

New Forest National Park: Archaeological Research Strategies

National Parks as part of their ongoing work have been required to develop Cultural Heritage Strategies. The New Forest Cultural Heritage Strategy workshops identified the need for undertaking an archaeological resource assessment to allow the development of research agenda and strategies for the New Forest National Park and surrounding areas. It was recognised that the regional research strategy and documentation was in many ways deficient for the New Forest area given the then lack of information in the Hampshire County Council (HCC) Archaeological and Historic Buildings Record (AHBR). This along with the Wiltshire HER are the local Historic Environment Records (HERs).

A suite of individual archaeological research documents have been produced as stand-alone items. As a result much information within these documents has been duplicated.

The reasons for developing research strategies simply put are:

To provide guidance:

- For those undertaking archaeological work through the formal planning application process.
- For local voluntary sector groups and individuals wishing to undertake meaningful archaeological survey and investigations.
- For the academic sector to know where gaps in archaeological knowledge might be usefully researched.

Significantly most archaeological invasive work is undertaken through the formal planning process where the Local Planning Authority imposes archaeological planning conditions to consents for development. The standard conditions are attached as an *appendix* below.

The first stage of this process, to meet the planning requirements, is usually a desk-based assessment (DBA) of available archaeological information easily accessible and obtained from the Historic Environment Record (HER). This work is often undertaken by firms or archaeological contractors and consultants, with little local knowledge or experience of the New Forest. The research strategies are designed as an aid to their understanding and to direct them to providing appropriate proposals in relation to these developing research strategies in their Written Schemes of Investigation (WSIs).

Enhancing the availability of easily accessible public archaeological records has thus been a priority of the New Forest National Park since 2006. This has been partially met through the enhancement of the Authority's archaeological evidence base via the Rapid Coastal Zone Archaeological Assessment (maritime) HLF funded project and also through the New Forest Remembers, Second World War HLF funded Project. The historic environment work of the New Forest Higher Level Stewardship and other HLS schemes has also made significant contributions to improving the evidence base through the acquisition of Lidar, infra-red and aerial photographic data. Much more work in enhancing the evidence base is still needed and is in part

being met by projects within the New Forest's *Our Past, Our Future* HLF Landscape Partnership Scheme and through undertaking archaeological Service Level Agreements (SLAs) with the Forestry Commission and New Forest District Council.

It is a standard requirement of recommendations arising from DBAs that archaeological contractors and consultants have access to and refer to relevant archaeological research agenda and strategy documents to inform the archaeological mitigation strategy required for planning purposes. Most relevant is the Peer reviewed *Solent Thames Research Framework for the Historic Environment* 2014 <https://library.thehumanjourney.net/2597/> that includes resource assessments and research agendas. Also, the Hampshire strategy;

http://www3.hants.gov.uk/hampshire_archaeological_strategy_2012.doc

Objectives and aims

The Archaeological Research assessments for the New Forest National Park are intended to survey and define all aspects of the rich and diverse history of the area and to produce an agenda to address the key archaeological heritage issues and gaps in our knowledge. The aim is to ensure that decisions about future development are undertaken with the most up-to-date information available. That the research potential of the archaeological work is quickly recognised and opportunities for investigation are seized. It will also enable the archaeological resource to be further interpreted, made more widely available and displayed to best effect; providing learning opportunities for all and information to enhance the quality of the visitor experience and to foster the economic vitality of the area.

There are three stages required to achieve the necessary outcomes based on the English Heritage approach:-

- **Resource Assessment,**
- **Research Agenda**
- **Research Strategy.**

Resource Assessment

Following the NFNPA Cultural Heritage workshop on 31 January 2013, that involved over 20 individuals, representing a wide range of local heritage organisations, it was clear that initially there was a need to collate existing data for each period and possibly major themes, followed by gap analysis that could then lead to developing the archaeological research agenda and strategy to inform future decision making.

The research strategies for the various periods and topics that have currently been developed for the New Forest have not involved a thorough resources assessment as defined by Historic England. Instead they have relied upon local knowledge and the expertise of colleagues from the commercial, voluntary, academic and local government sectors through the period and thematic seminar sessions.

Full resource assessments it is hoped will be developed to further refine the documents currently available. As further survey, excavation and archaeological

work takes place within the New Forest and surrounding areas, these documents will be regularly updated, especially where comments contributions and reports are received into *New Forest Knowledge* <https://nfknowledge.org> and via the local HER.

Research Agendas

The archaeological gap analysis produced through the seminar approach as described above is seen as a short-term quick-fix before a full resource assessment can be undertaken. These seminars have provided pointers to where our knowledge is incomplete and have suggested approaches to address questions and perceived priorities which have arisen from the discussions. The results for each period or thematic seminar has then been developed so that it can be circulated widely to both professional and non-professional organisations and individuals and placed on publicly accessible web sites for the views, comments and revisions.

Research Strategy for the archaeology of the New Forest National Park

The final phase of this work and the main outcome is to produce a fully informed archaeological Research Strategy for the New Forest National Park and surrounding areas once a full resource assessment has taken place. This will address the issues raised in the Agendas and consider how our understanding of the cultural and archaeological heritage of the area can be furthered and communicated in challenging financial times.

Next Steps

- Determine the methodology for the resource assessment.
- Source materials to be consulted; how to collate the data and how to provide the information to inform the revision of the results of the period seminars.
- Commission preparation of a funding application to Historic England to obtain resources for a resource review, to meet Historic England guidance and to cover the geological zone of the west side of the Hampshire Basin, from Southampton Water to Poole.

Appendix 1

A) No demolition/development shall take place/commence until a programme of archaeological work including a Written Scheme of Investigation has been submitted to and approved by the local planning authority in writing. The scheme shall include an assessment of significance and research questions; and:

1. The programme and methodology of site investigation and recording
2. The programme for post investigation assessment
3. Provision to be made for analysis of the site investigation and recording
4. Provision to be made for publication and dissemination of the analysis and records of the site investigation
5. Provision to be made for archive deposition of the analysis and records of the site investigation
6. Nomination of a competent person or persons/organisation to undertake the works set out within the Written Scheme of Investigation.

B) No demolition/development shall take place other than in accordance with the Written Scheme of Investigation approved under condition (A).

C) The development shall not be occupied until the site investigation and post investigation assessment has been completed in accordance with the programme set out in the Written Scheme of Investigation approved under condition (A) and the provision made for analysis, publication and dissemination of results and archive deposition has been secured.