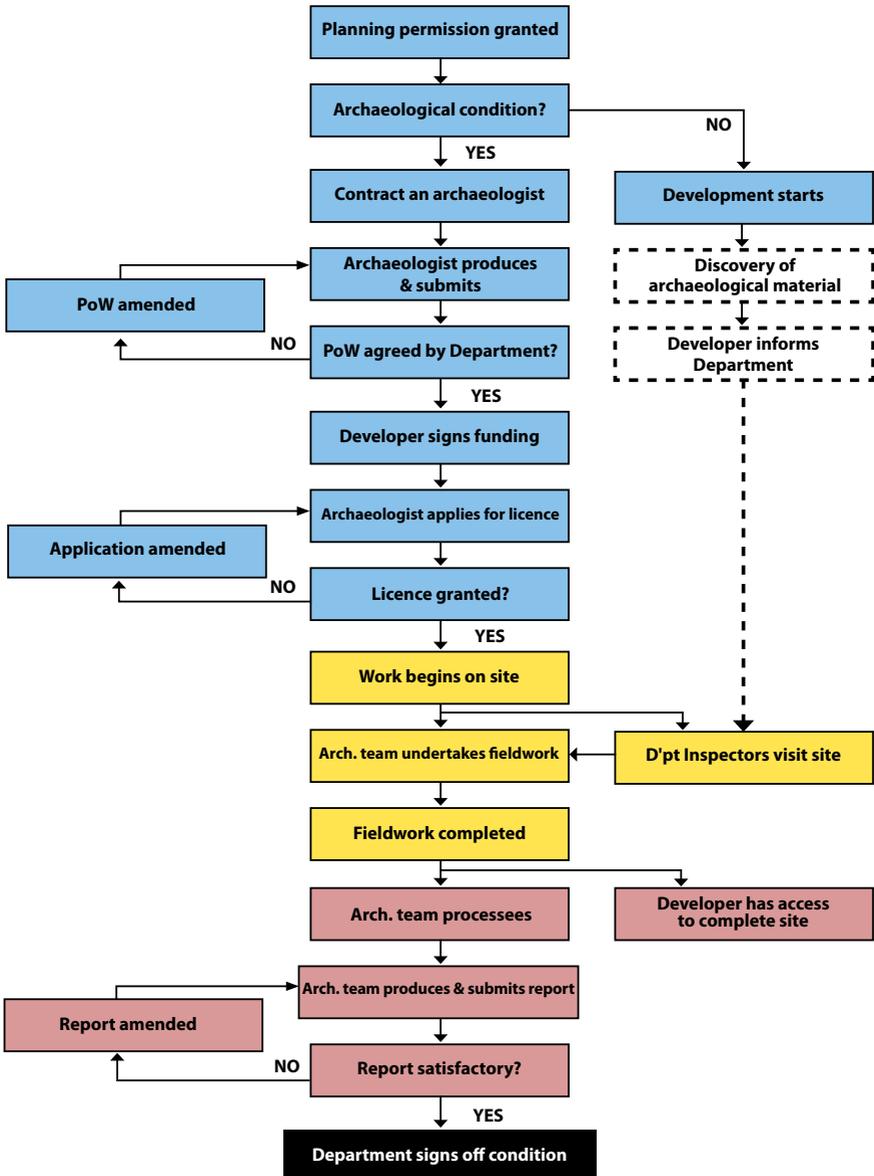
Acting on behalf of the developer, the archaeologist will conduct a desk-top survey of the area to ascertain the known or anticipated archaeological survival on site, and its probable age and nature. They also produce a Programme of Archaeological Works for identifying, investigating and recording archaeological features; this Programme of Archaeological Works must be agreed with the Department as being an appropriate approach to satisfy the planning condition.

Once the fieldwork has been completed and the archaeologists have left the site, the next phase of their work can begin. The material, drawings and data derived from the site can then be properly processed, examined by both the team and various experts, and compiled into a professional report with interpretations as to the nature, extent and age of the remains, as well as comparisons with other known sites. Ideally this procedure would have started when they were still on site, as it can take a considerable amount of time to complete.

Unless such a report is submitted to the Department, and the results being made available to both the professional and wider communities, the information will be lost as surely as if the site had been ploughed away. It is the retrieval and availability of this information that serves the public interest by having such conditions in the first place.

Only when this report has been received by the Department, and it is determined to be sufficiently complete and of an appropriately high standard, will the planning condition be signed off. Even then, if the findings were significantly interesting, publication may be necessary under the terms of the archaeologist's licence. This is not to say that development cannot continue in the interim, but the developer is still responsible for funding the off-site work until it has been completed to the Department's satisfaction.

The flow-chart opposite shows the main steps to be taken when undertaking archaeological mitigation on a development site.





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Our aim is to protect, conserve and promote
the natural and built environment for the
benefit of present and future generations.



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