

WORKING WITH THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT

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BPG

NOTE 14

Best Practice Guidance
for Land Regeneration

Introduction

This Guidance Note provides advice and information on how to address historic environment issues in a way that meets best practice standards and can add value to regeneration projects.

The historic environment is all around us, providing a key to understanding the past and a valued connection with the cultural heritage of people and places. It has many forms, shapes and sizes, ranging from individual features such as windmills and standing stones (Figure 1) to large-scale urban and rural historic landscapes. Individual features do not have to be centuries old to make an important contribution to the historic environment but can range in date from the last century to many thousands of years ago. There are very few parts of Britain unaffected by past human activity and changes within the landscape are an important part of the human story and experience. An understanding of the historic environment of a particular area can guide future change and provide both a framework and structure for regeneration projects.

Implementing a particular land regeneration project may involve the need to identify and conserve historic environment features (many of which will be referred to as 'archaeological sites' or 'heritage assets') in accordance with national and local government policy. Planning legislation and guidance provides helpful advice on how to successfully address historic environment issues in land-use change, regardless of whether or not a particular project requires formal planning permission.

Key documents are:

- **England:** *The National Planning Policy Framework*, published in March 2012, replacing all previous Planning Policy Statements
- **Wales:** *Planning Policy Wales and Welsh Office Circular 60/96 Planning and the Historic Environment: Archaeology*. This, in conjunction with *Planning Policy Wales and Welsh Office Circular 61/96 Planning and the Historic Environment: Historic Buildings and Conservation Areas*, provides the framework for the protection of archaeology in Wales within the planning process
- **Scotland:** *Scottish Historic Environment Policy* (2011) and *Scottish Planning Policy* (2011). A series of *Managing Change in the Historic Environment* Guidance Notes are available for use by planning authorities and other interested parties

(For information on best forestry practice and accompanying guidance see the links to the UK Forestry Standard and other sources of information at the end of this Guidance Note.)

As outlined above, historic environment (hereafter abbreviated to HE) features should not be viewed as a hindrance to land regeneration projects. For many community-based projects, such features can provide a focal or interest point with educational benefits. Similarly, archaeological interest should be seen as a guide to conserving and interpreting heritage features within woodland, especially in Community Forest areas. Because many HE features can influence design plans and may determine the nature of surrounding land use, it is imperative that HE advice is sought early in the project planning process to maximise benefit and minimise the risk of later design alterations.



Figure 1 An ancient stone circle.

This is not the place for detailed guidance on the many combinations of HE features and past and proposed types of land use. Best value is obtained by judging each feature on its own merits and in consultation with the local authority archaeologist/HE advisor, who are professionals familiar with the needs of confidential and commercial enquiries. This note is therefore intended to raise awareness of the HE, give general advice on the more common issues and provide links to further information.

Types of historic environment feature

The term 'historic environment' is increasingly used to reflect the wider aspects of cultural heritage beyond those of archaeological remains, with which most people may be familiar. More recently, a greater emphasis is being placed on landscapes, biocultural heritage (e.g. veteran and significant trees) and the historic defence of Britain. Local authority archaeologists hold and maintain a register of all the known archaeological sites in their region. These Historic Environment Records (HERs) and, in some historic towns, Urban Archaeological Databases (UADs), are the basis for all conservation and management advice. Additionally, many local authorities have now completed and mapped historic landscape characterisation for their region. The latter is related to a landscape type that has evolved through time. Where proposed changes would alter the character of highly important historic landscapes, the proposals should be changed, where possible, to complement the surroundings. For example, in a landscape with a strong historic connection to orchards, a proposed regeneration project could incorporate planting of fruit trees in the designs to complement the historic landscape character.

Some examples of HE features are given below and are shown in Figure 2:

- **Archaeological evidence.** This can range in size from find spots to field systems, hillforts and industrial sites. Burial mounds and earth banks are amongst the most common. Not all archaeological remains will be above ground and the extent of the buried archaeological resource is often unknown.
- **Historic buildings.** These can also fall under the category above, but they are currently recorded by local authorities on a different system (recent proposals suggest integrating these with archaeological records, etc., to form a single historic asset database). There has also been a drive in recent years to draw greater attention to often unrecorded, neglected farm buildings. Planting near existing settlements, especially villages, may well be affected by designations applying to the settlement (e.g. conservation areas).
- **Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC).** This describes the historic nature of a landscape and is a product of its location and past land use, both of which contribute to its appearance today. In many circumstances, this will also reflect the employment history of the local communities and form a valuable part of their cultural identity.
- **Ancient/veteran trees.** These are unlikely to appear on existing databases or records held by the local authority, unless they are the subjects of Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs), but an increasing number are recorded in national registers (see Further information section). Ancient or veteran trees (and old hedgerows) can provide important information about the history of a site and also contribute to the biodiversity. Many of the trees will have names and stories associated with them. They should be retained where possible and sympathetically managed to prolong their future.



Figure 2 Examples of historic environment features. a) A wood bank, b) former parkland boundary, c) parkland avenue, d) an ancient coppice stool, e) WWII military training trenches, f) former railway line, g) burial mound, h) park pale, i) hillfort ramparts, j) remains of a stone hut, k) WWII storage deports, l) former mining infrastructure.

Site investigation

The following guidance should be considered not only for land undergoing restoration but also for any surrounding buffer strips that are to be included in the new design plans. Where restoration is taking place after modern mineral extraction and the landscape has been drastically altered, it is unlikely that there will be many significant HE features present. Derelict land is not always devoid of interest, particularly if structures remain on site and/or there is physical evidence of past mineral extraction. There may also be geological interest in the site. On sites where buildings or industrial remains are present, these can have an historical significance and value, especially if they are relevant to the regional HLC. Where HE features are in the form of above-ground remains, they can be easily located and mapped. However, many archaeological features are not visible above ground and may be unrecorded. This may be more relevant where land-use change from agriculture is proposed, with archaeological evidence only evident from surface scatters, soil or crop marks visible in aerial photographs, or historic maps. Pasture can have more archaeological potential than arable land, but a lack of crop marks or finds often means that this resource is unknown. The degree of necessary site investigation will therefore differ depending on the type of former land use and risks associated with the proposed land-use change.

Sources and procedures that can be used to examine a site for HE features include:

- **HER.** This should always be the first port of call and is held by the local authority archaeologist (regional Archaeological Trusts in Wales) for the site in question (see ALGAO web link below for contact details). The local authority archaeologists should also be able to advise on the HLC, any recorded historic buildings in the area and also the necessity of the stages below (possibly providing direct information or contacts). However, a lack of entries within the HER for a given area does *not* mean that HE features do not exist. Buried sites may lie undiscovered and many veteran trees are likely to remain unrecorded.
- **Historic maps.** These are increasingly available online, typically dating back to the end of the 19th Century. Older tithe and estate maps may be held within local historic buildings (e.g. manor houses) or by the local record office. They can be useful in showing the land-use change of a site over the last few hundred years and provide information on the age of individual features.
- **Record offices and historic documents.** Regional record offices (found via local authorities) may hold maps, photographs and documents that can shed light on the history of a particular site. Many offices offer a search facility for which there is usually a small charge. Documents from a record office are best used in conjunction with historic maps, and may show ancient trees, hedgerows, woodland or place names that could be incorporated into proposed design plans.
- **Aerial photographs (APs).** In a similar way to historic maps, a series of APs of a given area can show land-use change over time. Aerial photograph collections hold images typically dating back to the late 1930s or early 1940s. However, unlike maps, APs are best known for their ability to show buried archaeological features in agricultural environments because of patterns created by subtle changes in soil or vegetation. Some APs are held by local authorities, but many are held by national collections (see links at the end of this Note).
- **Site visits and walk-over surveys.** Depending on the former and proposed land usage and a site's location, the local authority archaeologist may suggest a site visit to assess the site and discuss proposals. If the area is devoid of known HE features but is in a landscape surrounded by other significant features, some further investigation may be recommended. Walk-over surveys are the most common next step, involving systematic walking of a specified area, recording all features and artefacts. A concentration of artefacts found in a localised area can be indicative of a ploughed-out or buried feature. Such surveys work best with a low occurrence of ground vegetation, which can otherwise hide smaller features from view. In most circumstances, it is at this stage that veteran trees and old hedgerows could also be recorded.
- **Geophysical surveys.** There are various types of geophysical survey used to indicate below-ground features. Each method has strengths and weaknesses depending on the nature of the surrounding soil and the type of below-ground artefact present. There is no single method that will show all buried archaeological evidence. As such, advice on the most appropriate method should be sought, and more than one may be recommended. These surveys are undertaken by specialist contractors.
- **Excavations.** In a few situations, archaeological excavation may be necessary. This would normally take place when the methods above have shown something not recorded on the HER, believed to be significant and potentially under threat from the proposed land use.
- **Other remote sensing.** In addition to APs, multi-spectral, radar and lidar data are increasingly used for heritage mapping, captured from a range of platforms including satellite, manned or radio-controlled aircraft. While coverage of and access to coverage of multi-spectral or radar data is limited at this time, the use of lidar for heritage mapping is now commonplace. Local authorities can advise on what data exist for their area.

Protecting the historic environment

To what extent the survey methods listed above will be required will depend not only on former land use but also on the proposed future usage. The location of proposed plantings, landscaping and infrastructure within a restoration design plan are therefore very significant.

- **Planning.** Where important HE features are known, the preferred option is to design the land regeneration around them to minimise impacts. This typically involves working them into open spaces. For this reason, it is essential to begin to identify any HE features as early in the scheme as possible. With sympathetic regard to the feature, its context and the surrounding HLC, it will often be possible to make the feature a focal point of interest.
- **Cultivation.** This can be very damaging to the HE and should be avoided on and close to important features. On some sites cultivation may have previously occurred and, if it is necessary to cultivate again, this should be to a depth that is no greater than before. Deep cultivation and soil inversion should not be applied on or near sensitive areas. The vegetation choice should therefore be tailored to depth of cultivatable soil.
- **Site drainage.** Where archaeological evidence occurs in wetland environments, the waterlogged conditions can result in very good preservation of artefacts. If such conditions and HE evidence are known to be on site, actions that could reduce the water content should be avoided.
- **Engineering works.** Any major ground disturbance on or close to HE features can be detrimental. The extent to which engineering works can be tolerated in the vicinity of these features will depend upon the feature type, depth (if buried) and the proposed works. For example, if a feature is known to be buried below 0.5 m of soil, creating an all-access path need not be detrimental.
- **Woodland.** New woodland establishment is not usually recommended on or in close proximity to significant HE features. However, there may be exceptions to this general rule; for example if the feature originated in a woodland setting but has since been removed from that context, or perhaps ancient woodland was once on the site and the planned regeneration will replace it. Additionally, woodland may already occur on the site. If archaeological evidence is known to be deeply buried (>2 m), woodland establishment may be tolerated (depending on the type of feature) and may offer long-term site protection. Windthrow is the greatest concern usually associated with woodland and HE features. Where there is perceived to be a real risk, site management for windthrow should be proactive.
- **Vegetation management.** Most HE features will require some degree of vegetation management to prevent the encroachment of unwanted species (e.g. bracken, gorse, rhododendron or tree seedlings). Such vegetation can mask the feature and potentially cause damage.
- **Erosion control.** Burrowing mammals, grazing stock and high visitor numbers can inevitably damage an HE feature. Action should be taken to monitor and mitigate against this type of erosion.
- **Watching brief.** On some sites, a watching brief may be recommended during the engineering and establishment phases of a regeneration project. This is undertaken by a professional archaeologist and involves periodic site visits and assessments.

Further information

Forestry and the historic environment:
www.forestry.gov.uk/fr/heritage

Scotland's woodlands and the Historic Environment: www.forestry.gov.uk/website/forestry.nsf/byunique/infd-5xfmd

UK Forestry Standard: www.forestry.gov.uk/ukfs

UKFS Guidelines on Forests and the Historic Environment: www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/infd-8bvf2g

Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers (ALGAO) UK:
www.algao.org.uk/Association/ALGAO_UK.htm

England – Historic Environment Local Management Planning Tools and Policy Framework:

www.helm.org.uk/managing-and-protecting/planning-tools/

www.helm.org.uk/better-heritage-protection/a-new-planning-policy-framework/

Wales – Planning Policy Wales:
<http://cadw.wales.gov.uk/historicenvironment/policy/historicenvironmentpolicy/?lang=en>

Scotland – Planning Policy and Guidance Notes:
www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/index/heritage/policy/managingchange.htm

Further links for planning advice:
www.archaeologyuk.org/conservation/planningguide

www.bajr.org/DeveloperWeb/Planning.asp

National AP collections:

Scotland: www.rcahms.gov.uk/

Wales: www.rcahmw.gov.uk/

England: www.english-heritage.org.uk/nmr

Online national monument record search (UK):
<http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/catalogue/>

Ancient/veteran tree information:

www.ancient-tree-forum.org.uk/

www.tree-register.org/

Heritage Trees of Scotland: www.forestry.gov.uk/website/forestry.nsf/byunique/infd-6tvjzf

Contact details for UK archaeological bodies:
www.britarch.ac.uk/info/contract.asp