Offshore development: creating a legacy for marine archaeology

This article has been prepared to set out the primary outcomes of the Marine Archaeology Special Interest Group (MASIG) session, 'Offshore Development: Creating a Legacy for Marine Archaeology', at the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' (CIfA) Institute-wide conference, Archaeology: values, benefits and legacies', in April 2019 at the Royal Armouries Museum in Leeds.

In 2011, the UK Marine Policy statement stated a view, shared by all UK administrations, that heritage assets should be conserved through marine planning and that opportunities should be taken to contribute to our knowledge and understanding of our past by capturing evidence from the historic environment and making this publicly available. Alongside considerable growth in offshore development in recent years, these steps forward in marine planning have resulted in the production of an enormous body of archaeological data, entirely funded by developers.

The MASIG session aimed to explore how we realise the public benefit of this data and how we can create a meaningful legacy for marine archaeology in terms of both the approaches we take to 'rescue archaeology' in the marine historic environment and to the assimilation of data as part of established research agendas. The session comprised four papers followed by an open discussion chaired by Antony Firth and Victoria Cooper. A summary of each of the papers is provided below, including an overview of some of the key observations captured though questions and discussion following each paper.

Dead Man's Chest: Historic Environment Data Archive Centres and MEDIN (Marine Environmental Data and Information Network)

Peter McKeague (Historic Environment Scotland) and Katie Green (Archaeological Data Service)

The first paper, presented by Peter McKeague, examined the role of the MEDIN Data Archive Centre (DAC) for the historic environment (a partnership between The Archaeology Data Service, Historic Environment Scotland and the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales). It was recognised that the success of the DAC, in terms of long-term curation of maritime data sets, is dependent on the collaboration of those undertaking fieldwork and research in the marine historic environment. However, the number of offshore development projects feeding into this digital archive is low, with a focus on more research based marine projects. It may be assumed that this low rate is associated with the 'confidentiality' aspects of projects and clients who wish to control data entering the public domain. Furthermore, the view that the DCO process for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs), very public in nature, is not very straightforward cannot help either. There are a high number of 'invisible' datasets, including those that aren't associated with NSIPs, which are simply not making it into the public domain. OASIS forms feed metadata directly to MEDIN, and there is increasingly a requirement secured through WSIs to upload archaeology reports to OASIS (and thereby become publicly available via the ADS). However, this is very rarely done pre-construction with many projects waiting years, often until the end of a construction phase, before allowing data to be released. Does there need to be a better way of capturing this obligation earlier in the process? Perhaps the landowner should play more of a role (i.e. The Crown Estate)?

Across and beyond site boundaries: maximising the legacy of commercial submerged palaeolandscape investigations

Claire Mellett (Wessex Archaeology)

Using the case study of geoarchaeological work recently undertaken for Vattenfall as part of the consent process for the Norfolk Vanguard and Norfolk Boreas offshore wind farms, this paper recognises that data is often there, if you know where to look for it, but that the format which it is presented in (i.e. technical papers,) are not always user friendly for non-specialists. Further issues can arise as there is no standard methodology for presenting the work done, which means it can be difficult to match up work by different contractors.

A key point is that work offshore needs to be seamless with that on land and consider regional scales across present day environmental boundaries, 'offshore' now was not 'offshore' during much of prehistory. Regional studies using offshore development data, beyond the 'project' or 'site' view, have the potential to dramatically advance our understanding of archaeological potential but the data needs to be made public earlier in the planning process (ie pre-consent).

Outputs also need to be fed back into the planning process making assessment more efficient and allowing for more targeted research. There is also significant potential for working collaboratively with other disciplines, including data produced for engineering or ecology purposes, for example.

Where the wind blows: a curator's perspective on the public benefit from offshore wind developments

Pip Naylor (Historic England)

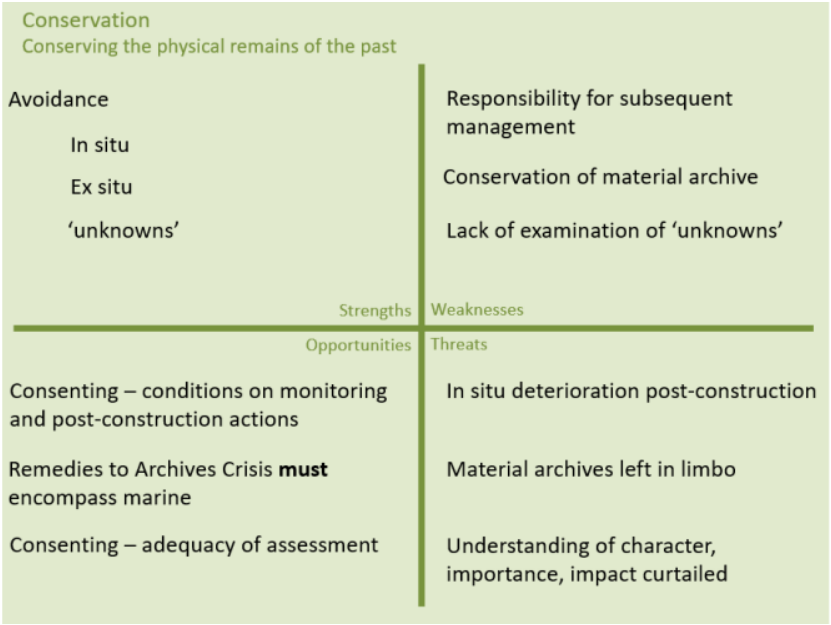
Historic England identify three main elements associated with the legacy of public benefits from offshore renewables. The first is the vast quantity of data that is being collected covering large parts of England's offshore areas and Historic England have a key role in ensuring that the data acquired is acceptable for archaeological purposes, influencing survey methodologies and ensuring its application for research in accordance with established frameworks. The second element identified in this paper is knowledge and learning. This refers to the archaeological knowledge that is gained through the development process that furthers public knowledge of both the area investigated and specific chronological periods. It is also the learning within Historic England, developers and their consultants about how these projects develop and making the most of 'lessons learned'. There has been a change in culture within the industry in recent years which has helped to engender genuine interest from industry members which can lead them to go beyond the basic requirements of their consent to achieve more, and this is something Historic England actively encourage.

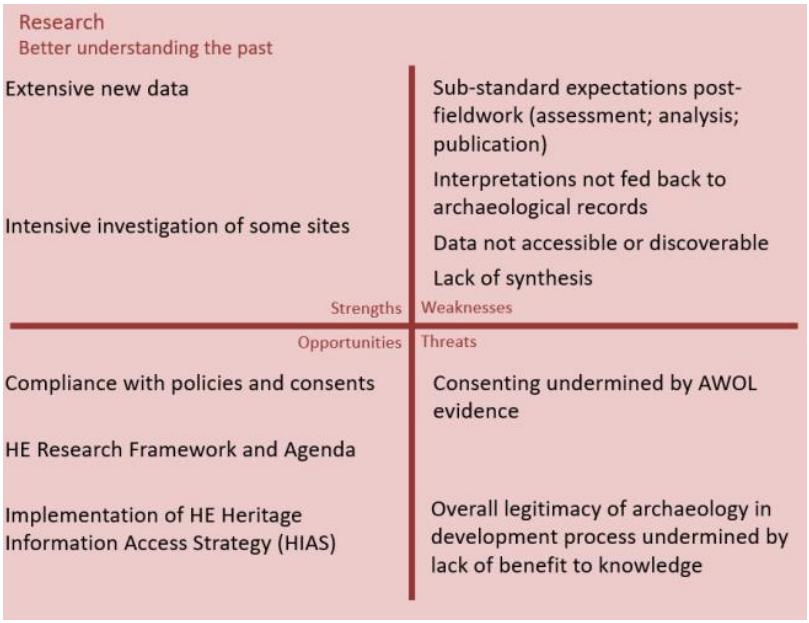
This leads to the third element, mutually beneficial collaboration, with archaeologists getting further information and dissemination of important archaeological information, and the industry getting the good news story of the positive benefits and being seen to actively engage within the planning regime. The future may therefore be seen to include an emphasis on further collaboration, a requirement for updates to standard WSI clauses as a part of the learning process (how do we do things better, such as with post-construction monitoring) and the ongoing acquisition of data and new and unique opportunities for archaeological research.

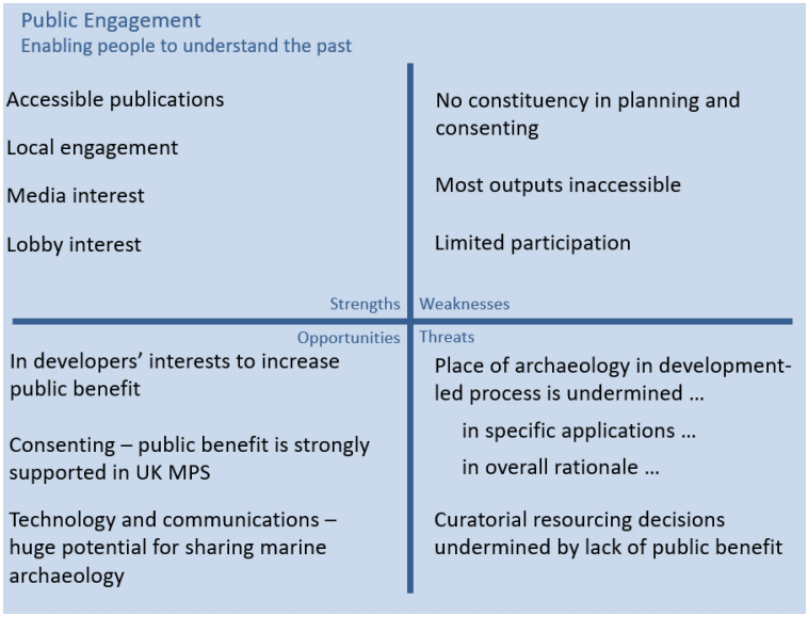
Offshore legacies: are we making the most of the marine development dividend?

Antony Firth (Fjordr Ltd)

The final of the four papers in the session examined if we, as an industry, are making the most of development led archaeology in the marine environment. While it is important that we recognise how far the industry has come in the last 25 or so years it is widely recognised that there are still areas in which we could do things better. The paper identified three main, interconnected objectives for marine archaeology, to conserve the physical remains of the past, to better understand the past and to enable the public to appreciate the past. A SWOT analysis of each of these objectives was presented and the results are included below as a useful indicator of where the industry currently stands. The key conclusion is that we need a more seamless approach with development-led archaeology onshore. In terms of methodologies, policy, employment and assessment we are arguably on the right track, however in terms of public engagement, resourcing, interpretation and enhancement we possibly still have a way to go. Referring back to the view of Historic England outlined above, it is through higher regulatory expectations, building upon lessons learned, and seeking greater levels of collaboration that we might get more value from the work we do and greater enhancement of the marine archaeological record (going beyond the basic requirements). If we expect more, then maybe we will see a greater commitment to the resources required for development led initiatives, including greater investment financially in assessment undertaken as part of the planning system.







If we are to achieve as much as we can from the development-led dividend then there is potentially a need for an independent review of the system as it currently stands.

We need more support for land-based curators in marine planning; more support to consider marine heritage across regions and sectors rather than just through project-specific approaches; we need to build a public constituency; and perhaps most importantly of all, a greater recognition that non-compliance with planning law is effectively heritage crime, a matter which needs to be enforced by the regulator and archaeological curators.

Discussion and session key outcomes

Following the above presentations, the open floor discussion brought out the following conclusions:

• Data is being produced and mechanisms for sharing that data are available (e.g. MEDIN, ADS), but the data is not being consistently entered. There also needs to be a standard methodology for presenting technical work and delivering it in a manner comprehensible to non-specialists.

• There is insufficient examination of the unknown; we competently identify what to avoid but are rarely empowered to recommend mitigation involving investigation of anomalies, as would be undertaken onshore. There are, however, positive moves forward in the right direction with, for example, the cheaper and logistically easier investigation of targets using ROVs as part of UXO (unexploded ordnance) surveys.

• We can afford to be less 'apologetic' in our approach for requesting offshore archaeological assessment and investigation. The regulators and curators need to insist that assessment is not only adequate, but that it moves beyond the basic requirements.

• There is insufficient resourcing within the curatorial bodies to fully enforce measures in all circumstances. There are no real examples of developers being held accountable when acting against the archaeological conditions of permits.

• We need to develop initiatives to support a change in culture moving beyond the site-based approach to an integrated regional and national framework which traverses the onshore/offshore boundary, particularly in terms of submerged palaeolandscape research, as these boundaries are modern and artificial.

Vic Cooper, Marine Archaeology Special Interest Group

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