



The Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP  
Prime Minister  
Office of the Prime Minister  
10 Downing St  
London  
SW1A 2AB

17 July 2020

Dear Prime Minister,

### **ARCHAEOLOGY'S CONTRIBUTION TO CONSTRUCTION-LED RECOVERY**

We welcome the announcement that the government is committed to ensuring economic recovery through an ambitious programme of infrastructure spending and housebuilding.

Development-led archaeology contributes to this goal by effective investigation, leading to greater understanding and conservation of heritage assets before and during development. There is a well-tested, staged system in the planning process designed to protect our historic environment, put it to work for public benefit, minimise costs and delays, and contribute to good place-making, local distinctiveness, and community identity. The UK is a world leader in archaeological research and development and our heritage management system is a model for others.

Through their role in advising planning authorities and providing services to developers, archaeologists can enable well-balanced and informed planning decisions by assessing how heritage assets can be protected from needless harm, and how their investigation can add value to the development, to local people and the wider community. Where harm to the assets is necessary to deliver other public benefits, developers commission archaeological investigation and dissemination of findings, normally secured through planning conditions.

The system works for the benefit of all. Over 30 years it has revolutionised our understanding of the past. It is not cited as a reason for major delay by developers<sup>1</sup>, nor is it identified as a factor preventing build-out rates<sup>23</sup>. It removes from the public purse most of the cost (£258m in 2019<sup>4</sup>) of safeguarding and unlocking a vital source for the history of our country.

There are cases where existing policy has not been properly applied and in consequence the public has lost value that the proper application of the planning policy could have delivered. This

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<sup>1</sup> Cornerstone Projects Ltd, [Delays in Construction Projects](#) (2017)

<sup>2</sup> Letwin, O. [Independent Review of Build Out: Final Report](#) (2018)

<sup>3</sup> Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers (ALGAO), [Archaeology in Development Management](#) (2019), p.16

<sup>4</sup> [State of the Archaeological Market Survey Report, 2019](#) (2020)

has been manifested through unrecorded destruction of our history, whilst developers have suffered costs, delays and reputational damage.<sup>5</sup>

Aspirations to 'build back better' must include safeguards that protect both the environment (in this case the historic environment) and a smooth development process. We are committed to ensuring that our work is proportionate, streamlined and as efficient as possible, but we need Government to leave us the tools we need to do our job in the nation's recovery.

Given the speed of reforms, please would you assure us that new approaches will maintain existing planning safeguards for the historic environment, protecting thousands of jobs in our industry and the local supply chain? More important, we ask whether you will ensure that our nation's unique cultural heritage is conserved, investigated and interpreted so that everyone gains from the economic, social and environmental benefits it offers.

Yours faithfully,



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Chief Executive, ClfA



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Paul Drury  
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President, Society of Antiquaries of London

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<sup>5</sup> Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, [Archaeology and Planning Case Studies, Vol. 1](#) (2019) p.32

## **Appendix: Why does archaeology matter?**

Everything that is special about Britain has been shaped by millennia of daily human lives – creativity, conflict, changing beliefs and technologies.

Archaeology is about uncovering, recording and interpreting that story. Historic records start only 2,000 years ago, but our cultural heritage extends back for over 500,000 years, and archaeology is the only way of understanding and appreciating this rich and diverse past. Even during historic times, it helps explain the growth of our towns and cities and the evolution of our countryside as well as our relationships with nature and the spiritual world.

- Archaeology is key to understanding an irreplaceable store of human history, most with no written record and sometimes highly vulnerable.
- Understanding and appreciating this legacy makes a core contribution to our sense of who we are as a nation, and in our communities.
- A sense of place and a common cultural perspective are essential ingredients of quality of life for communities and for individual citizens.
- Archaeology links people in a direct way with continuity and change in our society and our surroundings.
- In common with other disciplines in the historic environment, archaeology makes a major contribution to the tourist economy and to heritage-led regeneration.

## **How can we make the most of the UK's archaeology?**

We want to make sure that we can harness the full value of archaeology to deliver social, environmental, and economic benefits. We desire to promote the distinctive contribution that archaeology makes in the historic environment in collaboration with national heritage agencies, and Government officials and politicians from all political parties, such as members of the All-Party Parliamentary Archaeology Group (APPAG).

To do this we need

- a widely shared understanding of the importance, relevance and benefits of archaeology as a means for understanding past and present people and places;
- a robust statutory and planning policy framework;
- a sustainable commercial archaeological planning sector that supports and enhances developers; and
- sustained investment in national and local government planning advisory historic environment services and museums, and facilitating funding for the voluntary sector to improve delivery of social, cultural and educational benefits and community involvement.