ABRAMS ARCHAEOLOGY

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WRITTEN SCHEME OF INVESTIGATION (WSI) WHAT IS IT?

The acronym WSI is frequently quoted when developers, applicants and planners contact our company. We are often provided with a planning condition referring to the need for a WSI and we are asked to cost for this service.

We have produced many Written Scheme of Investigation documents on a wide range of site types and a wide range of geographical areas. We want to share some of the knowledge we have gained with you and help you see how we approach this important service for our clients.

The Planning Condition

Most of our clients encounter the term WSI in a planning condition they have received in a Decision Notice from a local planning authority. These conditions vary, but frequently have wording similar to the below in them:

> *"No development shall be carried out at the site until a Written Scheme of Investigation has been submitted to and approved by the Local Authority in writing."*

This statement will often be followed by more detailed text and a reason explaining why it has been used.

A WSI is a Scope of Work

The WSI is a document and it sets out how archaeological work will be conducted. It will define the **reason for the work** and in so doing should refer to the planning condition but should also go further than that and explain what advice, evidence or **reasoning** underlies that **condition**. This is vital as it will help to explain which techniques should be used to do the archaeological work. When we know the techniques, we can define the **competence** and with that we can say who should do the work. The WSI should also define where on the application site such works should take place and why in those places and not in other parts of it. The WSI states **Who, Where, Why, What and How**.

Purpose 1 - Defining a Measurable

In construction, a **measurable** is any item of work that can be **quantified and assigned a unit of measurement** for estimating, pricing, or payment purposes. Archaeology can sometimes be (appropriately) seen as a relatively **poorly understood/controlled risk**. After all, it's a discipline in which the most important information is buried below the ground where **no-one can see it**. Therefore, anything which helps to **control that risk** is a positive from our perspective. To us, being able to understand how long and how much are key. This is what our clients need and, therefore, we use all the available and appropriate tools to help estimate the amount of **define time and money**.

The WSI is one of the best ways of doing this and because of that, it's of core interest for developers and for the local planning authority. It creates a measurable for

archaeological work. A typical example would be to move from a Condition which requires archaeological evaluation (low level of definition on time/money) to a WSI which states what techniques (e.g. trial trenching) and how much/where (literally every trench to be opened will be shown in a scale plan and defined in text). Therefore, in that movement from 'condition' to 'WSI' **we have moved from a low level of definition to a high level of specific detail and agreement.**

Beware – the WSI is not an end in itself.
The WSI is a really **important planning document.** Sometimes its existence and agreement is really key for ensuring a project is compliant and ready to move towards construction. However, the WSI is not an end in itself. It actually jus**t describes what needs to be done**, what needs to happen. It is looking ahead to the work and **is not the work.**

Beware – what does the WSI cover and what does the Condition allow for?
We frequently note that planning conditions allow for a range of possibilities. For example, it may be that no archaeological evaluation has yet happened on a site. A careful reading of the condition will explain that a WSI is required and that will define the evaluation which is necessary (perhaps that means trial trenching). However, the Condition will then go on to explain that 'all' necessary archaeological investigations will then be done and followed by assessment, analysis, publication and archiving.

We take care to explain to clients that this may mean the following set of works:

WSI (for evaluation)
Trial Trenching
Reporting

Scoping of Mitigation works.

WSI (for mitigation)
Investigation
Assessment report
Analysis
Publication Article
Archiving

On more than one occasion a client has thought they are facing one type of archaeological work (evaluation), not necessarily expecting that could turn into a two stage process. Many archaeological conditions have this scenario built in.

Adding Value by focusing on the Scope
Many people ask our company to price a WSI and in response we frequently price to Scope the work and produce a WSI. This is where we add value. We are a consultancy and it's in the scope of the works that we can really add value for you. It is that scope which has the biggest impact in terms of the works being required and that connects directly to time and money. The WSI defines that scope – but by the time it is written that scope is already agreed. It's before the WSI is written that our work focusses. What is to

be done where and why. That is where we can add value for your team. Ensuring that the scope is appropriate before it is defined and agreed.

Talk to an expert.
We have decades of experience in scoping archaeological work and agreeing suitable WSIs to cover it. That experience is available to your team. Get in touch to discuss Archaeology the next time you get one of those Conditions.

If you need more information having read this guide find us here:

https://www.abramsarchaeology.co.uk/

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