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Critical Review of Role-play scenarios undertaken as part of Project Design module

Introduction

The other students and I were tasked with several scenarios across the module. This review sets out the content of each scenario, its aim and whether I would have changed my approach if faced with a similar scenario again.

Project Start Up Exercise

In the first task we played the role of a prospective archaeological consultant approached by a developer hoping to develop an area of the Gwent levels for a test tidal energy weir. The aim was to analyse the project area for its archaeological potential. We had to consider what further information we would need about the development, the significance of the heritage assets, and what stages of work should be proposed to Goldcliff Tidal Ltd.

Initially I identified that the area of the proposal would have significant geoarchaeological potential as well as a high risk for waterlogged remains due to the closeness of the Severn Estuary, which would indicate the presence of the former coastline. Due to this significance, we suggested that we would need to understand more of the development methodology. For example, would the proposed tidal energy weir fill the entirety of the development area or would it only affect a small portion. This would have an impact on the proposed mitigation strategy for the site as excavating the entirety of the site would cost the client significantly more than excavating a smaller portion. I suggested a programme of work consisting of a desk-based assessment (DBA) alongside geoarchaeological borehole sampling and a geophysical survey. The DBA would aim to determine 'as far as is reasonably possible from existing records, the nature, extent and significance of the historic environment within a specific area' (Chartered Institute For Archaeologists 2014, 4). The aim of geoarchaeological assessments is to 'understand site formation processes, [as well as] issues concerning site preservation, refining field interpretations of archaeological contexts and identifying changes in the physical landscape through time' (Historic England 2015).

In this particular scenario identifying changes in the physical landscape would be particularly important given the nearness of the tidal estuary to the development area. The geophysical survey would allow us to understand whether any below ground archaeological features are present within the development area prior to any

intrusive excavations. Given the potential waterlogged conditions that may be present on the site, the borehole assessment would be particularly important for identifying suitable areas for the geophysical survey.

HER Task

In order to better understand the whole archaeological project planning process, we were asked to undertake a task aimed at context planning and research. I felt most confident undertaking this due to my historic environment background, however, it was extremely beneficial hearing the thoughts of my fellow classmates who came from commercial backgrounds. The task asked us to consult the Derbyshire Historic Environment Record (HER) for a small development looking to convert farm buildings to create 2 dwellings, a yard, and outbuildings. We were given 30 minutes to assess the HER, emulating a rapid assessment in the real world. I identified three monuments; a burnt mound to the north west of the development site, evidence for Medieval ridge and furrow identified through aerial photographs, and a potential Bronze Age barrow. My cohort also identified a number of historic buildings associated with nearby farmsteads which I had initially dismissed as they were further away from the development than the other monuments. However, if I had another attempt to consider this site, I would ensure that I had considered the setting of nearby properties, an area where my knowledge is weakest.

As I had the most HER experience, I was asked to chair the discussion. This was a really interesting experience for me as I was able to hear the opinions of my fellow classmates and the direction they were coming from. Furthermore, the role of being chair meant that I was able to direct the conversation of the group and focus the discussion for the benefit of the client. This would be especially important in a real-world scenario where the chair is supposed to help keep the discussion focused on the objectives of the client while also preserving and understanding the archaeology. After each of the cohort gave their opinion on the best course of action, with three of my team identifying the historic buildings as requiring further investigation and two of the cohort identifying similar monuments to myself a consensus was eventually reached. It was decided after I was able to sum up everyone's arguments that a DBA and geophysical survey was the best course of action. This programme of work would aim to investigate the built heritage as well as assess the potential for buried archaeology.

Correspondence Task

The aim of the correspondence task was to demonstrate that we knew how curatorial staff should correspond with applicants, planning case officers and archaeological contractors. It is the role of curatorial staff, usually composed of county archaeologists, local authority archaeological officers, and Historic Environment Record Officers to provide expert advice to the public, contractors, applicants, and planning officers using their expert knowledge and an up-to-date historic environment record (Chartered Institute for Archaeologists 2020, 6). The scenario involved us in the role of local authority archaeological advisors. We were tasked with corresponding with the commissioned archaeological contractor AAA Archaeology, to understand whether the archive and finds for a site evaluation had been deposited with Siluria Museum, in accordance with the project written scheme of investigation (WSI). Unfortunately, time

constraints within the lecture programme meant that we were unable to undertake this task with the rest of the lecture cohort. I was able to discuss this task with my workplace colleagues in the development management (DM) team of East Sussex County Archaeologist.

Within the scenario the archaeological site evaluation was requested prior to the planning application being determined. This meant that no archaeology planning conditions were attached to the application. The applicant requested the full discharge of all conditions so that they can sell on the units to another company. The lack of planning conditions means that there is no legal basis to withhold the discharge of the conditions on the site. The requirement for pre-determination evaluation is supported by paragraph 194 of the National Planning Policy Framework (Ministries Of Housing, Communities & Local Government 2021) to describe the significance of the heritage asset, which in this scenario was a nearby Roman fort that may potentially have been affected by the development.

Following discussions, I had with my colleague the ESCC county archaeologist we agreed that in this scenario the best course of action would have been to write to the applicant J Jones and Sons requesting that they ensure that the written report is supplied to the planning authority as required by the NPPF. However, if I was able to re-do this scenario, I would have wanted to see the brief set by us as the archaeological curator to understand whether this included requirements for lodging the report with the local historic environment record in order to achieve the aims of paragraph 193 (Ministries Of Housing, Communities & Local Government 2021).

WSI Task

Written Schemes of Investigation (WSIs) are documents prepared by archaeologists ahead of a programme of work being carried out, usually as part of the planning process (Chartered Institute for Archaeologists 2020, 7). The aim of a WSI is to set out, in sufficient detail, the programme of work, methodology, aims and objectives of an archaeological project in response to a curatorial brief (Chartered Institute for Archaeologists 2020, 8). This roleplay task contained two parts; the first asked us to consider background information supplied to us by the applicant which included a number of heritage assets that had been identified during a desk-based assessment. The developer requested that we help to inform the WSI by proposing suitable methodology for each of the known and potential heritage assets. The WSI should satisfy the planning archaeologist that the work will be undertaken appropriate to the known and potential archaeological assets and impact level, as well as, serving as a benchmark for the field archaeologists to work towards during the investigation (Chartered Institute for Archaeologists 2020, 7).

In this roleplay scenario there were a number of known and potential heritage assets that had been identified during the DBA, which we had to identify the potential of and propose sufficient investigative methods to satisfy the archaeological condition applied to the site. Both geotechnical test pitting and a geophysical survey had already been carried out, but no evaluation of the site had yet been conducted. It had already been agreed that a watching brief would be carried out on the site, but the developer wanted to deal with heritage assets in advance. To this end we were given 10 minutes to appraise the information and suggest suitable investigative methods

which varied for each of the heritage assets within the development boundary. The known assets included: a standing 19th century farmhouse, a Second World War pillbox, and the concrete footings of a 20th century barn. The potential assets included a finds scatter of two Roman coins, a geophysical anomaly potentially indicating a Roman building, Peat deposits, and the potential site of a Medieval building.

While a general consensus for the appropriate methodology was reached for the majority of the heritage assets the team were split on how to deal with the geophysical anomaly and the peat deposit. The options for the anomaly were to exclude it from the development, carry out an initial evaluation with the potential for excavation if required, or strip, map and sample the entire area and excavate. One of the cohort who has a marine archaeology background played the role of devil's advocate arguing against the consensus of the team. In regard to the peat deposit the team were split evenly on whether to carry out a single sample column or multiple samples. The chair in this instance had the deciding vote and decided that multiple samples would be most appropriate.

The second part of the scenario asked us to consider what investigative work we would have conducted had we been given the opportunity prior to the application going in. As a team we decided that it would be best to focus on the unknowns of the development such as the geophysical anomaly, the site of Old Poplar farm, the peat deposits and the find scatter. The aim of this prior investigative work would be to move from uncertainty to certainty.

H&S Video Task

The fourth roleplay was designed to focus on health and safety risk on archaeological sites. As part of this scenario, we were asked to view two videos from the tv series The Detectorists and identify health and safety issues. This roleplay was fairly straightforward as the entire cohort identified similar H&S issues and suggested that the site featured in both videos needed better organisation of the site surroundings such as the trench edge and loose equipment as well as better personal protective equipment. The chair summed up all our arguments well before asking for the level of severity for the issues.

Project Planning and Costing Task

This roleplay scenario was split into two parts, the first assigned us each a role and we had to decide how much time and input we could allocate to the task. I was the outreach officer and decided that for a 6ha site evaluation with a short timeframe it would be best to hold a single open day at the end of the project. In an ideal world I would have wanted to have an outreach officer on site every day, however due to the timeframe and finance constraints this wasn't feasible. The second part of the scenario had us decide how a 15% reduction in the project costs, requested by the developer, would affect our decisions. We decided that the project should only be amended depending on the profit margin and this would most likely involve the reduction of project staff.

Critical Path Task

The final scenario focused on the critical path, a business planning tool aimed at identifying critical tasks, those tasks which will have the biggest effect on project time and how to organise those jobs to meet a completion date at minimum cost (Levy, Thompson and Wiest 2022). The scenario asked us to estimate what the shortest time was for completion of an evaluation of three areas. The second part stated that after discussing staff availability only two areas could be investigated, and the third part asked us to consider what would happen if another team overran and could only be available after five days.

This task was straightforward in practice; however, I would need further practice to be able to carry this out manually. There are plenty of computer programmes which allow for quick and easy critical path analysis to be conducted. This is particularly useful for large scale or complex projects (Ntask 2022).

Conclusions

In conclusion, the seven roleplay scenarios discussed above proved to be an interesting and eye-opening way of exploring the design of an archaeological project. I found the project planning tasks to be the most challenging as these relied more on project management understanding than any archaeological or heritage background experience, I had access to. However, while I found the HER task to be the easiest given my background as a historic environment record assistant, I also felt that I was able to provide useful input to the more commercially focused tasks while at the same time learning from my classmates. The experience I have gained from these tasks should allow me to enhance the skills in my current job role as well as provide me with new skills to take forward in any future job role.

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