Report on the Local Planning Authority Public Benefit Survey – 2021

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Executive Summary

A survey was undertaken in 2020-21 by the CIfA Voluntary & Community Special Interest Group (V&C SIG) of local authority archaeological planning advisors to understand better the extent, scope and perceived value of community engagement taking place within the context of planning led investigations. The survey focused on:

- understanding the types of engagement being requested as part of development work and processes involved in this

- identifying the barriers and potential ways to increase the delivery and impact of community engagement.

52 respondents from across the UK filled in the survey. The results show that less than 30% of the local authority archaeologists who responded regularly require, and 60% only occasionally require, community engagement to be part of a developer funded investigation. This indicates that community engagement is not a standard consideration of development-led investigations. The value to developers of engaging with communities is also perceived to be low, as over 87% of respondents believe that developers don't value community engagement through archaeology as a way of meeting their social value requirements.

The survey replies highlighted a number of issues and barriers associated with the implementation of community engagement activities in development-led investigations. These include a lack of awareness of the range and variety of potential engagement activities; uncertainty of what engagement options could be chosen and whether these are proportionate to the works being undertaken. Difficulties were also raised around funding, restrictions on undertaking activities and a lack of clear information or guidance to facilitate the implementation of community engagement.

1 Intro

This survey sought the views of local planning authority archaeological advisors on community engagement and public benefit in development-led archaeology, with a particular focus on evaluations and smaller excavations – typical projects as opposed to the exceptional (large scale development and infrastructure).

There were various reasons for undertaking the survey. CIfA's Voluntary & Community Special Interest Group's (V&C SIG) committee had received enquiries from local authority planning archaeologists asking about guidance to support decision making around community engagement as part of development-led projects and the type and extent of these activities. The survey also contributes to the SIG's aims by identifying needs and ways to support the promotion and delivery of community engagement within archaeology, including those within the planning system[1].

The survey was created by the V&C SIG in collaboration with Dr Sadie Watson and Kate Faccia of the UKRI funded study '*Measuring, maximising and transforming public benefit from UK Government infrastructure investment in archaeology'[2]*. The online survey was managed and distributed by CIfA and was supported and sent out to its members by ALGAO UK[3]. The survey was promoted to all local authority archaeologists, not just members of ALGAO, through various social media channels. The survey was live throughout December 2020 and January 2021.

The survey was completed by a total of 52 respondents. Whilst the majority are based in England, Scotland and Wales are relatively well represented too given that most planning archaeologists advise multiple local authorities. No responses were received from Northern Ireland.

No. of respondents **(total)**	52
No. from England	40
No. from Wales	3
No. from Scotland	5
No. from Northern Ireland	0
Unknown	4

The results of the survey will contribute to the development of new resources being planned by CIfA to support public benefit and archaeology. It will also contribute to the ongoing UKRI project and hopefully inform other relevant organisations as to how their support in this area may best be focused.

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[1] CIfA Voluntary and Community Special Interest Group, https://www.archaeologists.net/groups/voluntary
[2] Museum of London, https://www.mola.org.uk/archaeology-and-public-benefit-ukri-future-leaders-fellowship
[3] Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers, https://www.algao.org.uk/

2   Results

The results of the survey have been broken down into different sections relating to the questions asked with a short commentary of both the quantitative and qualitative (when provided) answers.

2.1   Impact of community engagement

Question 1: In your opinion, what would be the ideal impact from community engagement work in developer-led archaeology?

The majority of responses on the ideal impact from community engagement focus on increased knowledge, awareness, interest and value of heritage by communities. Several answers also spoke about raising the profile and increasing public understanding of the profession, alongside greater protection for heritage assets within the planning process. It is notable that, besides knowledge, few of the benefits communities can experience from engaging with archaeology – wellbeing or enhanced sense of place – are mentioned more than a handful of times. In general, responses portray a relatively top-down, one-way view of community engagement.

However, several answers do allude to more collaborative methods of community engagement:

"That existing communities feel involved in decision-making and are made aware of the results of investigations in their local area"

"An increased opportunity for public involvement in that branch of archaeology currently carrying out the majority of archaeological work in the country"

"a sense of ownership."

2.2   Valuing community engagement

Question 2: Do you feel that developers value archaeology-based engagement as a way of meeting their social value requirements?

Yes (8)   No (42)   No answer (2)
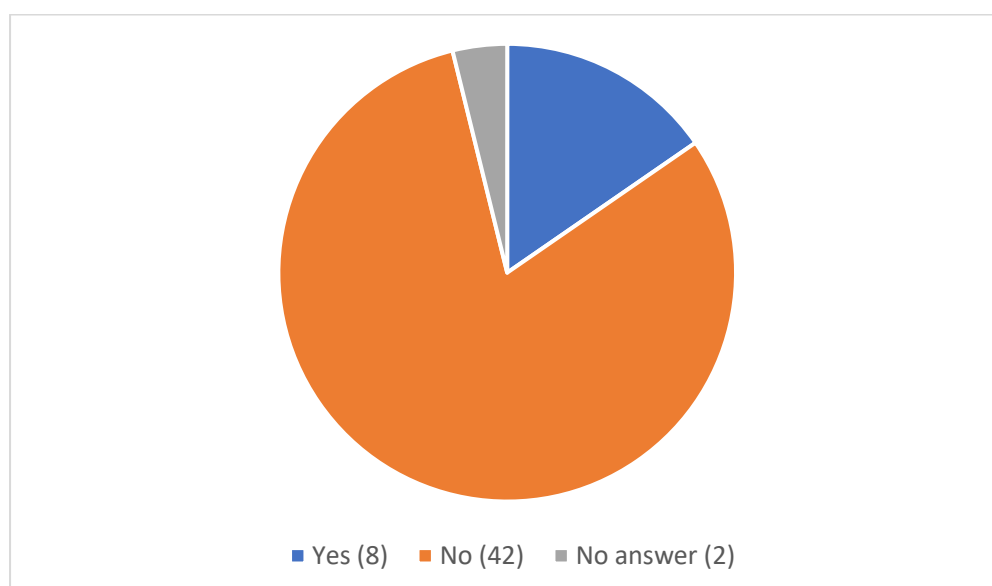
Responses are overwhelmingly negative with over 87% of the respondents replying that they don't think developers value community engagement through archaeology as a way of meeting their social value requirements.

Explanations for this emphasise the view that many developers see archaeology as a hindrance, with community engagement adding extra unwanted costs and delays to projects that are already an inconvenience. There are a mix of differing views about whether developers consider or place much consideration on social value at all, regardless of how it is delivered.

Other common points raised include:

- Safety issues
- A lack of enforceability
- Limited understanding amongst developers about the value of archaeology or how archaeological process operates
- Problems stemming from archaeology not being involved in the early stages of a development project
- Fear of local opposition to development as a result of archaeological engagement

Conversely, several answers highlight that some developers do recognise the positive PR potential of archaeology:

"Quarry companies seem to be quite engaged and see it as a way of promoting their positive impacts, others not so much."

"Generally, even very modest 'public engagement' in a very simple form, is often appreciated by developers as contributing to the social value of their development."

*"Some see it as good PR and others see it simply as yet another cost burden"*

This question didn't ask about where the responsibility for the current situation lies. However, one comment strongly advocates for the archaeological profession being to blame:

"I do not blame developers for this, I blame ourselves as archaeologists for not bringing it to their attention. It seems to be based on deep seated fears by units, consultants and probably also curators that we shouldn't do anything to upset the developer, and that we are grateful that they are funding anything at all. But 30 years on from PPG16 I really do think if we don't change tack to be less apologetic about developers paying for archaeology and more assertive about what benefits we can bring to their development and remind everyone why we are doing any of this."

It may also be possible that we, as a profession, are not aware of or sufficiently understand developers' obligations for delivering 'social value requirements'. This whole topic of social value is something that needs to be explored further and promoted to the profession through CIfA.

2.3   How can we facilitate community engagement into projects

Question 3: What resources or information would make it easier to incorporate community engagement into developer funded projects?
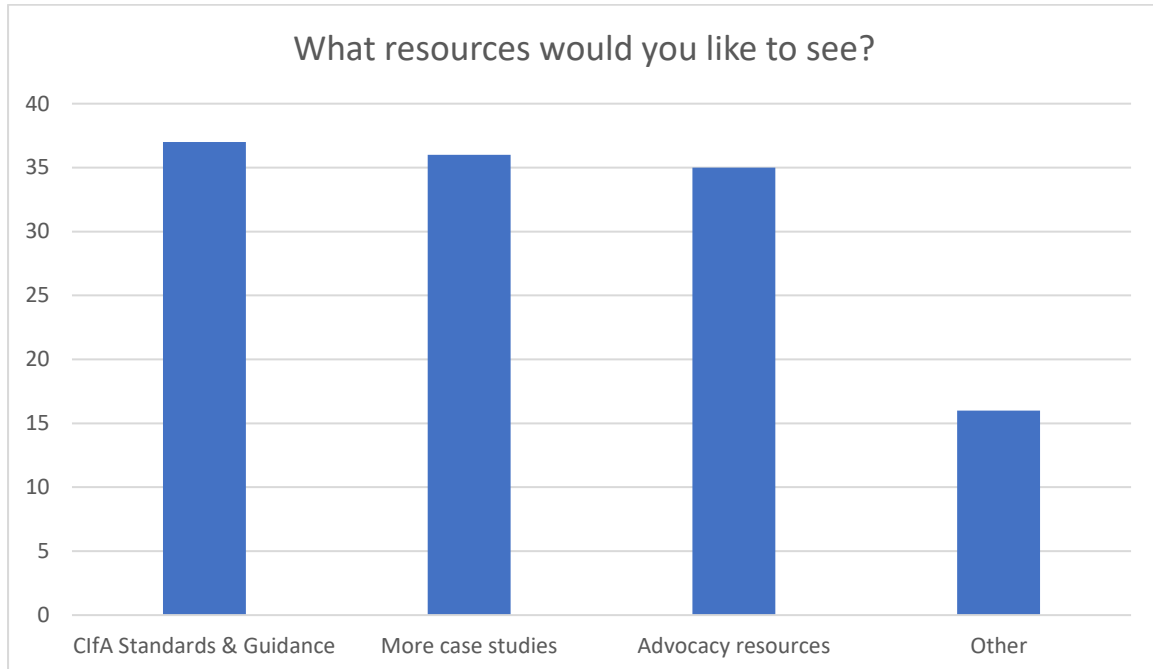
The most popular resource to support incorporating community engagement into projects was Standards and Guidance, followed closely by case studies and advocacy resources.

Other suggestions include:

- Legislation
- Guidance on Health & Safety for public events
- Guidance for LPAs, increased funding (and staff capacity) for LPAs
- More community archaeologists/ archaeologists with community engagement skills within commercial units.

It is clear from this question that the sector would really value resources to support how they can incorporate community engagement into developer funded projects.

2.4   Requirement of community engagement

Question 4: Do you ever require community engagement to form part of WSIs [Written Scheme of Investigation] for developer funded archaeological investigations?

■ Regularly (15)   ■ Occasionally (31)   ■ No (6)
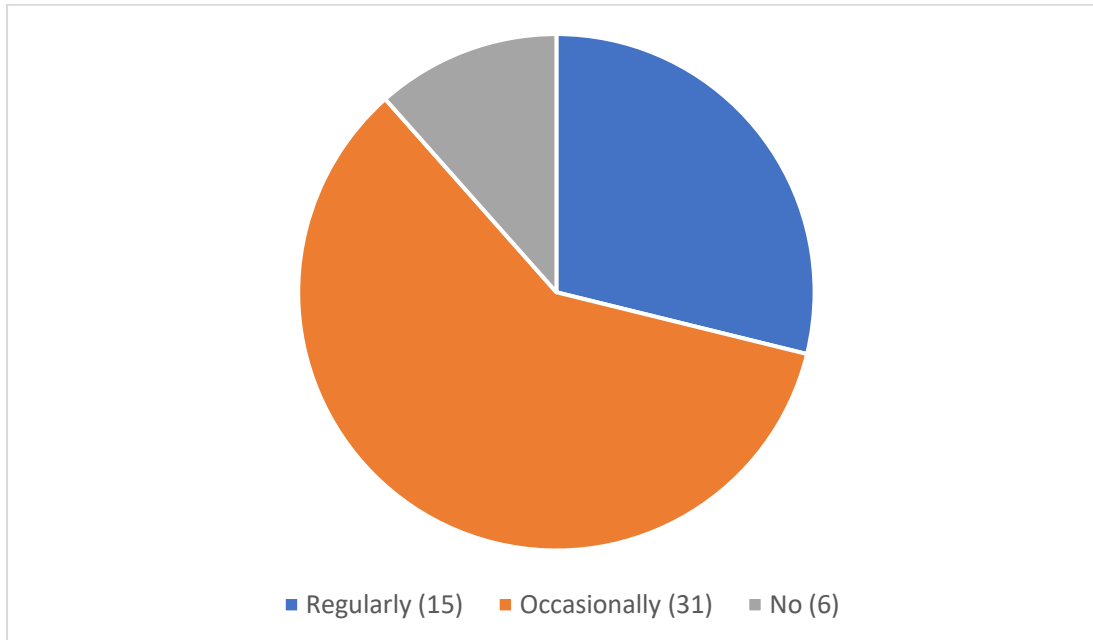
The results of this question are telling with less than 30% of local authority archaeologists regularly requiring, and 60% only occasionally requiring community engagement to be part of a developer funded investigation. This question does not allude to the types of community engagement or on the reasons why it is not happening (see other questions), but it does clearly show that community engagement is not a standard consideration of these investigations.

2.5   Examples of successful community engagement approaches

Question 5: Can you describe any approaches that you have found to be more successful than others in implementing this? If you haven't required it, please describe any ways you can think of that might be best to achieve this.

This question provided the opportunity for respondents to provide examples of ways to successfully implement community engagement in investigations. A common theme of the 41 responses received is being able to persuade the developer – a *"carrot not stick"* approach. This is through case studies, the opportunity for positive publicity and that a sense of place can form part of a developer's sales package.

The current and potential role of the planning system was also emphasised by several responses. For example, one response states that *"By condition works best - wording in the WSI is okay but less solid".* However, another respondent feels that standards are needed in order for the planning system to become a more successful route to implementing community engagement: *"I don't see any way at present to force a developer to do any particular type of engagement as there are no standards or rules to point to either by Government or by CIfA".*

Several suggestions of alternative avenues to explore were made, including:

"By lessening the focus on traditional forms of engagement e.g. interpretation boards, open days and increasing the focus on inexpensive but effective social media (which also avoids H&S issues around open days)."

"Having more policy/ CIfA backing would help encourage this as a valuable part of contract and should be scaled based on what's appropriate to a scheme"

"more information to heritage champions on breaking down the siloes of archaeology and how it links across to other activities and engagement generally."

2.6 Factors influencing community engagement

Question 6: How do you, or how would you, decide whether or not to include community engagement as part of a developer-based contract? What factors (would) weigh into your decision to include it?

Responses focus heavily on the certainty and nature of the archaeology or heritage assets (*"it has to be significant and interesting enough to justify"*), along with the fieldwork and development's size, location, H&S constraints, profile, timescales and private or public funding source. The level of existing local interest is raised several times, along with the comment that, *"where the development proposal was very controversial… it became clear community engagement was essential"*. How receptive the developer may be to community engagement, and the archaeological contractor's experience, also factor into some decision making.

A small number of LPAs require community engagement to be considered in all projects, but this raises the question of what level of engagement is proportionate to a development programme. It is generally accepted that excavations of regionally or nationally significant archaeology nearer to a sizeable population (i.e., a large potential audience for engagement) warrant some degree of community engagement. However, for evaluations, locally significant heritage assets (or projects with an unknown potential) and fieldwork in more rural areas it is often considered that community engagement would not be appropriate or proportionate. It is notable that only one respondent raises the intrinsic value of community engagement as providing a benefit to communities rather than just as a way of furthering the awareness of significant archaeology.

The challenges facing LPAs were also highlighted:

"We have no input to the contract between commercial units and clients - that is part of the problem. We can only discuss and agree what goes into the WSI for a commercial project - but by that stage the unit is usually already appointed and will have agree a price etc. So, they may be happy to include something in the WSI that it will actually be very hard to get them to deliver."

2.7   Impact of planning process stage on community engagement

Question 7: Does the planning process stage that a project is at affect whether or how you require community engagement? If yes, please explain how your decision and/ or approach is affected.


Yes (29)   No (19)   No answer (4)
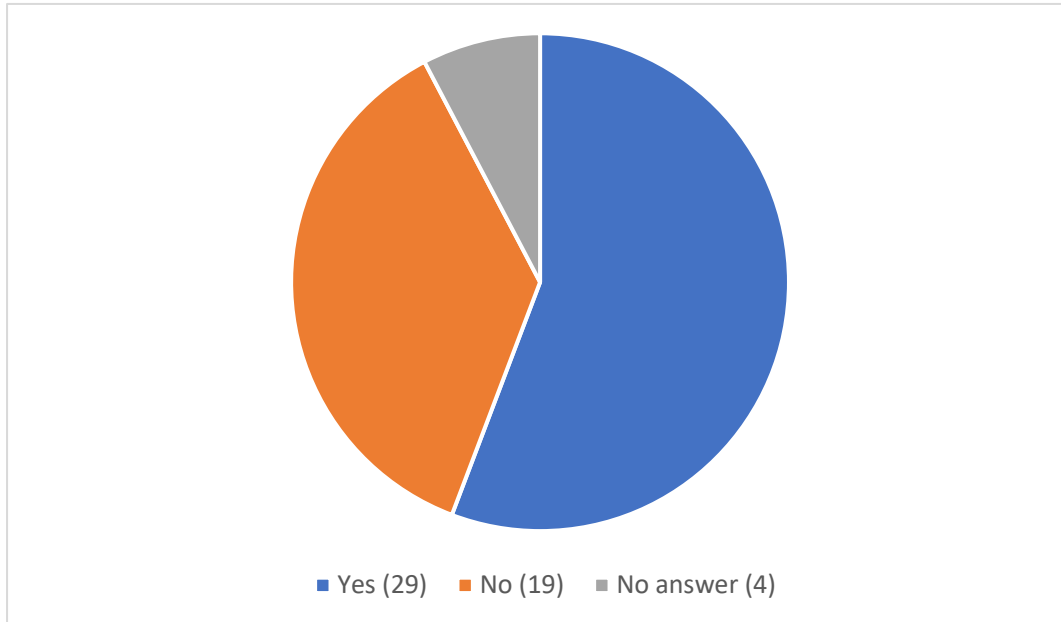
60% of the respondents to this question feel that planning stages do affect whether or how they require community engagement. However, of these, opinions are divided over which planning stages are most appropriate. Whilst some feel that pre-determination is often an inappropriate stage at which to raise community engagement – due to confidentiality, short timescales, and uncertainty around the nature of heritage assets present, – others argue that it can be better to introduce the idea of public engagement earlier on:

"generally I try to get public engagement points made in pre-application discussions as part of the general encouragement to engage an archaeologist."

"Better to start discussions early and get the principle of community engagement enshrined in planning documentation (i.e. WSI)."

2.8   Targeting community engagement

Question 8: If/ when you stipulate community engagement in a development programme, do you specify whether the engagement should be targeted to any groups in particular? If so, how do you decide who to target, and why?

■ Yes (14)   ■ No (36)   ■ No answer (2)
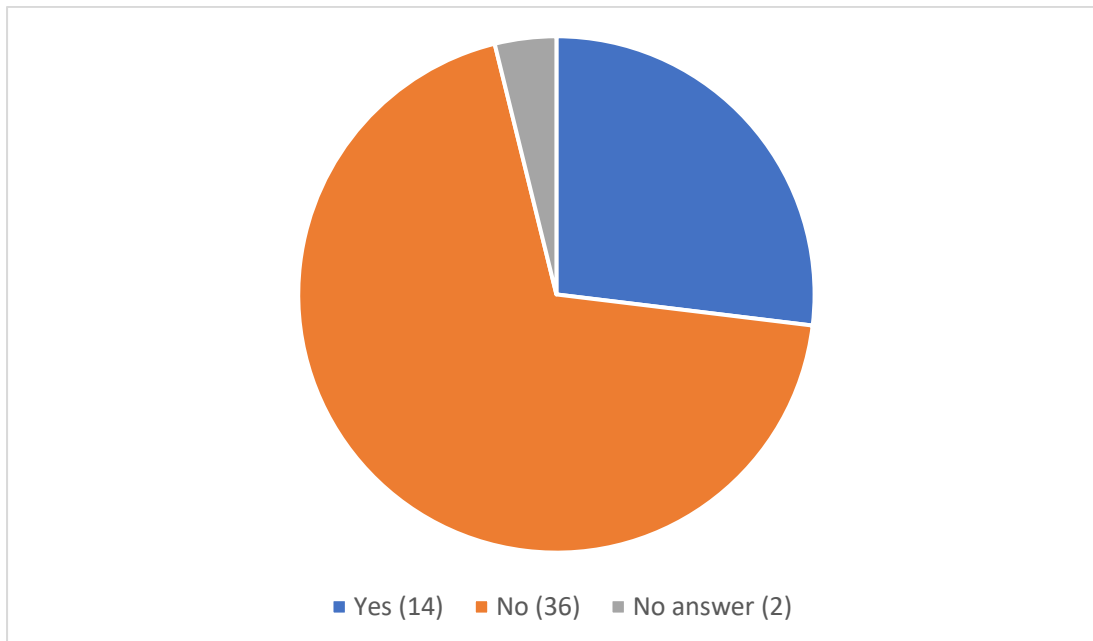
Just under 70% of respondents do not specify whether the engagement should be targeted at any specific groups. However, where target groups are specified or suggested, it is most often a local school or society, unless the site has clear links to a particular community (e.g., within a Jewish Quarter or industry where there remains a community with strong connections). However, one described approach aims to *"engage people other than the converted"*.

The need for decisions to be made on a case-by-case basis is also raised, along with the view that *"the sector needs to get better at understanding audiences"*. This point is exemplified by the fact that only one respondent requires archaeological companies to research potential audiences prior to the engagement work – *"I ask units to do audience development and identify relevant groups."*

However, there is also a cautionary note about discrimination:

"I believe that this should be non-prescriptive as it would result in discrimination. it is our collective heritage, and all should be able to engage."

2.9 Evaluation of community engagement

Question 9: If/ when you stipulate community engagement in a development programme, do you also require that it is evaluated? If so, how do you use the evaluation results?

■ Yes (9)   ■ No (41)   ■ No answer (2)
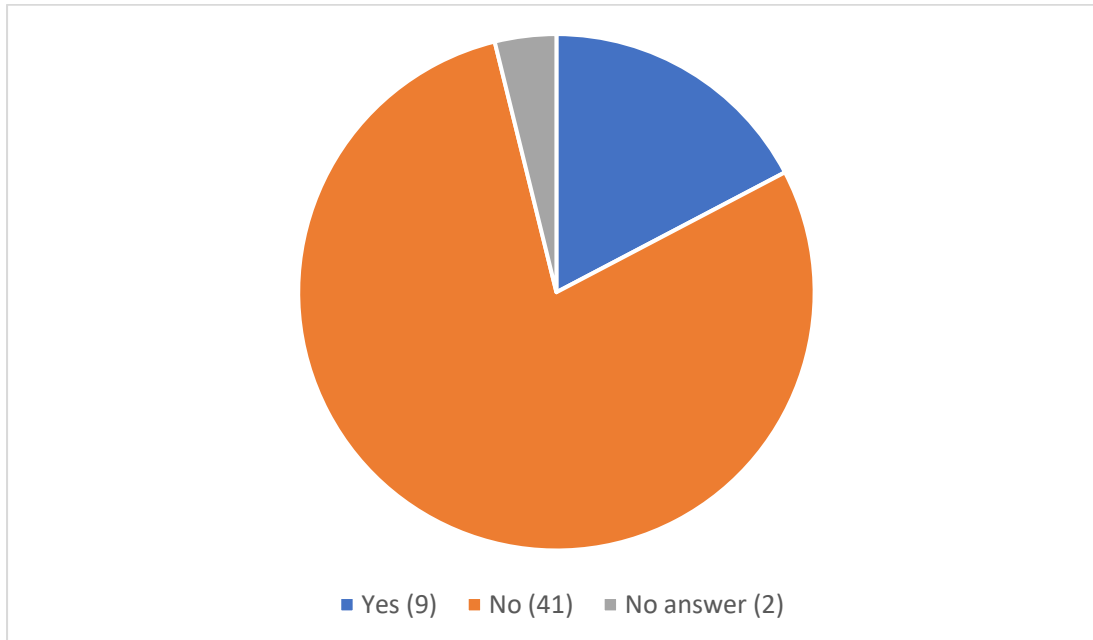
Just under 80% of the respondents replied that they do not require evaluation of the community engagement work that is undertaken.

19 additional comments were received that covered different aspects of this question. Comments highlighted the importance of evaluation to improve engagement for future work. The method of data collection also varied – which was often informally collected or collected through questionnaires and feedback.

However, it was made clear in various comments that there is only a requirement to demonstrate that engagement work has been done. Several reasons are given for this within the responses:

- Uncertainty about how engagement work could be evaluated.

- That evaluation wouldn't be appropriate within the context of developer-funded projects.

  "I don't see how it would be possible to justify the additional cost of an evaluation. As it would presumably be used to inform future projects elsewhere it wouldn't meet the 6 tests on planning conditions, as it doesn't relate to the development. Of course it would be a good idea for units to evaluate it, and for curators to keep figures on numbers of people engaged etc, but I think this would need to be done at our own expense as it would be for our benefit not the developers, particularly if you wanted to do collect and analyse detailed feedback forms as well."

- *"This is beyond the requirements of the role"*

The lack of evaluation of community engagement is a concern as it is standard practice in the cultural heritage sector. It may be that it is considered to be outside the quality assurance processes that are embedded in standard archaeological practices (excavation and post excavation) or that it is just not considered to be an important aspect of the process – as long as some outreach is undertaken. The responses on the uncertainty of evaluation practices and on who should do this, could be covered in learning resources and training.

Conclusion and Next Steps

The survey has highlighted a number of issues associated with the implementation of community engagement activities in development-led investigations. These can be grouped into the following areas:

1   Lack of awareness of the range and variety of potential engagement activities

There is a lack of awareness of the wide range and variety of community engagement activities that could be carried out. The usual practice is restricted to more traditional activities, such as site visits and talks. Often these are undertaken in a direct "top down" way rather than as a more audience driven two-way process. There is also a common perception that community engagement needs to happen during the fieldwork stage and preferably involve access to the site itself.

2   Uncertainty of what engagement option to choose and whether it is proportionate to the works being undertaken

The concern was expressed around what type or extent of community engagement is proportionate to the intervention being undertaken - how do you judge what is proportionate or reasonable?

3   Perceived barriers to implementing community engagement projects

A number of barriers were identified, including uncertainty of developer funding and restrictions on undertaking activities. The latter included H&S, planning stages of activities, time restraints, skills and staffing availability. There is a need to address these barriers and showcase how engagement activities can be undertaken.

4   A lack of clear information or guidance to facilitate the implementation of community engagement in development-led investigations

A number of the issues highlighted can be addressed through the development of training or support resources that would benefit not just local planning authority archaeologists, but also the contractors delivering these public engagement activities. These resources – webpages, standards and guidance and training – could cover a number of different areas, some of which are highlighted below:

- Explore what level of community engagement is 'proportionate' to the works being undertaken and provide examples of this as case studies.
- Understand better social value and how archaeologists can contribute to its delivery.

- Illustrate the different models of community engagement - it is apparent that a relatively traditional, top down and potentially costly view of public engagement is still widely held.

- Understanding audiences, co-creation and impact evaluation.

These could be achieved by:

- CIfA Voluntary & Community SIG developing community engagement guidance or toolkit as part of CIfA's suite of standards and guidance.

- CIfA updating its standard and guidance (including the archaeological advice by historic environment services) to refer to community engagement and public benefit and signpost to the community engagement guidance that will be created.

- CIfA creating webpage resources dedicated on the different aspects of public benefit – including community engagement.

- The creation of case studies covering different examples of engagement associated with different sizes and types of development-led investigations to showcase what can be achieved.

- Developing closer links between ALGAO and the CIfA Voluntary & Community SIG committee to support the development, delivery and communication of resources.

- CIfA Voluntary & Community SIG building on the newly created specialist competence matrix, which supports applicants who work in community archaeology roles[4]. This could be used to promote skills development in delivering community engagement to both local authority and commercial archaeologists.

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[4] CIfA Voluntary & Community SIG 2020
https://www.archaeologists.net/sites/default/files/Voluntary%20and%20community%20archaeology%20specialist%20competence%20matrix_Oct%202020.pdf