

East West Rail and Archaeological Trial Trenching

As one of the UK's largest proposed railway projects we acknowledge the profound obligation we have to address the environmental challenges faced by all of us. Preserving and protecting your historic environment and enhancing your heritage assets is a key part of this.

Archaeology is the study of the remains of human activity preserved through changes to the physical environment, these include evidence of previous land use such as pits, ditches or material artefacts. We also put archaeological sites and deposits into their environmental context by obtaining evidence on such things as diet, economy and living conditions (known as paleo environmental archaeology).

What does Archaeological trial trenching involve?

This survey technique requires trenches to be dug which will allow us to expose and investigate any potential buried remains to understand the extent and character of archaeological deposits or areas of potential remains. Archaeological trial trenching is normally conducted by a team of 2-4 professional archaeologists, per location.

Prior to work being carried out, underground and above ground services will be identified prior to work taking place and measures will be put in place to protect these utilities. We will also arrange a pre-entry meeting with the landowner to discuss and agree matters such as access, safety, security and reinstatement.

As part of the survey, photographs will be taken which may be published as part of the environmental survey documents submitted as part of the Development Consent Order unless the landowner explicitly requests that they remain confidential.



Typical archaeological trial trench immediately after opening

What machinery will need to be on site?

The archaeologists will require access to the site, preferably by van or four-wheel drive vehicle. A mechanical excavator, either wheeled or on tracks, will also be required on site depending on ground conditions and landowner preference. Machinery will usually be limited to a tracked mechanical excavator at most sites as the ground disturbance from one of these has less impact than a wheeled excavator for the same task.

Welfare facilities will be provided by means of a small mobile welfare unit, usually a van, located in agreement with the landowner.

Where will the trenches be located?

The trenches will be located based on the evidence from which the archaeological remains have been inferred (desk-based sources and geophysical survey) and/or on a prospective random array to test areas which appear from initial studies to be clear of subsurface archaeological deposits. The trenches will, where possible, also be located to avoid constraints such as the location of known services, vegetation, protected species, public rights of way, land boundaries, environmental scheme field margins and any known concerns regarding ground conditions.

How big are the trenches?

This survey technique requires trial trenches to be dug. These are typically up to 2m wide, between 20m and 50m long and are normally excavated down to the horizon between top and sub-soil as this is where evidence of archaeology is usually located (average

depth between 0.5 and 1m). However, the exact size of each trench will be specific to each location, soils and geology.



An array of archaeological trenches to evaluate a large area

How long will the trenches be open for?

Timings on site will vary depending on archaeological findings, ground conditions and weather conditions. The team will work as quickly as possible to complete trial trenching in each area to reduce disruption. Indicatively, one team may complete the opening up of trenches and complete the recording of two trenches per day.

There is a requirement to leave trenches open until the Local Planning Authority Archaeological Advisor has viewed and signed off trenches, with visits potentially twice weekly, dependent on availability. Should it be necessary to leave a trench 'open' overnight, for example if the archaeological excavation and recording is incomplete, it will be fenced unless otherwise specified.

What happens next?

Once the survey work has been completed the trench will be backfilled, replacing the soil in the reverse order to which it was excavated and returning the site to the state in which it was found as far as is possible to do so.

This work needs to be carried out as early as possible in the programme before we submit the Development Consent Order so that we can:

- Avoid, preserve and enhance very important heritage assets by designing the route around them.
- Identify mitigation required for any heritage assets that we cannot avoid, either prior to or during construction of EWR.

Any material finds, together with the report, are often all that remains of a site at the end of an investigation and together they form an important archaeological resource. Government guidelines recommend that such material should be preserved in the correct conditions to protect it.

We are committed to preserving and improving the local environment and so would suggest that any finds are donated to a local public repository where they will be curated to ensure their long-term survival and can be accessed by museum staff, researchers and the public. The finds remain the property of the landowner (apart from Treasure – see below) until they are formally transferred to the public repository.

The terms of the Treasure Act 1996 will be followed with regards to any finds which might fall within its scope. Any such finds will be removed to a safe place and reported to the local coroner as required by the procedures laid down in the “Code of Practice” (DCMS 1996). Where removal cannot be undertaken on the same working day as the discovery, suitable security measures will be taken to protect the finds from theft. The local Portable Antiquities Finds Liaison Officer will be informed.



A backfilled archaeological trial trench

Being able to carry out this important archaeological survey work we will be able to carefully plan to avoid the most important heritage sites, where we reasonably can, protecting and preserving the historic environment for the future.

Get in touch

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