

East West Rail and Archaeological Trial Trenching

As one of the UK's largest proposed railway projects we acknowledge the profound obligation we have to address the environmental challenges faced by all of us. Protecting your historic environment through preserving and enhancing your heritage assets is an important part of this.

Archaeology is the study of the remains of human activity that have been preserved through changes to the physical environment, including evidence of previous land uses such as pits, ditches or material artefacts. Archaeological findings also help us to understand how people lived by providing insights into things like diet, economy and living conditions.

What does archaeological trial trenching involve?

Trial trenching is a survey technique where we dig trenches to enable us to expose and investigate any potential buried remains. It is normally conducted by a team of two to four archaeologists per location who look at the extent and type of remains or any areas of potential remains.

Before we start the work, underground and above ground utilities will be identified and measures will be put in place to protect them. We will also arrange a meeting with the landowner before we access the land to discuss and agree things like access, safety, security and reinstatement.

As part of the survey, we will take photographs which may be published as part of the environmental survey documents submitted as part of the Development Consent Order, unless the landowner explicitly requests that they remain confidential.



Typical archaeological trial trench immediately after opening

What machinery will need to be on site?

Our archaeologists will usually need to access the site by van or a four-wheel drive vehicle. A mechanical excavator may also be needed depending on ground conditions and subject to the landowner's agreement. The excavator will usually be on tracks, to reduce disturbance to the ground, but sometimes it may be wheeled.

We will provide welfare facilities for our team (such as toilets), which will be positioned in agreement with the landowner.

Where will the trenches be dug?

We will use findings from desk-based sources and geophysical surveys to decide where the trenches need to be dug, or they may be dug at random to test areas which appear from initial studies to be clear of archaeological remains. The trenches will, where possible, be located to avoid things like known services (e.g. underground pipes), vegetation, protected species, public rights of way, land boundaries, environmental scheme field margins and any known concerns regarding ground conditions.

How big are the trenches?

The trenches are typically up to 2m wide, between 20m and 50m long and are normally excavated down to where the top soil meets the sub soil as this is where evidence of archaeology is usually located (average depth between 0.5m and 1m). However, the exact size of each trench will be specific to each location, soils and geology.

How long will the trenches be open for?

Our team will work as quickly as possible to complete the trial trenching on the site. This may be impacted by the weather, what the findings are, and what the ground itself is like. Typically, one team may open up and record the findings of two trenches per day.



We are required to leave trenches open until the Local Planning Authority's Archaeological Advisor has viewed and signed off trenches. They may visit the site to view the trenches twice a week, depending on availability. Should it be necessary to leave a trench 'open' overnight – for example if the archaeological excavation and recording is incomplete – it will be fenced off unless otherwise specified.

What happens next?

Once the survey work has been completed the trench will be backfilled, replacing the soil in the reverse order to which it was excavated and returning the site to its original state as much as possible, as shown on the photograph below.

Trial trenching needs to be carried out as early as possible before we submit the Development Consent Order so that we can:

- Avoid, preserve and enhance very important heritage assets by designing the route around them.
- Identify mitigation required for any heritage assets that we cannot avoid, either prior to or during the construction of East West Rail.

Anything that we find as a result of the trial trenching will be preserved in the correct conditions to protect it, in line with government guidelines. We will produce a report to document any finds as part of the survey.

We are committed to preserving and improving the local environment and suggest that any finds are donated to a local public repository (such as a museum) where they will be curated to ensure their long-term survival and can be accessed by museum staff, researchers and the public. The finds remain the property of the landowner (apart from Treasure) until they are formally transferred to the public repository.

The terms of the Treasure Act 1996 will be followed with regards to any finds which might fall within its scope. Any such finds will be removed to a safe place and reported to the local coroner as required by the procedures laid down in the “Code of Practice” (DCMS 1996). Where removal cannot be undertaken on the same working day as the discovery, suitable security measures will be taken to protect the finds from theft. The local Portable Antiquities Finds Liaison Officer will be informed.



A backfilled archaeological trial trench

Carrying out this important archaeological work means that we can, where reasonably possible, carefully plan to avoid the most important heritage sites, protecting and preserving the historic environment for the future.

Any questions?

If you have any questions about trial trenching, please get in touch using the details below.



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