

Protecting Archaeology from Waste



Guidance Notes

Sites of archaeological significance are often hundreds or even thousands of years old. Their survival for the future depends on being looked after properly. Most sites have reached equilibrium with their surroundings, and even small changes can disturb that equilibrium. Dumping, or storage of waste materials, can cause irreversible damage to heritage features.

Everyone has a responsibility to ensure waste is dealt with legally and doesn't damage the environment, both historic and natural – you can be prosecuted for fly-tipping. Dumping on a Scheduled Monument is also an offence. Farmers who receive payments under agri-environmental schemes have a duty not to cause any damage to archaeological sites, and can lose money if waste is dumped on them.

What is waste?

Waste (rubbish, trash, junk) is a broad term that describes an unwanted or undesired material or substance. Some types are classed as 'controlled waste' meaning that they can pose a hazard to both public health and the environment, and need to be carefully disposed of in accordance with regulations on a licenced site. Waste includes:

- Ordinary rubbish, including everyday items such as food, electronics and packaging materials. This type of waste is the sort that ought to be put out for collection by the council in black bin bags or other suitable containers, and is generally known as municipal waste.
- Large static objects such as burnt out cars, unused farm machinery and furniture.
- Building waste, usually rubble and other waste debris from the construction/destruction of a building, including concrete, rebar, and wood. This can also include hazardous materials such as lead and asbestos which are 'controlled waste'.
- Industrial waste is produced by various methods of industrial activity. Industrial wastes can include metals, chemical solvents and other industrial by-products, which are 'controlled waste'.
- Other types of hazardous waste include motor oil, pesticides, aerosols, cleaning agents and paints.

Alien species such as Japanese Knotweed are also classed as 'controlled waste' because of the environmental damage done by their uncontrolled spread.

How can waste damage the historic environment?

Even the most inert waste can cause damage to nearby historic monuments simply by being there:

- The weight of above ground waste can compress and distort underground deposits.
- The roots of invasive species such as Japanese Knotweed can grow up to 3m, which can damage and disturb archaeological deposits.

- Waste can attract burrowing animals by providing shelter, and encourage them to dig in. These burrows damage or destroy the archaeological information beneath the surface, as well as potentially altering the shape of the monument.
- Abandoned cars can leak corrosive chemicals, such as battery acid, into the nearby area changing the soil chemistry.
- Other toxic chemicals and solvents can seep into the soil and cause corrosive and lasting damage to archaeological sites. This can in turn distort archaeological evidence impairing future research
- Burning rubbish, cars and other waste can both damage historic structures and also affect archaeological deposits below ground.
- The build-up of waste around a historic site can cause it to become less accessible and visible, preventing proper management of the site.

If historical buildings are used for proper storage, this should be done carefully, ensuring that there is no damage to the structure and any interior fittings.



What types of site are most at risk?

- Quarries are most commonly used for the dumping and storage of materials. This can damage the various structures associated with quarrying, such as lime kilns, tramways and buildings.

- Abandoned historic buildings, such as old farmhouses, military installations and industrial buildings may attract people who want to dump their waste inside out of view. This can damage the interior features and fittings that show how the building was originally used.
- Burial sites are under particular threat from corrosive wastes such as acidic chemicals and solvents as they can damage or even dissolve human bone over time.

How can we prevent waste damaging the historical environment?

We all have a responsibility to protect our heritage from all types of damage and interference. There are a number of ways we can do this:

- Dispose of your waste legally and safely. Take your waste to the tip, recycle where possible and if need be contact the council to take it away for you.
- If you're asking a third party such as a builder to remove waste from your property, ensure that they are a Registered Waste Carrier. It is your responsibility for making sure they are registered.
- Inform the authorities of any fly-tipping incidences as soon as possible. Waste that is left there can encourage further tipping.
- Educate yourself and others of the impact the improper disposal of waste can have on the historical environment.
- It is easy to unintentionally store waste and materials on a historic monument if you are unaware of its existence. You should take care to check your land for any historic landmarks on the [Archwilio](#) website, or contact your local Archaeological Trust for information.

