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Value from Development-Led Archaeology in the UK: Advancing the Narrative to Reflect Societal Changes

Sadie Watson [1,*] and Harald Fredheim [2]

[1] Museum of London Archaeology (MOLA), London N1 7ED, UK
[2] Department of Archaeology, University of York, York YO1 7EP, UK; harald.fredheim@york.ac.uk
* Correspondence: swatson@mola.org.uk

Abstract: This paper explores how current challenges in the development-led system of archaeology in the UK are widely applicable elsewhere. Using the UK model, we explore the legislative and structural frameworks that enable archaeological work and the pressing need to better provide benefit for the wider public from that work. We believe that there is a focus on outputs rather than outcomes, which has perpetuated the idea that contracting archaeology is a product of development rather than a process that can instigate social value. We argue that the shift to public benefit and social value in UK policy should be encouraging practitioners operating within this industry to pay more attention to the links between their standard contracting practice and the benefits they deliver to people through their work. We explore why this could be a way of meeting policy priorities but also an opportunity to bridge the gaps between expert-identified heritage values and societal needs.

Keywords: development-led archaeology; public benefit; planning framework; values; heritage; cultural capital; community; policy

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1. Introduction: The Challenge

Practitioners and professionals working in cultural heritage and archaeology in the UK tend to be suspicious of attempts to reorder the methods and metrics utilised during valorisation of the assets they engage with. This is probably largely due to perceived hard-won battles during previous legislative changes and a protective (defensive even) approach to maintaining the frameworks currently in operation for fear that major changes will loosen the regulatory expectations and reduce capacity for protection of the historic environment. This can be of particular concern when archaeology is due to be impacted prior to development and therefore requires the design of a mitigation strategy, the default position in the UK legislative system. When changes and amendments are proposed, the fallback position has often been to rely upon the protections viewed by many colleagues as flimsy, although in reality the UK has some of the strongest structural frameworks working to ensure protection, conservation or mitigation of damage to heritage and archaeology; and the development-led archaeological market is robust as long as development occurs. The boom in transport infrastructure spending since 2010 has reinforced the sector [1] (p. 7) despite the internal struggles that have yet to be fully eradicated, with understandable machinations continuing over business models [2], the need to respond to these boom-and-bust scenarios [3] and a widespread concern about the sustainability of the sector itself [3–6]. There are also major concerns, shared by the authors [7], over the persistent link between commercialisation of archaeology and the subsequent ethical dilemmas that are faced daily by archaeologists working on often unpopular development projects. There is no space here to discuss these more fully, but this paper will assume the position of pragmatism on this and will propose that some of these ethical issues could be tackled if archaeology was repurposed as a provider of positive social impact, taking into account recent and ongoing developments in policy and practice. In particular, we argue that there

are specific opportunities with archaeology, given that this large resource of assets that are subject to change through excavation can provide significant public benefit during this process despite that fundamental change in their character.

2. Archaeology and Development

The vast majority of archaeological work undertaken in the UK is as a result of its inclusion in the planning system, whereby developments which impact buried or standing remains are required to enable funding and time for archaeological investigations and subsequent publicly available dissemination thereof in order to mitigate their impact. This was initially framed through the lens of preservation by record, and although more recent legislative developments have migrated towards the concept of offsetting through updates in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) for England and other legislation in the devolved nations [5], we consider the impact on fieldwork and contracting practice itself to be negligible, acknowledged widely across the profession [6].

The legal frameworks established by the UK Government in the 1990s required developers to enable the study of buried archaeological remains through funding of professional teams to excavate them, by the provision of sufficient time to undertake this within the construction programme, and by an expectation that the results would be disseminated to the public. This basic model is seen in various structures across Europe having been incorporated into the Valetta Convention in 1992. Although there are significant national variations depending on ownership of archaeological assets and how the status of undesignated assets is legally determined, the basic tenet of funding of archaeological work, the dissemination of results and the need to provide public access to cultural heritage is enshrined [8]. This methodology is now well established in Europe, nominally referred to as development-led archaeology, preventive archaeology or rescue archaeology, depending on the specific national context [9]. In the US and Australia professional practice is known as Cultural Resource Management (CRM) and is largely privatised in much the same way as in the UK, with very similar questions being raised around the provision of public benefit from this structure [10]. The burgeoning sector in many African nations is following a similar model albeit with challenges of funding and the need for legislation to reflect the modern continent rather than perpetuating the structures from its colonial past [11,12]. In all these contexts the need for archaeology to better serve local communities is stressed by both professionals and commentators, with mixed success. In an important expansion of the remit afforded to cultural heritage, the Faro Convention in Europe extended the approach to stress that cultural heritage is important because of its meaning to people and stressed the right of people to benefit from their heritage [13]. There are clear links between the intentions within the Faro Convention and our paper; however, there has been less adherence to the Faro Convention by national governments. The Amersfoort Agenda from the European Archaeological Council outlines a vision as to how there could be progress towards better integration of public benefit outcomes to archaeological projects, although it also acknowledges the need for action by national and state bodies to ensure this progress can happen [14] (p. 1). However, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) remind us of the fraught relationship between official measures of value of cultural heritage and those values held by communities [15]. These are often in conflict and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs) may in fact embed inequalities they are intended to reduce [16].

A single definition of public benefit has not been adopted, although it is widely accepted to mean as a minimum that a project will provide a positive legacy for the wider community [17], (18p. 4). This legacy could be one of many things, from attractive urban design incorporating the heritage of an area, to the provision of educational materials focussing on the archaeology on the site to local schools, and ideally the inclusion of local communities in decision-making around how the archaeology and heritage might be used to benefit them. Developers and construction companies will often have their own aims in

relation to this legacy, which is referred to within the planning and construction sectors as social value [18] (p. 14).

In the UK the development-led sector is often buoyant, yet always reliant on the churn of construction and development. Latest figures record the UK archaeological sector as being worth £258 m per year, with the sector providing up to 5300 jobs (approximately four-fifths of all archaeological employment) [19] (p. 3) with 73% of its funding sourced directly from the private sector, with a significant 34% originating from housebuilding although transport infrastructure projects increasingly provide a significant proportion [20] (p. 20; Table 20) and notably, these are funded through direct taxation. These publicly funded projects are assessed in relation to the Public Value Framework, which requires a cost-benefit analysis to be undertaken on all spending. In this context any impact on buried archaeology or other heritage is considered physical impact upon the tangible assets, with the accruing benefits (flows) from the mitigation of these impacts currently poorly understood, largely framed as providing or increasing knowledge and understanding. These flows are perceived as a result of the work rather than a potential reason for doing the work at all, given that current policy encourages an approach of preservation rather than using the impacts in a more overtly positive way.

The cost of archaeological works in relation to total UK construction sector costs was 0.13% in 2017–2018 [21] (p. 15). Despite differences in planning frameworks between the four home nations of the UK and also between types of development (i.e., national transport infrastructure is usually facilitated through an Act of Parliament), there is little that fundamentally separates how these various projects are practically approached in terms of archaeology. The 2012 (and revised in 2019) NPPF [22] further elucidated the structure within which this occurs, leading decision-makers through the process of ensuring developments provide public benefit, including through archaeological works. The UK contracting sector is embedded within this structural framework and has navigated many aspects of it successfully, through an increasingly managerial approach, the proliferation of archaeological roles within multi-disciplinary engineering consultancies and the economic outcomes outlined above, the last of which in particular would have been considered pipe dreams 30 years ago (see papers in [23]). There are distinct opportunities within the NPPF that encourage planners to consider how public benefit can be provided through the enhancement of heritage assets, which includes archaeology of both designated and undesignated status. It follows the narrative of sustainable development: that is, to provide economic, social and environmental benefits, with a clear acknowledgement that although these may not all be achievable in every case there should be a clear pathway to ensure that a combination of these three targeted outcomes are at the forefront of any plans and decisions within the planning system [22] (p. 5).

There has been a thread of concern over the public benefit provision from the sector throughout this time; with larger (usually ex-public-sector) organisations adopting the educational charity status to foreground their altruism, an increase in applications to the National Heritage Lottery Fund (NHLF) and other community funding to more consciously foreground public benefit [24] (p. 19; Table 19), as well as specific staffing recruitments aimed at increasing the level of public-focused outputs from commercially-funded work [21] (Tables 1.1.1 and 1.1.2). Sectoral reviews show that aspirations are not lacking, yet they are notable for their clear-eyed realism about how precarious some of the provisions for archaeology can be (e.g., [6] (p. 3; pp. 12–13)). The ambition of this steadily maturing profession is admirable. Nevertheless the central challenge remains of how to best provide public benefit, which we can also now define as social value, through the planning system which is not known for its flexibility and is often criticised for decisions which ignore the opinions and aspirations of local communities [25].

The planning system and the passive contracting nature of archaeological work within it certainly acts as a barrier to encouraging archaeologists to be more innovative, with the public sector and community archaeology and heritage practitioners having been more adept at thinking about the wider impact of their work, led by academic advances and

ambitious expectations from research grants and the NHLF. There have been impressively detailed and respectful methodologies for embedding community aspirations into project design and implementation in institutional contexts [26] and much UKRI research funding invested in exploring where the relevant opportunities and challenges lie (e.g., [27]).

Within the UK development-led system, the planning curatorial teams of the Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers (ALGAO) produced a guide in collaboration with the NHLF to remind applicants of their obligation to consider that archaeological outcomes are appropriately considered [17], and they have voiced their support for meaningful provision of public benefit through the planning system, framed as "economic development, regeneration, learning, leisure, tourism and local distinctiveness" [21] (p. 2). Including specifically public-facing planning conditions and other statutory expectations that require developers and archaeological contractors to incorporate public engagement into a standard project design remains largely the preserve of individually supportive ALGAO members, although with changes in the planning system this might change [19]. The key concept behind the value of directly impacted archaeology in this system, however, remains that of knowledge creation and the requirement to transfer the buried archaeological remains into knowledge through the stipulation of mitigation and thereby excavation or other forms of recording [7]. We seek to redefine this value as a myriad of possibilities, drawing on the tangible remains to elucidate the intangible values they provide. There has been acknowledgement of this need to change in the UK professional sector, with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) investing in developing concepts and moving towards providing guidance both for archaeologists [18] and for the construction industry [28].

3. External Influences

Archaeology has been seen as a magpie-like adopter of theoretical and practical mores from elsewhere—adapting its frameworks for academic enquiry from those encountered within the social sciences [29] (pp. 21–23) and early technical practice from the earth sciences [30], albeit with an individuality that is unique to our area of study. We need not be reluctant to adopt other paradigms therefore, nor slow to embrace socially responsible practice from aligned and disparate sectors. In fact, it might be time to look towards a sector we have traditionally found problematic, that of construction and development. We propose this fully aware that many archaeologists find the notion of a closer relationship perturbing, having been nominally sub-contracted to construction projects for 30 years, often frustrated at the lack of influence over the sector. This burgeoning relationship has run in parallel with an ethics-led rejection of the reality of the current situation despite maintaining and participating in the business models that enable it (for some previous and recent discussions, see [2,4,31–34]).

The construction industry uses social value terminology, which originated with the Social Value Act of 2012 [35] and has since expanded into every aspect of development, including the legislative aspects of the planning process itself. For us, the dual definitions of social value and public benefit need not be a source of confusion or concern; it responds to a socially responsible process and outcome—which inevitably requires us to open up our practice to understand how communities see this value being created and maintained. Usually the social value outcomes of a development or procurement project are assessed according to complex metrics under the umbrella categories of jobs, growth, social (i.e., people), environment and social innovation [36]. Increasingly public sector projects are assessed according to their social value outcomes, and there is growth within the private sector as organisations acknowledge the need for 'The wider social contribution that a development creates for society through how it is constructed and managed including the economic returns to the local economy, the wellbeing of individuals and communities as well as the benefits to help regenerate the environment' [35]. This is now commonly aligned with the UK office for National Statistics Social and Human Capital Frameworks [37,38], and the international United Nations Sustainable Development Goals [16], in a useful

cross-fertilisation of ideas that should theoretically allow scalable and comparable impacts from the very local to the international, all the while maintaining the focus on the need to embed social value at the heart of the design. There is a clear link here with the NPPF aims of providing sustainable development through the consideration of three, interlinked objectives: economic, social and environmental benefits [22] (p. 5). A social impact assessment is commonly being requested at the same time as the standard environmental impact assessment, and there are many ways in which archaeology can respond to these new expectations.

Although archaeological work is mandated by the planning process, it is often dealt with "as and when needed" and is rarely used to generate meaningful social value for specifically identified individuals and communities affected by a project. Nor is it used strategically by the developers funding excavations to generate social value through their schemes, largely because there is a distinct lack of awareness of the potential of archaeology to contribute and a challenging commercial context within which archaeologists are trying to make this case. This is despite the fact that archaeology has the potential to influence many of the social value metrics and criteria listed above, from investing in local economies through procurement, via the provision of skills training and employment, to delivering the intangible benefits associated with well-being. This, in turn, has the capacity to generate social value through development, but it does require the support of developers to use the archaeology for these purposes. If executed well, this collaboration should translate archaeological work into meaningful social value for local communities as well as the more business-driven targets of complementing and contributing to developer targets and objectives.

4. Reality Check

A report from the European Archaeological Council (EAC) reminds us that very few archaeologists working in the regulatory sphere across Europe will consider the social impact of a development as part of their decision-making process about how the archaeology should be treated [39] (p. 18), with the inevitable result that archaeology becomes separated from any potential for increasing the social value of the development itself, or any role in providing value beyond the 'archaeological' value provided by the material remains themselves. Similarly UNESCO stresses the need for more co-designed projects to narrow the gap between policymakers and citizens [15]. Perhaps more notable though is the assertion that the archaeologists consulted as part of the EAC study did not consider this aspect of development-led work to be their role [39] (p. 18), presumably preferring to focus on the areas of the various assessment processes they were content to contribute to—the archaeology as material remains of the past. This draws us back into the traditional view of archaeology as being a product rather than a process, and reduces the potential for innovative ways to include, consult and ultimately benefit wider communities.

The provision within planning systems of periods of public consultation is widespread, particularly with sites of known significance or those for which an environmental impact assessment (EIA) is produced [39] (p. 27). Nevertheless, the details of impacts on heritage and archaeological assets might be included in these consultation exercises, there will be very little detail and the public are generally not consulted on the design or implementation. The EAC highlight that this is against the core principles of both the Faro and Valetta conventions, but as yet the progress towards a meaningful adoption of those frameworks is slow and patchy.

There remains a persistent belief that archaeology is primarily an information-gathering activity, with an onus on knowledge creation and a sustained assumption that the public will want to learn from the historic environment. This is problematic because it assumes a level of interest in the passive receiving of information and takes the view that a didactic approach is appropriate when communicating the 'value' of archaeology [40]. Whilst it is true that the knowledge gain is significant and research value is a central aspect of the system, it is the *impact* of this research that is hard to provide evidence for and to

fully understand. However, the constantly developing social value metrics would enable archaeology to be drawn into measured evaluation of its impact, with the crucial benefit of these being project-specific, which is after all how archaeology is currently enabled through planning permissions and conditions.

A central problem with this approach of assessing value and significance within the UK planning system is that it takes the standardised heritage policy-driven measures to determine the level of archaeological intervention, and dissemination plans will also respond to these valorisation frameworks. Sites considered to have little archaeological significance in the traditional sense may actually be able to provide expansive public benefit to a local community; what is considered average by archaeological professionals will perhaps be highly valued by those who live nearby. Even highly technical practices taking place at early stages of project development such as borehole sampling can draw in a wide community of interest if an open approach is taken to this potential [41]. Belford [19] (p. 19) acknowledges the dichotomy between professionalised practice and its potentially exclusionary behaviours and we can expand this idea further to conclude that the need to provide benefit for communities and the fact that these two things may not be the same; if a very local impact is required the national frameworks will not be the best way to provide this. This is where the central challenge of this volume can be tackled, by bringing in other value frameworks to ensure that these two (potentially conflicting) interests are taken into account on an equal footing. Here it is useful to be aware of the UNESCO warning that the processes involved with the assessment of cultural heritage assets can be exclusionary [15]. The UK and other examples of development-led archaeological sectors are perhaps particularly at risk from following narratives that will enhance inequality, so there is a need to deliberately include local communities and those traditionally excluded from decision-making over changes to their local heritage.

5. Opportunities

What Perring called "wishful thinking" back in 2016 is slowly becoming more widely accepted: archaeology encountered through development can provide benefits beyond the traditional expectations of its 'use' being solely related to knowledge gain [42] (p. 102). Legislative expectations are changing rapidly in this sphere and there is clear opportunity for archaeology to embed itself as a key provider of social value, assuming we are up to the challenge. Meaningful responses to local priorities can be embedded through local plans, an instrument that uses a specifically local approach to development seeking to provide the sustainable development required by the NPPF [43] and the similarly locally-focussed neighbourhood plans, which can be as influential as local plans in some cases [44]. Here is the opportunity to include local communities in project design, implementation and delivery, in ways that allow them to voice their concerns and state their wishes over future use of the archaeology of their area.

What, therefore, would these archaeology-specific objectives look like in response to the social value frameworks? Commonly social impact assessments have a set series of impacts to be considered: jobs, growth, social, environment and innovation. All these directly relate to the international and national metrics mentioned above and are generally evaluated in relation to the National Social Value Measurement Framework [36], although many developers use their own metrics, which are broadly similar. There are myriad ways in which archaeology can be directly (and indirectly) linked to these, through the provision of employment and skills for graduates and non-graduates in a professional sector where diverse communities are underrepresented, through the well-understood narrative of knowledge creation (albeit targeted more specifically at providing increased understanding and awareness of local narratives), by ensuring that this knowledge gain directly contributes to the learning and development of local school pupils and through the provision of learning and skills opportunities for a cohort that reflects the local community. The community themselves should be identified through various stages of mapping and consultation.

The social aspects of these frameworks relate to health and well-being (individual and communal), community cohesion and an increase in reliance. Archaeology can of course provide increased personal and communal wellbeing through participation, not merely physical participation but also through the meaningful co-design of the intellectual aspects of a project. As previously stated, the specific value of a site or locale may consist of different concepts for different stakeholder groups and it would be a valuable addition to our standardised design and implementation to better understand what these might be.

If archaeology is used to generate social value, then objectives and strategies should be discussed and integrated into the project plan as early as possible. As with any programme, this will allow developers to maximise their investment as well as the social value that can be generated from the archaeological works on site. For example, if a developer wanted to foster a sense of identity for a development, then early consultation could be used to integrate archaeological knowledge into the building and/or landscape design; this would not only situate the development within the historical context of the site and surrounding land- or cityscape, but it could also be used to generate a sense of unique identity and community cohesion amongst people that people live and work on site. This of course is particularly relevant when new housing is built, as a new community is created as part of that development and embedding cohesion from the start is important to the new community members.

Alternatively, if the social value objective is to provide skills development for local community members, then archaeology could be used in a number of ways to address practical work experience, research skills, media training, and so forth. However, as with any such work, the value created also depends on community members and how much they value the experiences offered. Therefore, ideally the process would start with early community consultation and co-design of projects to maximise the value produced and gained from the assets being used. We can look to other successful examples from other sectors such as health care to expand our expertise in these areas (e.g., [45]) and to ensure that these processes involve responsible participatory methods and reduce inequalities concerning power dynamics. Issues such as the ability to participate in and influence local decision-making processes, or access to employment or educational opportunities, or income and health disparity, are all linked to differences in access to resources, inclusivity and social parity [46]. There is no need for archaeology to be concerned about the complexity of this challenge as there is no need to reinvent the wheel, but to look to other sectors as we have done throughout our development to gain inspiration and guidance.

Our recent work to communicate the potential of archaeology to respond to social value metrics with construction sector initiatives such as the Construction Innovation Hub [47] and Considerate Constructor Scheme [48] as well as the most significant rail infrastructure project in Western Europe, High Speed Rail Ltd (HS2 Ltd.) [49] have met with interest and positivity. These programmes tend to be focussed on contractual arrangements, the procurement process and overarching project strategies, thereby usually missing archaeological contractors out of the decision-making stages and ensuring that any input we can have is restricted to later stages, by which time strategies, budgets and programmes have been established. We have concluded that the potential is clear and by proactively engaging with these frameworks we can help accommodate archaeology within them rather than having to decide which parts to apply in practice once the project value has been decided without us.

6. Conclusions

We have discussed how by opening up our assessments of value to incorporate other metrics and allowing our stasis to be challenged we might approach the "critical and meaningful future of archaeology" proposed by [34] (p. 31), although his aims extended far beyond the adoption of new frameworks we are pragmatically proposing here. There are critical stages to overcome, not least of which is the tendency to rely on assumptions about 'publics' [50], although social impact assessments offer the chance to establish impacted

communities and best serve their needs. Archaeology needs to look beyond traditional metrics and analysis to absorb external developments. On a general level the focus of evaluation methods on quantitative measures is not helpful when attempting to provide value for a local community; the beneficiaries may be specific and the gains relatively small scale, but these are often more meaningful in terms of sustainable impacts. The UNSDGs are just one guide to how we might rethink our approaches and outcomes, but it will be crucial to understand that relying on standard assessments and professional opinion may not be the most appropriate or respectful way to achieve true sustainable development [15].

The purpose behind this special issue was: "building true bridges between the different agents, especially between academia and society". The bridge for us is between archaeologists and society, by coming out from behind the hoarding and opening up practice and research design to those we work adjacent to, in order (we hope) to create a more equitable and socially responsible practice. Industries such as construction and infrastructure development are beginning to consider their responsibilities at the project design stage, and whilst we are not advocating a wholescale volte face towards these metrics, we consider that a reassessment of the ultimate purpose and value of development-led archaeology could be a multi-faceted dividend for both communities and practitioners alike. There is an urgent need to reposition our practice as more than risk management or providers of knowledge, and the proposals within this paper are one stage in expanding the services that archaeology can provide to all its constituents.

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