



How to plan an archaeological project

Starting an archaeological project can seem like a daunting task if you've never done it before. You might have a great idea for a project but how do you know if it is feasible to do it? Some projects never get off the drawing board because it is easy to underestimate the importance of doing the right things in the right order before the fieldwork starts.

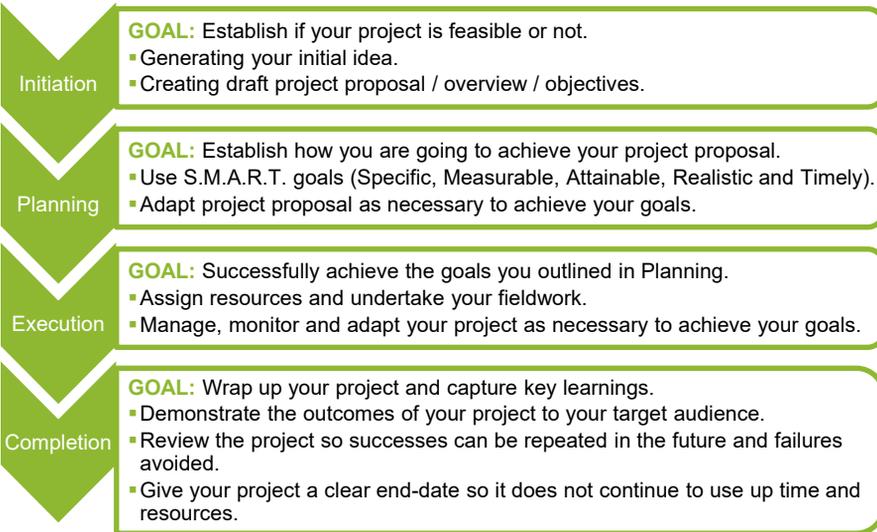
The following guide will provide a framework for you to plan your own project, will pose questions for you to ask yourself whilst you are planning your project, and will provide information and answers to some of your more probable queries.

For further information on how to carry out different types of archaeological fieldwork, finds processing, post-excavation analysis and report writing, visit:

<https://leicsfieldworkers.org/resources/fieldwork-guides/>

Project stages

Every project, no matter how large or small, has four key stages:



Planning your project

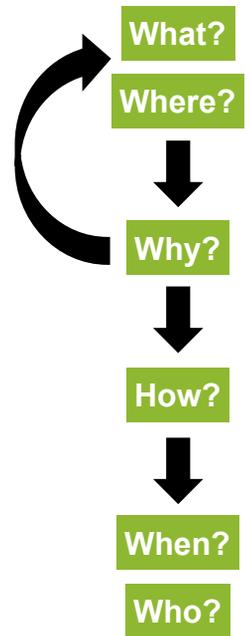
There are six basic questions in project planning, sometimes known as the 6Ws – What? Where? Why? hoW? When? and Who?

For your plan to be complete, all six questions need to be answered. For example:

*"I keep six honest serving-men
(They taught me all I knew);
Their names are What and Why and When
And How and Where and Who."*

Rudyard Kipling

What?	Fieldwalking	Test-pitting	Excavation
Where?	A newly ploughed field	Across my village	At a deserted medieval village
Why?	To find out if there is any evidence of past human activity in the field, or not	To find out how the village has developed and changed over time	To find out when the village was deserted.
How?	Fieldwalking with fieldwork group, processing finds, getting finds identified, reporting back to group, sending a report to Historic Environment Record (HER)	Test-pits dug by homeowners in their own gardens, processing finds, getting finds identified, reporting back to village, sending a report to HER	Trenches dug across house platforms and other earthworks, processing finds, getting finds identified, reporting back to group, sending a report to HER.
When?	Sometime in the next few weeks before crops germinate	Over a single weekend in the summer	One week in the summer
Who?	Local fieldwork group members	Homeowners and their families, other volunteers	Volunteers supervised by a professional archaeologist



Ethical Archaeology

REMEMBER: Archaeology is inherently destructive. We have one chance to gather data and justifiable conclusions can only be extrapolated from the data we have collected. As archaeologists we have a responsibility, therefore, to treat our collective heritage with respect and safeguard it for future generations.

Before you start your project, you need to be clear about what you want to find out, why and how.

- Do you have a legitimate research reason for working on your site?
- Are you rescuing archaeology that might be lost or just treasure hunting?
- Is a destructive approach, such as excavation, appropriate?
- Can the same goals be achieved by less destructive means, such as fieldwalking, or non-intrusive methods such as geophysical survey?
- Will you be bringing the wrong kind of attention to your site (leaving it vulnerable to illegal metal detecting for example)?
- Do you have the training and resources to properly record what you find and ensure the results are available for future generations?

Sometimes, this means making the hard decision to leave the archaeology undisturbed, even though you really really want to investigate it.

If the decision is made to investigate, it is your responsibility to make a **careful**, **accurate** and **lasting** record of what you find.



Initiating your project

Before you start planning your project, you need to be clear about what you want to do, you need to have carried out some background research and you need to get appropriate permissions in place to access your proposed study area / carry out the proposed fieldwork.

Aims and objectives

Broadly speaking, the aim of **ALL** archaeological projects is to **IDENTIFY, CHARACTERISE, RECORD, REPORT** and **ARCHIVE**.

That is:

- Identify the presence/absence of any archaeological deposits and artefacts.
- Establish the character, extent and date range for any archaeological deposits and artefacts present.
- Record any archaeological deposits and artefacts present.
- Advance understanding of the heritage assets.
- Produce a report and archive of any results.

Community-based projects may also have broader aims which are indirectly related to the archaeological ones, such as:

- To **INVOLVE** local people in excavating archaeological test-pits to discover when and where past settlement took place.
- To **INSPIRE** and **STIMULATE** wider interest in the history of the local community by giving people the **OPPORTUNITY** to take part in a hands-on archaeological project.

It is also important to have your own research objectives. These will:

- Guide your work and give your project structure.
- Give you something to aim for and focus your attention.
- Shape your methodology, execution and end result.
- Ensure everyone is working towards the same goal.

Key to defining your research objectives will be some initial background research. For instance, research before you start will tell you:

- If the work has already been done.
- If there are any restrictions on the site.
- If there is anything which might make you change your methodology and execution.
- If there is anything which might help you achieve your goals.

Regional Research Agendas

There are regional and county overviews of the current state of archaeological knowledge in England. These are very useful source of background information. They comprise three elements:

- A Resource Assessment:** An overview of the current state of knowledge and understanding in the region.
- A Research Agenda:** Recognition of the potential of the resource, gaps in our knowledge and an unprioritised list of research topics.
- A Research Strategy:** A prioritised list of research objectives (seen as flexible over time and subject to change as new research is carried out).

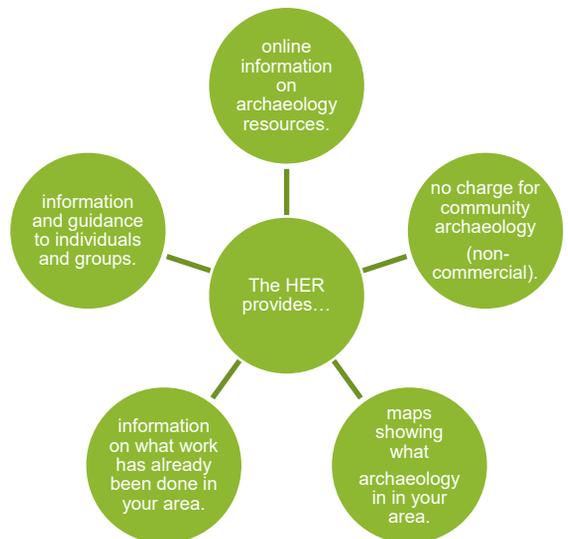
Research Agendas exist for: East of England, East Midlands, North East England, North West England, Solent Thames, South West England, West Midlands, Yorkshire & Humber. They should all be freely available online.

Gathering information

Increasingly, today there is a wide range of free online resources which can help you gather background information.

Your first place to look should be the Historic Environment Record (HER). HERs are an important starting point for anyone interested in the archaeology, built heritage, and history of an area. They can provide comprehensive information on a wide variety of buildings and sites within a defined geographic area, from finds of prehistoric flint tools to medieval castles and Second World War pillboxes.

- HERs are public records and welcome enquiries.
- Nearly two-thirds of HERs are available online through the Heritage Gateway <http://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/gateway/> where you can cross search several national as well as local datasets on the historic environment.
- You can find an HER contact list at: <https://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/gateway/chr/default.aspx>



Other useful links

Geological information

- <http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html>

Topographical information

- <https://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx>
- <https://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/business-and-government/products/opendata.html>
- https://www.google.co.uk/intl/en_uk/earth/versions/

Historical & archaeological background

- <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/>
- <https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/>

Domesday Book & place names

- <https://opendomesday.org/>
- <http://kepn.nottingham.ac.uk/>

Historic Maps (National Library of Scotland)

- <https://maps.nls.uk/>

DON'T FORGET
a trip to the Record Office for sources of information not currently online.



Permissions

REMEMBER: Before you start fieldwork, you **MUST** get permission to access the site from both the landowner and the occupier. If the owner and occupier are different individuals / organisations, you **MUST** get permission from both parties.

DO NOT think that you can 'get away with it!' Carrying out archaeological work on land without permission from the owner and the occupier is **TRESPASS**. Whilst trespass is not generally considered a criminal offence it is actionable in the civil court, and any damage caused whilst trespassing may be considered criminal damage as set out in Section 1 of the Criminal Damage Act 1971.

To protect yourself and the landowner / occupier:

- Clearly explain what you want to do and get permission in writing.
- Get clear agreement about the location of the fieldwork.
- Establish finds ownership before you start work (see below).
- Establish publicity/publication agreements before you start work – if someone will let you access their property but only on the condition you cannot publish your findings, ask yourself is your project ethical? Should you proceed?

This can be laid out in a single agreement letter that the owner and occupier can sign. Pro forma templates for agreement letters can be downloaded from:

<https://leicsfieldworkers.org/resources/fieldwork-guides/>

REMEMBER: Both the landowner and the occupier have the right to refuse access. If this happens, be polite and respect their wishes. **DO NOT** antagonise them with repeated requests. You might irreversibly sour relations, which otherwise could have reversed in the future.

Finds Ownership

Ownership of archaeological finds rests in the first instance with the landowner, except where overridden by specific laws (e.g. Treasure Act 1996; Burials Act 1857 etc.). With this in mind, before you start your project it is worth establishing finds ownership with the landowner. Two options are generally acceptable for the long-term storage of archaeological material.

1. Finds are kept by the landowner but allowed to be studied and identified before they are handed back.
2. The landowner transfers ownership of finds to the discoverer with the proviso that once studied and identified, title is transferred to an appropriate archiving authority for storage in perpetuity.

Once your project is completed, it is best **NOT** to keep finds yourself. **THINK:** If something was to happen to you, what would happen to the finds? Could they unwittingly be thrown away by someone unfamiliar with their significance?

If you plan to deposit your project's archive and finds with an archiving authority (such as a local museum) you will probably need to ask them for an accession number - a unique identifier assigned by the archiving authority to your archive so it can be easily tracked and located in the future.

Local Knowledge

Talk to the landowner / occupier and other locals. They will be best placed to tell you about the area's local history, past land uses, the location of potential hazards and services, suitability of fieldwork locations etc.

Scheduled Ancient Monuments

Are you planning on working on a Scheduled Ancient Monument?

If so, **REMEMBER**, under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 it is against the law to:

- Disturb a scheduled monument by carrying out works (outside Class Consents) without Scheduled Monument Consent.
- Cause reckless or deliberate damage to a monument.
- Use a metal detector or remove an object found at a monument without a licence from Historic England.

Consent is required **IRRESPECTIVE** of other permissions that have been granted or other legal requirement that are being followed. Non-intrusive work such as geophysical survey does not need Consent but does need a Section 42 licence.

If in doubt, find out more at:

<https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/planning/consents/smc/>

Or get advice from the relevant Historic England Inspector of Ancient Monuments at:

<https://historicengland.org.uk/about/contact-us/local-offices/>

Human Remains

Are you planning on working on or likely to find human remains?

REMEMBER, under the Burials Act 1857 it is against the law to disturb or remove human remains from their place of burial without lawful authority.

If human remains are discovered, work **MUST** stop immediately, and the police and coroner informed.

- The coroner or the police need not be informed of the discovery of human remains if they are properly interred in a recognised burial ground or if there is reason to suppose that the burial is more than 100 years old (i.e. archaeological).
- **BUT**, if in doubt, always call the Police!

Various laws, both secular and ecclesiastical, provide a framework for the treatment of human remains according to the type of burial place, the ownership of the land, and the future use to which the site is to be put.

- Permissions on land subject to the legal effects of consecration are controlled by the Church of England.
- Otherwise secular controls apply, and a licence must be obtained from the Ministry of Justice.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apply-to-excavate-human-remains-for-archaeological-purposes>

Treasure

In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, all finds of gold and silver objects, and groups of coins from the same find, over 300 years old, are considered **TREASURE** under the Treasure Act 1996. Prehistoric base-metal assemblages also qualify as Treasure under the Treasure (Designation) Order 2002.

REMEMBER: You **MUST** report treasure to the local coroner within 14 days of finding it, or within **14 days** after the day you realised the find might be treasure. Find your local coroner at: <https://www.coronersociety.org.uk/coroners/>

The Portable Antiquities Scheme can help you report treasure and archaeological finds. Find your local Finds Liaison Officer at <https://finds.org.uk/contacts>

For more information: <https://finds.org.uk/documents/advice.pdf> or www.gov.uk/treasure



Other considerations

The Team

Recruiting likeminded people to join your project probably won't be difficult. Many people have a very real interest in the past and all they need is an opportunity to turn their interest into active pursuit.

How will you recruit your team?

- Collaboration with other existing groups. Local history societies, archaeology groups and museum volunteers will almost certainly help spread the word and are good groups to recruit from.
- Advertise on social media, local information boards and in neighbourhood magazines and newspapers.
- Hold a public meeting where you can explain what you want to do and can recruit volunteers.

Start small. Recruit a core group of people who can help you plan and organise. Once you are ready to execute your project you can expand your team to meet your needs.

Equipment

The equipment you need will depend on the type of fieldwork you plan to carry out. In most instances, basic archaeological equipment is readily available. Most of what you need might already be in your shed or garage, or can be purchased from a garden centre or hardware store. Ask yourself:

- What will you need?
- Will it be individually or group owned?
- Where will it be stored?
- Will a budget be needed to buy items?
- Will you need special equipment (e.g. a digger, safety fencing)?
 - Where will you get it from?
 - Will you need a qualified operator?

Welfare and Transport

Depending on the nature and duration of your projects, its location and the time of year, you might need to provide welfare facilities for your team.

- Do you need toilets? Is there access to a toilet nearby or will you need to hire a portaloos?
- Will you have a lot of equipment and people? Will you need to hire a cabin/tool store?
- What will the weather be like? Will you need to provide shelter (e.g. pop-up gazebos)?
- How will people get to your site? Is site access dangerous? Will you need to make parking arrangements? Can people car share?

Written Scheme of Investigation

The best way to formulate your plan is to write it down in a written scheme of investigation. This is also known as a Project Design. It is a method statement which outlines what you are going to do and how. It can be as complex or simple as you want and it should contain all pertinent background information so everyone knows what to do and how. A template can be downloaded from:

<https://leicsfieldworkers.org/resources/fieldwork-guides/>

REMEMBER: Be S.M.A.R.T. (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timely).

Health and Safety

For more detailed information on health and safety advice in archaeology see **Fieldwork Guide #1a**. When planning your project, health and safety considerations should include:

- A Risk Assessment identifying potential hazards, the risk of harm and suitable control measures to reduce the risks. It is a good idea to carry out a site visit **BEFORE** you write your risk assessment.
- Are you insured? You may need to provide public liability and employer's liability insurance (depending on the wording of your policy).
- Volunteer participation disclaimer (GDPR compliant).
- A health & safety briefing for volunteers before fieldwork starts
- Are your volunteers' tetanus shots up-to-date?
- Who will be a first aider and where will the first aid kit be kept?

REMEMBER: Identify risks and how to avoid them before you start!

A useful **BAJR Guide 20: Basic Health and Safety Advice in Archaeology** can be found at:

<http://www.bajr.org/BAJRGuides/20.%20Basic%20Health%20and%20Safety%20Advice%20in%20Archaeology/HSAdvice.pdf>

Reporting your results

What will you do once your fieldwork is complete? It is important to make the results of your fieldwork accessible to others:

- So fieldwork can be viewed in a wider archaeological and historical context.
- Because our heritage is not private property. It is a shared resource and others have a right to know what was found – **HERITAGE FOR ALL!**

The best way to make results available is through a report sent to the relevant Historic Environment Record (**HER**)

- This is usually known as grey literature – a document which is protected by intellectual property rights, which is of sufficient quality to be collected & preserved, but is not controlled by commercial publishers, i.e. publishing is not the primary activity of the producing body.

Projects can also be reported to the Online Access to the Index of archaeological investigationS database (**OASIS**) and accessed via the Archaeological Data Service (**ADS**).

- OASIS <https://oasis.ac.uk/pages/wiki/Main>
- ADS <https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/>

Funding

Regardless of how large or small your project is, there will always be a need for some funding. Will you need to pay for:

- Professional archaeological supervision?
- Equipment?
- Finds identification / specialist reports?
- Conservation and archiving?
- Other costs – stationary and printing, venue hire, vehicle hire, catering etc.?

Where will your funding come from? Possible sources of funding include:

- The Heritage Fund (formerly the Heritage Lottery Fund)
- Commercial sponsorship (local businesses)
- Community funding / fund raising (local societies)
- Local authority community grants and funding