

Using UK heritage and planning legislation to enhance wellbeing

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Abstract

The UK planning system enables the vast majority of archaeological investigations in the UK, allowing archaeologists to record, remove and interpret any buried or standing remains due to be impacted by the development. This planning-led archaeology is well embedded as a key component of the UK construction sector and contributes up to £280m to local economies every year, through a combination of private and publicly-funded work. Traditionally most of this fascinating archaeological work has taken place largely without public access or consideration of how the wider public might benefit from it, but new research, rapidly evolving policy and innovative strategies are encouraging change. A new Wellbeing and Heritage Strategy published by Historic England is intended to enhance the social impact of heritage programmes, highlight inequities that heritage can challenge, and communicate the value of heritage. This initiative fits well with research showing that the developing Social Value policy frameworks can also be directed towards heritage and archaeology within the planning system to improve the value from these aspects of development projects. Ultimately the aim is that project outcomes should be about enhanced individual and community wellbeing, through people-centred project design and implementation. This paper will outline the potential offered by archaeology conducted through the planning system to create and provide this value for communities, through a careful consideration of wellbeing opportunities utilising the historic environment in innovative and socially responsible ways.

Keywords

Heritage, Wellbeing, Planning, UK, Social Value, Communities

1. Introduction

1.1. Archaeology and the UK planning system

Despite the complex and often fluid nature of UK planning and development control legislation the concept of legal protection for buried and upstanding archaeological remains has been enshrined in guidance since the early 1990s. This applies whether the remains are previously known, such as in the case of Scheduled Ancient Monuments and their landscape settings, or unknown, which is a far more common phenomenon often requiring detailed study and assessment by a range of archaeological professionals during the various stages of a planning application. A developer, whether a private or public body, will be required to fund investigations in the event of the archaeological resource being damaged during the construction project. The theory behind this is that the damage should be offset by investigation (for example an excavation) that leads to better understanding of the resource (ClfA 2021b), in practice any increase in understanding of the historic environment is often restricted to unpublished technical reports aimed at responding to planning system requirements accessed primarily by other archaeologists, despite probable public interest. This is an issue that has long concerned the UK sector and the challenge of how to translate these technical reports into provision of meaningful public benefit is an ongoing quest that is receiving significant funding from Historic England (Wills 2018: 22-40; ClfA 2021c).

A Europe-wide opportunity to create meaningful engagements with heritage was provided by the Faro Convention, which stresses that access to heritage is a component of human rights and a cornerstone of democracy (Council of Europe 2005). The Convention encourages practitioners to facilitate public access to, and understanding of, heritage, from a basis of the intangible aspects of heritage: that the assets themselves do not provide meanings, but rather meaning is applied to these assets by people and how they attach their own value to them. This democratic understanding is not widely applied within the UK planning-led system however, as the structure of land ownership can mean restricted access to heritage and archaeology when it is exposed or observed during construction projects. The emphasis on private ownership of land extends to the domination by privately-funded archaeological projects in this system, and has resulted in the vast majority of work being undertaken via commercial contractual arrangements between clients and contractors. In the UK this industry contributes around £258 million to the national economy per year, with the sector providing up to 5300 jobs (approximately four-fifths of all archaeological employment) (Belford 2019: 194) with 73% of its funding sourced directly from the private sector (Aitchison and Rocks-Macqueen 2021: Table 20), through projects on housing developments for example.

The persistence of this system has been criticised in the past for its restrictions on public access to archaeology (Watson and Fredheim 2021: 4-5, Belford 2019), both during and after fieldwork – as the emphasis is on construction sector requirements of programmes and access during the fieldwork; and on standardised reporting to adhere to planning-led expectations. Neither of these provide accessible provision for the wider public. Various initiatives are underway to encourage change, through guidance provided by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, the professional body in the UK (CIFA 2021a) and by a Europe-wide project aimed at highlighting the public benefit provided by development-led (called preventive archaeology in some national contexts) archaeology (EAC 2014). These are aimed at contracting organisations and state agencies respectively; and any change will inevitably be achieved through a combined effort from these two critical actors in the sector. So this is an issue of both strategy and implementation, and project design and management is a crucial aspect of embedding new ways to provide access and positive impact from archaeological work.

2. The HE strategy

Historic England is the UK Government's advisor to the historic environment in England. It carries out a variety of statutory functions, such as maintaining a list of 'Buildings at Risk', advising Government on buildings suitable for designating on the statutory list (that is the National Heritage List for England) and providing advice to Local Authorities within the planning system on changes to listed buildings and development-led archaeology. It has a central and regional structure, managing strategic approaches, research, grant giving and guidance between them.

One of its' strategic functions is to respond to government policy and to look to the future of how archaeology and work with the historic environment can be delivered. A key issue at the moment is health and wellbeing. In May 2022 HE published its first wellbeing and heritage strategy. This document sets out our intentions in working towards greater social impact of its work.

The definition of wellbeing as defined by the UK government in 2010 picks up on these two elements of social determinants and subjective wellbeing as follows:

Wellbeing is 'a positive physical, social and mental state; it is not just the absence of pain, discomfort and incapacity. It requires that basic needs are met, that individuals have a sense of purpose, and that they feel able to achieve important personal goals and participate in society. It is enhanced by conditions that include supportive personal relationships, strong and inclusive communities, good health, financial and personal security, rewarding employment, and a healthy and attractive environment.' (Department of Health 2010)

Access to cultural heritage *and* achieving a standard of living adequate for health and well-being are both human rights, as specified by the United Nations in 1948 (Articles 27 & 25) and therefore understanding how they can support each other not only makes sense but is also, in the context of ever widening and deepening social inequalities, imperative. When we make decisions about our local environment or engage communities in actions or activities relating to archaeology and heritage we make a choice, consciously or otherwise, of perpetuating the status quo (that is widening the inequality gap) or challenging the inequalities that reap havoc on people's opportunities.

The issue at stake here, therefore, is can considering a wellbeing approach help us work in development-led archaeology to improve public engagement with archaeology and provide a means for improving the lives of local people and communities?

We have suggested in the past that there are different ways in which heritage and wellbeing can work together (Figure 1).

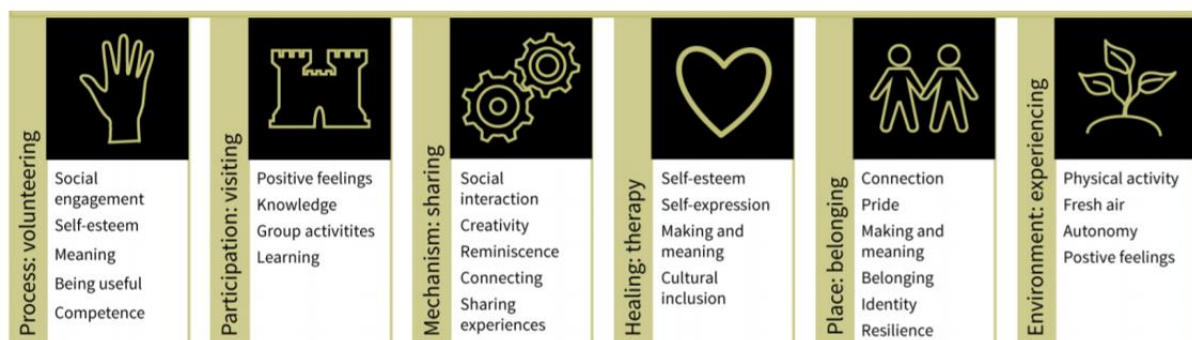


Figure 1: Ways in which heritage and wellbeing can work together

Whether one engages with heritage and archaeology through volunteering or visiting, experiencing or taking part in a more therapeutic programme there are clear wellbeing benefits that can be delivered as this model shows. The suggested benefits listed in this model link directly to those identified by the New Economics Foundation in mapping out what core elements are required for good wellbeing (Figure 2).

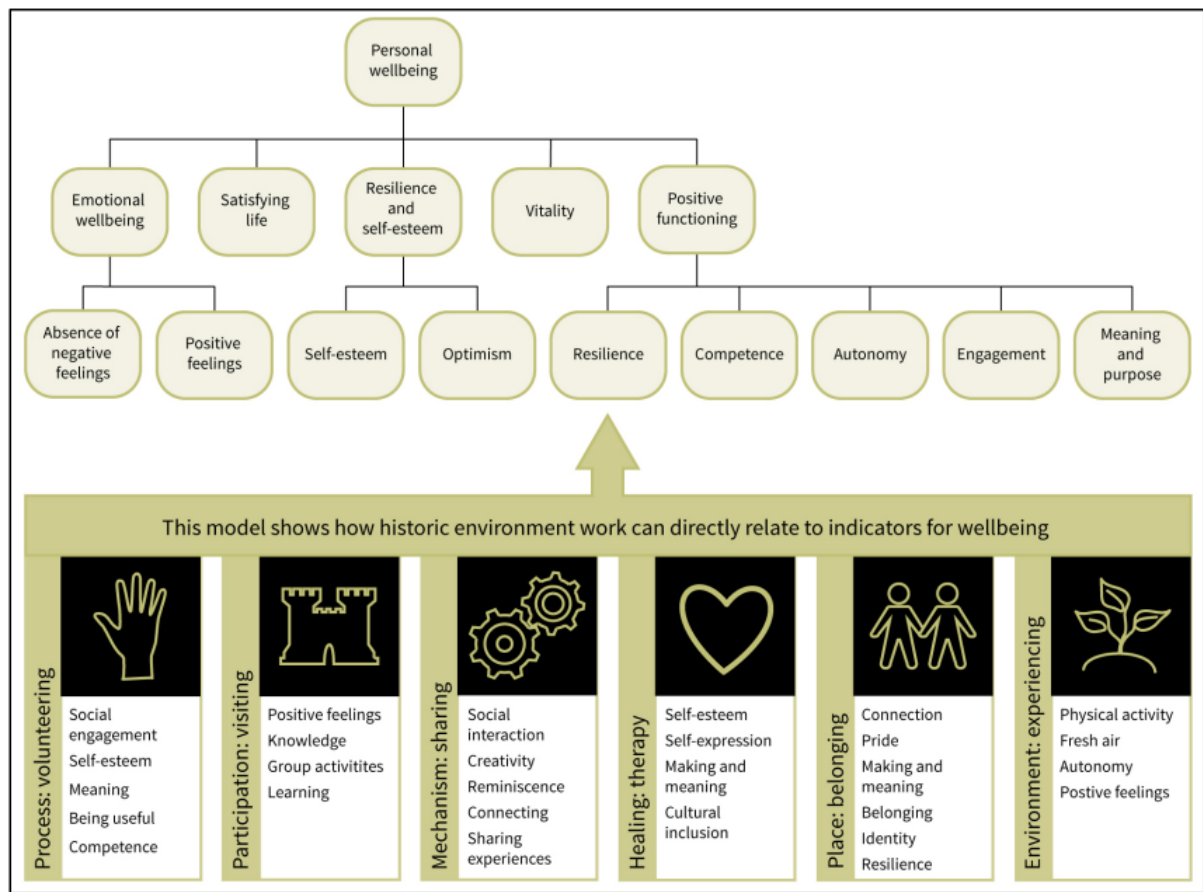


Figure 2: The core elements required for good wellbeing, as identified by the New Economics Foundation

Moving from general approaches to what we as an organisation can do, Historic England has now also committed to looking at how it works with three strategic aims (Figure 3).

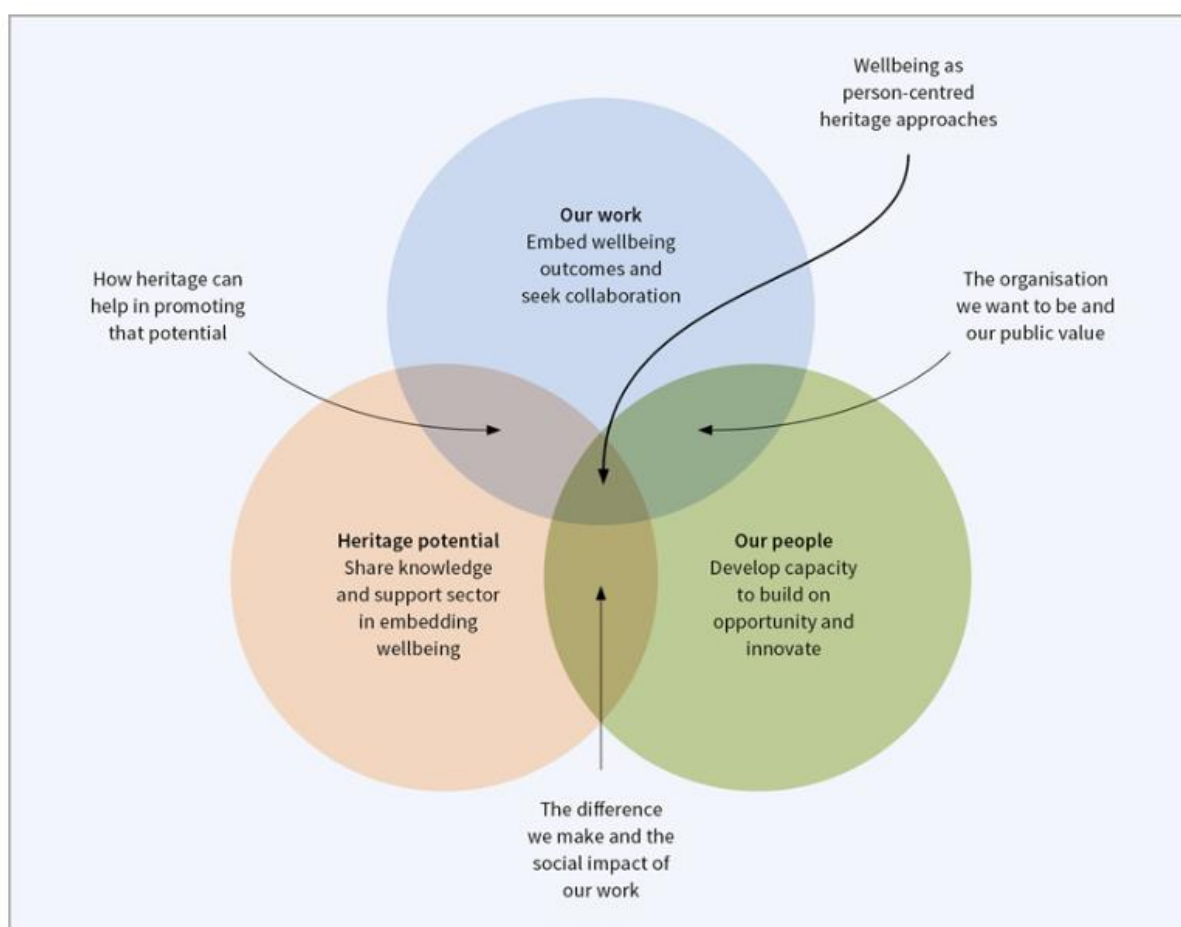


Figure 3: The Historic England strategic aims and the wellbeing implications

Recently Mark Carney, ex-Governor of the Bank of England, stated that post-COVID-19 policy should be centred on health and social outcomes. If Historic England does not do this, it will fail to make a positive difference to individual and community wellbeing and thereby also not demonstrate its' public value. It says something important about 'who we are' as an organisation.

Strategic planning and mapping out a future in which wellbeing and heritage are, wherever possible, considered together also requires balance: balance between need and resources and balance between obligations and aspirations. In order to achieve this, we are suggesting a model against which to consider this balance in relation to our wellbeing outcomes. This is an in-house tool to help us with wellbeing goals only; our Future Strategy and our Corporate Plan set out the broader context of our work.

It is based on an idea that our work might reasonably be considered as not only responsive to threat and need (fixing things and assets) but also pro-active in working towards a more sustainable historic environment (research and advice). Wellbeing can be used as a delivery mechanism to respond to immediate social need and thereby be seen as responsive or reactive, or it can work with prevention and in anticipation of need.

This approach produces a simple two-by-two matrix, the purpose of which is to create a framework against which to map our existing work and see where we could do more and identify gaps. The matrix creates four domains (Figure 4).

APPROACH THEMES	PEOPLE	PLACE
Proactive Preventative	DOMAIN A Maximising life satisfaction and wellbeing of groups and communities	DOMAIN C Making places and landscapes as healthy as possible
Responsive Healing	DOMAIN B Enhancing wellbeing for individuals in most need	DOMAIN D Addressing heritage and community need in local places

Figure 4: The four domains and their capacity to respond to wellbeing needs

Domain A will encapsulate all our work that is or has the potential to proactively support communities;

B will encapsulate all our work that is led by the needs of individual development and where it has the potential to be more therapeutically driven.

C is about promoting place and how the historic environment can support community life satisfaction through sustaining the historic environment and

D is about responding to the changing needs of places and includes our work on place-shaping and levelling up.

As a model this aims to help us see how wellbeing relates to aspects of our work, and inevitably in the real-world these areas overlap.

We have established priority areas of concern in which we will aim to work: these are based on current known social needs as seen through government priorities and population health information. Through connecting with heritage, we will prioritise support for the following target groups:

- People with mental health needs.
- People who are lonely or socially isolated.
- Older people, especially those who are coping with age-related challenges or reduction in their capacity to thrive.
- Younger people, especially those who need support to counter disadvantage.

We are aware that these are not mutually exclusive groups, neither do they cover every element of health and wellbeing. Yet we believe this focus will help us to develop knowledge with partners to understand specific needs of particular communities (Figure 5).

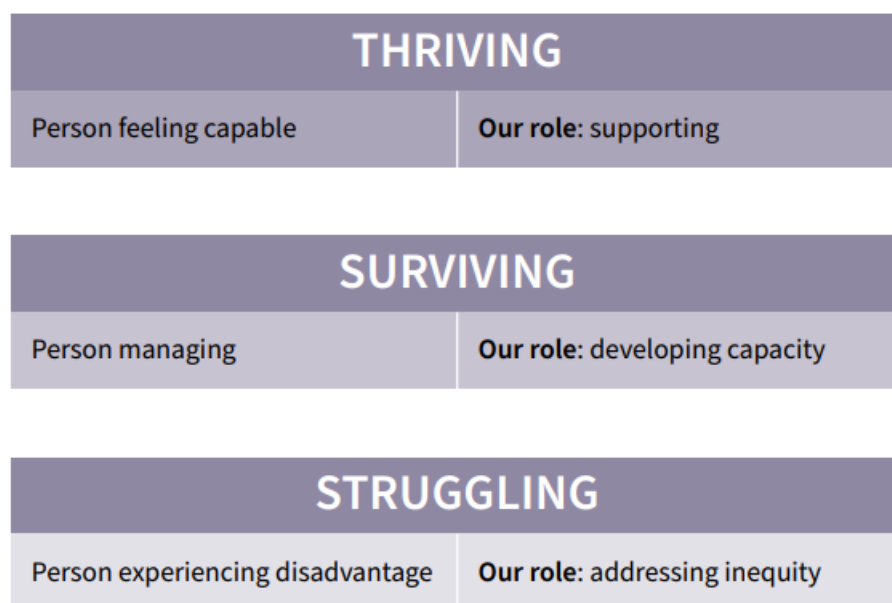


Figure 5: The role of Historic England in the various levels of wellbeing and equity

Wellbeing can be considered at different levels: Population, community, individual or national, regional, local and hyper-local. Rather than having a general aim to improve wellbeing it is crucial to work with intent and identify the 'level' of wellbeing impact any particular project can achieve.

The current tendency on place-based focus within the UK health system makes the local and hyper-local and the individual wellbeing agenda particularly relevant to addressing health needs for example. Central to this is the idea of addressing health and wellbeing inequalities. The concept of inequality is at the heart of the UK Government's Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill which is currently going through its parliamentary journey. Not only does addressing population level wellbeing appear as a likely mission of the Bill when finalized into an Act but the Bill currently provides for several areas of heritage change that could address inequality of support to local historic environment records and some regulation of protection within planning for historic assets.

The setting up of new Integrated Care Systems by the National Health Service, for the first time, pro-actively invites representation from voluntary groups who work locally and nationally the National Academy of Social Prescribing has cultural and arts organisations as key partners, including Historic England (NASP 2022). This shift towards not just integrating care and social care but culture and arts with health at a systems level is an important step in the cultural sector being able to make its public value clear.

At whatever level one is working – general population level support and advocacy between health and culture or hyper-local individual support to struggling individuals the principles of working with intent and understanding the context in which work is happening are crucial.

Principles of working with wellbeing:

- WELLBEING OBJECTIVES AND EVALUATION ARE EMBEDDED FROM THE VERY BEGINNING
- LOCAL NEED IS UNDERSTOOD AND MET BY PROJECT OBJECTIVES AND PRINCIPLES
- DECISIONS TAKEN DURING THE PROJECT (AND ALL PRODUCTS CREATED AS A RESULT OF IT) ARE CO-CREATED AND CO-DELIVERED WITH A WIDE RANGE OF PARTNERS

4. Wellbeing-led projects in community and research archaeology

We are fortunate that some UK organisations have embarked upon the wellbeing agenda and are responding to the Historic England strategy outlined above. Generally these are from the charitable sector, or funded through research grants, but they do offer examples of how these can be instigated and implemented, as well as valuable insights into the process. A leading organisation in this evolving landscape is the Restoration Trust, which works in partnership with culture and heritage bodies as well as the health and social care sector, providing 'culture therapy' for people with mental health problems (Restoration Trust 2022). Their services are very diverse although archaeology forms a significant part of their offer, including participation on community excavations, and crucially, the chance to shape the projects as they develop. The long-term impact on their participants is of primary concern and they evaluate and monitor their programmes with reference to medical criteria, ensuring rigor and responsibility.

From a more purely archaeological perspective, York Archaeology have embarked upon a programme of social prescription: Archaeology on Prescription, which uses a fieldwork project to welcome people living with mental challenges or those recovering from addiction, providing a safe and welcoming space to engage in various archaeological tasks (York Archaeology 2022). This has been run in collaboration with various local and national charities, the National Health Service and the National Academy for Social Prescribing.

Importantly, these projects and others (see Historic England 2022 for full details) working in this sphere maintain a focus on the people involved, with the archaeology by necessity taking a back seat. They are also committed to collecting data and publishing research as to the impact on mental health and wellbeing of engagement with archaeology and heritage. From that the rest of the sector can learn, and forefront people in projects conducted through the planning system.

5. Wellbeing-led projects in planning-led archaeology

The strategic direction offered by Historic England provides the theoretical framework for planning and implementation of projects in the historic environment, with funding decisions by Government an opportunity for us to reconsider how we might direct outcomes in a more socially responsible way. Both are aimed at encouraging a wider use of heritage for wellbeing outcomes and both should naturally influence the contracting aspects of development-led archaeology, as the planning system will be a significant influence on how these funds are allocated. It is a truism that many development projects occur in places and within neighbourhoods where the construction is likely to be disruptive and even perhaps upsetting, particularly in cases where residential areas are demolished and inhabitants relocated; or where the setting of buildings and greenfield sites are changed irrevocably. These projects are generally undertaken with the positive aim of providing housing or infrastructure, although their impact on local communities can sometimes be negative. Archaeology will often be a part of these challenging developments and generally occurs behind hoardings away from the public gaze but there is huge potential for this aspect of a development to provide insights into place shaping, community building and neighbourhood liaison.

The construction sector in the UK is also moving rapidly towards new ways to provide benefit from their projects, aware that the constant churn of new builds may not be responding well to local needs. As a consequence, there are several new initiatives that planning-led archaeology could consider utilising to embed wellbeing outcomes into standard projects.

6.1 Opportunities within the planning system

6.1.1 Social Value and the wider context

The legislative landscape in the UK has evolved over recent years to direct objectives towards providing positive outcomes for the general public. This has generally become a requirement of projects sponsored by (or organised through) local Government, which includes the planning system in the UK. The wider international context for this is provided by increasing adherence to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations 2021), in a critical attempt to provide measurable and comparable impacts on both a local and an international level. The construction industry is aware of its skewed impact on the environment and (as outlined above), its concurrent impact on communities, and is working to better tackle the potential negative impacts through value-led project management approaches designed with people (as well as profits) in mind (Construction Innovation Hub 2022).

Within the UK planning system the local authority has the statutory power to extend expectations beyond generic planning conditions such as building safely and to local design standards to a more holistic consequence that could include provision for skills and career training schemes, community engagement or meaningful consultation. The specific expectations will depend upon local need and local priorities of social, economic and environmental sustainability. While Social Value itself can be difficult to express, and there is ongoing work to provide frameworks for its delivery, a useful definition is outlined by the International Valuation Standards Council: *'Social Value' includes the social benefits that flow to asset users (social investment) and the wider financial and non-financial impacts including the wellbeing of individuals and communities, social capital and the environment, that flow to non-asset users'* (2020). There are many organisations working internationally to further the concept, with their own specific approaches (eg Social Value International 2022). In the UK this theoretical concept has been strategically implemented through the Social Value Act (HM Govt 2021), which places the onus on development or procurement projects to be assessed according to complex metrics under the umbrella categories of jobs, growth, social (i.e. people), environment and social innovation (Social Value Portal 2021). A very useful aspect of this framework is its local emphasis, and herein lies the opportunity of the hyper-local aspects of archaeology and heritage to respond well to these needs.

The vast majority of these development projects will have some level of archaeological or heritage input, whether this is a pre-planning assessment of impact, a planning condition placed on the project to address the impact, or a mitigation strategy to offset that impact via fieldwork and subsequent dissemination of results. The implication for archaeologists working within this regime is clear: that we can direct our own project outcomes towards social value expectations and the wellbeing agenda, and thereby target our work to positive impacts for the local community. This could be through many routes, but wellbeing-led examples that respond to Historic England's key target groups will include initiatives that provide opportunities for neighbourhood inclusion and loneliness reduction (eg involvement in project planning, opportunities for engagement during fieldwork, analysis or dissemination), opportunities to skills training and employment opportunities (careers advice for schools, apprenticeships, or early career jobs). The latter of these in particular could be provided collaboratively with the construction sector, as there is a widely acknowledged lack of skilled workers (Construction Index 2021) and also a lack of diversity amongst the workforce which the sector is trying to address (CIOB 2022).

6.1.2 Clients, communities, and the local context

When the above statutory and legislative opportunities are taken advantage of, we may be in a position whereby we have development-led archaeological projects that have a wellbeing focus, that are organised with people in mind, and that are designed in order to respond to specific local issues affecting the target

groups outlined in Historic England's strategy. There are other ways in which we can lever more social value through our work, and these are more inward-looking and respond to the frameworks within which we work as sub-contractors on construction and development projects. There is a well-trodden route along which archaeologists submit project designs, programmes and strategies to ensure the archaeology is conducted appropriately within the structures of a construction project. Several stages of this process will also offer chances to propose a wellbeing focus with outcomes that extend beyond the minimal professional guidance. The first consideration should be the clients' own aims in relation to the value their project will provide: all construction organisations will have a set of KPIs (key performance indicators) or guiding principles through which they identify and measure their social value outcomes. To take an international example, Skanska Group are active across Europe and North America. They have identified which of the UNSDGs they seek to respond to through their work (Skanska Group 2022) and will formulate project designs locally to focus on contributing towards the betterment of those goals. On a much more local level, their UK team have set priorities around 'being a good neighbour', which is further defined as providing employment, ensuring positive community relations, and contributing to local economies. All these could be considered as part of the planning and implementation of an archaeological project, assuming that the value offered is communicated successfully. Likewise, the multi-national engineering firm Atkins Global have been particularly supportive of embedding archaeology into projects as a provider of social value, with individual and communal wellbeing impacts highlighted as a priority (Talbot and Watson 2022).

There are particular developments that will aim to provide wellbeing throughout and beyond the construction programme, namely residential schemes and publicly-funded projects such as infrastructure. The organisations responsible for many residential developments have their roots in the public sector, and therefore have a good understanding of how their projects will impact upon residents. This is perhaps more marked on projects where new areas of housing are constructed, in effect creating entirely new communities. Here there can be issues of isolation, loneliness and potential negative impacts on both physical and mental health. By way of example, a largescale development project across two eastern London Boroughs of Barking and Dagenham, and Havering, has invited archaeologists to engage with the new community, using the buried ancient Bronze Age landscape below the site to provide a collaborative and welcoming activities, encouraging the new residents to meet each other and work together to shape future events and activities (L&Q Group 2022). This is not directly related to a fieldwork project, but was instigated through conversations around social value, illustrating the potential to use archaeology and heritage to benefit local communities in new ways.

7. Next steps to introduce and embed wellbeing-led design

This paper has outlined the strategic framework that enables us to consider archaeology as a provider of wellbeing, and has given some examples of projects wherein this initiative has started. It is hoped that further support of these exemplars will be provided through publicly-funded projects such as infrastructure, whether that be transport, health or education facilities. The research landscape is growing steadily and there are now published expositions for those who may want to introduce a wellbeing-focussed aspect to their archaeology delivery in a planning-led environment (eg Everill and Burnell 2021). Critical is that the conversation around this innovative idea need to commence as early as possible in the project lifecycle, preferably with input from the intended participants to ensure equity in the planning and design. The evaluation of the wellbeing aspects of a project are crucial, in order that we can learn from past experiences and engage in a constant churn of improvements. Ultimately a wellbeing focus within development-led archaeology could utilise the planning systems to lever better outcomes for communities, providing a new role for archaeology as a provider of social value and wellbeing.

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