

# DEVisING AN HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT RESEARCH FRAMEWORK FOR GREATER LONDON

## Introduction

- 1 Both the assessment of existing knowledge – *The Archaeology of Greater London* (Museum of London, 2000) – and the research agenda – *A research framework for London archaeology* (Museum of London, 2002) were based upon the academic discipline of archaeology and its distinctive subject matter. Substituting ‘Historic Environment’ for ‘Archaeology’ widens the scope of a Greater London Research Framework in two major respects. It requires full integration with the buildings and areas of the historic *built* environment, the subject matter of architectural and urban history. It shifts the emphasis from academic disciplines to the physical presence with which they are concerned. This note explores the implications and offers some definitions as background to the Framework itself.
- 2 A Research Framework for the historic environment has to cover three interconnected activities:
  - research and investigation
  - communication and participation
  - conservation management.As ‘research’ it should deal mainly with the first two, but also show how they underpin the third, without straying too far into the connected but separate territory of a Management Framework.

## The Historic Environment

- 3 A short definition of the Historic Environment is “the material and natural world all around us, as shaped by people’s activities through time and perceived by people now”. This usefully connects subject matter and process and recognises it as a construct of changing human perceptions. A more extended definition, connecting with the three sets of activities listed above, would include the idea that the historic environment of today is inherited from the past and bequeathed to the future, introducing the concept of change and the need for its management. A model of the Historic Environment can be proposed in three interlocking parts, a **hierarchy of physical scale, shaping human activities, and natural contexts**.
- 4 The descriptive **hierarchy of physical scale** is a set of elements nested like a ‘Russian doll’. At the top or outside is the whole landscape with its imposed patterns of habitation, past and present. It contains discrete settlements and places of human habitation, urban and rural, nucleated and dispersed. Within them are standing buildings and structures and the buried remains of earlier ones. They contain or are associated with artefacts and deposits, fixtures and portable items, visible and used or buried and discarded. This is a hierarchy of scale rather than of value or significance; lower elements help understand higher ones, and higher ones raise questions requiring work at lower levels.

- 5 The sets of **human activities** that shape these elements can be described in various ways; here, five are used, economic activity, social relationships, political activity, ideology and religious belief, and cultural activity, fully recognising the overlaps between them.
- 6 The **natural contexts** for the activities at the various scales, climate, topography, inert natural resources, flora and fauna, and human population and health, offer constraints and opportunities.

| <b>BASIC MODEL OF THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT</b>   |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <b>Descriptive hierarchy of physical scale</b>   | <b>Overlapping segments of shaping human activity</b>   | <b>Natural contexts</b>  |
| landscape & habitation pattern<br>settlements & places, urban & rural<br>buildings & structures<br>artefacts & deposits  | economic activity<br>social relationships<br>political activity<br>ideology & religious belief<br>cultural activity   | climate<br>topography<br>inert natural resources<br>flora & fauna<br>human population & health |
| <i>A 'nested' hierarchy; lower elements can contribute to understanding higher up, and upper elements raise questions requiring work at lower levels: terminology is deliberately broad.</i> | <i>Useful analytical categories but also modern historicist constructs reflecting different things at different times and not necessarily recognizable in or by people from all periods of past time.</i> | <i>Constraints and opportunities for human activities</i>                                      |

### **A Research Framework**

- 7 A Research Framework for the historic environment can also be expressed as a tripartite model, comprising **themes, components** and **projects or programmes of work**.
- 8 The **themes** are high-level cohering concepts, bringing together aspects, generating questions and promoting linkages. They are discipline-neutral: some will be led by archaeology, some by architectural history, and some by various manifestations of mainstream history; most will combine disciplines in varying proportions. They will reflect the descriptive hierarchy of physical scale in the definition of the historic environment, tailored to the distinctive locality covered by the research framework.
- 9 The **components** are a range of processes and factors, useful foci for question-based research, contributing to the high-level themes rather than being themes themselves. Several types of component can be identified, such as:

- *chronological periods*, which tend towards narrative but can also facilitate intra- or cross-period analysis
- *disciplines* or *subjects*, such as geomorphology, demography, ecology, art history etc etc
- *locations*, at any scale; probably requiring multi-disciplinary work
- *processes* – ‘continuity and change’, ‘transition periods’
- *concepts* – ‘regionality’, ‘identity’ etc

10 **Projects and programmes of projects** are coherent question-based research activities, applying components to sets of human activities at the various physical scales of the historic environment.

### Proposed GLHERF themes

11 The high-level themes proposed for the Greater London Historic Environment Research Framework were derived from material in three earlier documents, the above cited Assessment of 2000 and the Research Framework of 2002, and *Capital Archaeology* (English Heritage 1998). This material was reviewed in the light of the model of the historic environment, and expressed in terms of the particular circumstances in Greater London. Six themes cover the four levels of scale in the model of the historic environment.

| <i>HE physical model</i>         | <i>Possible GLHERF themes</i>  | <i>Comment</i>  |
|----------------------------------|--|---|
| Landscape and settlement pattern | <b>1 A city in its hinterland and world context</b>  | <i>An outward-looking theme, drawing upon all others: highly collaborative historically</i>   |
| settlements urban and rural      | <b>2 Inhabiting the pre-city landscape</b><br><b>3 An evolving urban settlement</b><br><b>4 Identifying places and communities within the metropolis</b> | <i>Focuses on the area of what later became London and links it with adjacent areas</i><br><br><i>Primary focus on urban evolution; major links with 1, 4</i><br><br><i>More inward focus on the diversity of the urban totality; social property and demographic aspects; major links with 3, 5, 6</i> |
| Buildings and structures         | <b>5 Buildings for living and working</b>  | <i>Architecture and function; standing and demolished; major links with 4, 6</i>  |
| artefacts and deposits           | <b>6 Making and using artefacts</b>  | <i>Technology from flint-knapping onwards – artefacts buried and found, in buildings and places, on and used by people.</i>   |

- 12 **A city in its hinterland and world context** is the equivalent of ‘landscape and settlement pattern’, dealing with the urban form as a totality from the earliest time it can be recognised until the present day. Its size and overall character changes through time, as does its hinterland, the extra-urban area it draws upon, influences and is influenced by in return. A world city has extra-hinterland connections in the local European region and more widely across the globe: some are trading links for the exchange of goods, ideas and people; others more directly influence growth, contraction and wider policy. This outward-looking theme draws upon all the other themes in various ways, and requires an inter-disciplinary collaborative approach.
- 13 Three themes equate with the layer of the historic environment model for discrete ‘urban and rural settlements’. **Inhabiting the pre-urban landscape** deals with the area of the present City, wider metropolis and suburban areas before any of them could be identified as such. Effectively it embraces all pre-Roman archaeological evidence and all Roman and post-Roman evidence outside its contemporary urban area yet now under the modern London Boroughs. In the pre-urban periods there is an emphasis on linkages with adjacent areas. **An evolving urban settlement** is complementary, concerned primarily with the development of the urban form across the pre-urban landscape, whether absorbing existing settlements or developing anew. It has strong macro-linkages with the top level theme of the city in its hinterland and world context, and micro-linkages with a fourth theme, **identifying places and communities within the metropolis**. This focuses on the diversity of the urban totality, its distinct areas at various times, and the urban villages created within the city by residual settlement or particular populations, also reflecting social, property and demographic aspects.
- 14 Two themes equate closely with the smallest scale elements of the historic environment model. **Buildings for living and working** deals with the architectural and functional history of identifiable buildings, whether still standing or known only from records or excavation. **Making and using artefacts** equates with ‘artefacts and deposits’ though the latter can also be the archaeological component of higher themes. It covers technology from flint-knapping onwards and includes the hardware of industrial archaeology. The artefacts can be buried discoveries, items attached to or placed within extant buildings, or attached to or used by people.

## Conclusion

- 15 This is a deliberately loose fit model, aiming at inclusivity for research interests while encouraging clear design, proper justification, articulation across themes, and the contextualisation that can help bring knowledge to wider audiences and sets of users. It is also intended to generate confidence in those who wish to use the knowledge gained and those who support research through policy and the provision of resources.