

DESK-BASED ASSESSMENT AND FIELD EVALUATION

Thirty years of archaeological experience have gone into the creation of MoLAS's unique predictive database, which allows rapid provision of site specific advice to clients and Local Planning Authorities through **desk-based archaeological assessments**. Assessment is normally the first formal step in the process of archaeological risk management for the planning process. It can be required by Local Planning Authorities implementing government policy as expressed in the Planning Policy Guidance notes on archaeology and historic buildings.

MoLAS assessments contain essential information on a site's historic and archaeological background, a summary of archaeological survival, and consideration of the impact of the proposed development. MoLAS has produced over 500 desk-based assessments for sites throughout Britain.

MoLAS produces or contributes to Environmental Statements for those projects defined as requiring **environmental impact assessment** (EIA) under European Community Directives. In 2005 MoLAS's EIA work continued to involve major infrastructure schemes for roads, railways and flood relief.

Where significant archaeological remains might be affected by development, Local Authorities may ask for desk-based assessment to be augmented by **evaluation** work in the field. Evaluation enables Local Authorities to determine planning permission but sometimes may not be possible before planning consent is granted and, in these cases, MoLAS can arrange an evaluation programme to meet the requirements of a staged planning condition. MoLAS carries out around 100 field evaluations each year, using a variety of field evaluation techniques, according to site type and conditions as follows.

Auger and borehole surveys recover evidence of past landscapes, especially on estuarine, floodplain and marshy land where conventional archaeological excavation may not be as effective. Geoarchaeological techniques can establish the location and nature of buried sediments, providing evidence for climate and ecological change, and allowing the more widespread prediction of archaeological survival. The techniques are particularly useful where archaeology is deeply buried, wet or peaty, or contaminated. Augering can reduce the number of manually excavated evaluation trenches needed and has considerably less archaeological impact than conventional excavation. The MoLAS geoarchaeology team works closely with environmental archaeologists in Specialist Services.

Contour and geophysical surveys can be used independently or in combination to prospect for and identify archaeological features over large areas.

Testpits and trial trenches are designed to establish the nature and extent of archaeological remains on a given site. The process is a predictive tool, with the configuration of trenches intended to yield maximum information from minimum intervention. MoLAS is often able to carry out trial work in parallel with the client's own geotechnical investigations, reducing overall costs, particularly on urban sites.