

DCCAS Guidance on the Preparation of WSIs

Introduction

Durham County Council Archaeology Section (DCCAS) introduced a document entitled *Standards for All Archaeological Work in County Durham and Darlington* in 2017, and this is regularly updated (latest version available at <http://www.durham.gov.uk/article/2006/Development-management-advice>). The aim of this was to standardise practices and encourage consistency in archaeological work in County Durham and Darlington.

In the case of developments requiring further evaluation post-decision, planning conditions imposed on planning permissions by DCC require adherence to the standards set out in the document. This has also been agreed with Darlington Borough Council.

Embedding these standards in the Conditions allows us to adjust the format of Written Schemes of Investigation (WSIs) to make them more concise and focussed, and hopefully also make them more useful to all involved in archaeological work.

All WSI's submitted as of 01 April 2021 need to conform to this new format.

Primary Change – A site-specific approach

The most significant change being proposed is for information included in the Standards document to no longer be repeated in WSIs prepared by contractors. This will make WSIs much shorter. This does not mean that there can be no variation from the DCCAS standards, however the assumption will be that methods detailed in our standards document will be employed unless stated otherwise. This is reinforced by the reference to the standards document in planning conditions. A statement along the lines of "Unless otherwise stated, the provisions in Standards for archaeological work in County Durham and Darlington v 3 2022 will be adhered to" should be included in all WSI's to ensure that it is clear to all involved that this is the case (the date and version can be updated as needed).

If a variation from our standards is necessary, the case should be made in the WSI. This should detail the proposed change and the justification. If the proposed change is accepted, then the method in the WSI will supersede the standard.

The shorter WSIs should focus more on the research questions and methodological details relating to the specific site in question and the proposed works.

Research questions should now be more specific to the nature of the remains present. Referencing the North East Regional Research Framework (NERFF) is already an expected element of WSIs however by creating a site-specific document, research questions can be used to better effect. Questions may still be broad at the evaluation level i.e. confirmation of the presence of archaeological remains, their general nature and date would be acceptable. At mitigation there is an expectation that further detail should be provided i.e. **what** specific questions within NERFF will the work address? And **how** will this work do that?

Methodological proposals also need to be site specific and should focus on how the work can answer the research questions. It is also important to consider whether there are specific investigative or scientific techniques which will help to answer these questions.

Other Changes

Based on recent training, WSIs will also need to provide further information on the following areas.

Preservation of Archaeological Remains

This is a new proposal based on the recent Historic England guidance called *Preserving Archaeological Remains* (2016) available via <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/preserving-archaeological-remains/>. This document is embedded with the ethos of the NPPF, and seeks to characterise not only the types of remains, but also to understand their significance.

The aim of this section is to characterise the nature of the preservation of the archaeological remains in order to inform the rest of the WSI. It should incorporate information on the nature of the topography, previous land use, previous archaeological work in the vicinity, as well as information on the solid and drift geology (information that is already included in WSIs). This information is gathered in order to understand the types of preservation that may be encountered, and how this might affect excavation and sampling strategies; not just to report these conditions, but to consider why they are relevant for the site. This should seek to answer not only the nature of the burial medium of the archaeological remains, but also the relevance this has to the types of artefactual and ecofactual material expected for the site type being explored. For example, techniques employed on waterlogged and well-drained sites will differ significantly.

Sampling Strategy

This will be informed by the previous section and will help to answer research questions as fully as possible. It will also allow for resources to be focused as effectively as possible. This should detail eg how differential sampling of linear features will be determined, and why different strategies may be relevant. For example, settlement related linears could be investigated more than field boundaries on a site.

Similarly, it is acceptable to refer to an in-house or other document (such as a recording manual) regarding what this may be. However, if this is done it is the WSI producer's responsibility to ensure DCCAS have access to the relevant documentation

Archiving

We would draw your attention to the additional requirements relating to archiving in our Standard—the need for a Digital Management Plan and use of the CiFA Archive Selection Toolkit

Reporting

WSIs should also be more precise when discussing reports. In some cases, multiple reports may be needed including a post-excavation assessment report and the final report. In many cases, these will be combined but it should not be assumed at the WSI stage. For guidance, see *Advice Note for Post-Excavation Assessment* (ALGEO, 2015) available via https://www.algao.org.uk/sites/default/files/documents/ALGEO_England_PXA_Advice_Note.pdf

Finally, with regard to any aspect of WSI's, if there is any doubt, please contact DCCAS to discuss the particular case, so that a way forward can be agreed.

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