

## **Publicly accessible repositories & archaeological archives**

A publicly accessible repository is one that is capable of providing physical and intellectual access to stored collections and their associated data to a wide and diverse range of audiences. The mechanisms that are employed to provide access to these stored collections must be user-friendly as well as:

- Fair
- Inclusive
- Equitable
- Flexible
- Responsive

Everyone must be able to benefit from what is being stored. This means that the arrangements to access stored material should recognise that there will be a range of needs at different times by different types of people with different levels of interest.

Providing public access to archaeological archives at a minimum means being able to produce both three-dimensional and associated documentary materials in a timely manner and to provide them in a space suitably equipped for examination and study over extended periods of time. The space must be capable of meeting the needs of a wide variety of users and include the provision of good access to associated information resources. It must also be capable of providing temporary storage in environmental conditions appropriate to archaeological collections and of being secured. It is acknowledged that the space where these activities take place may be provided remotely from the store itself but the location itself should avoid introducing barriers to access with regard to travel time and costs.

To be publicly accessible, however, archaeological archive repositories must be managed pro-actively in order to broaden public engagement with them and ensure they remain a well-used and relevant resource: they cannot simply exist to passively service enquiries. This means they should be managed by qualified staff with specialised knowledge of archaeology and archaeological archives that are well-

experienced in all aspects of collections management as well as effective audience engagement and development processes.

A publicly accessible repository for archaeological archives will therefore share many of the characteristics of an archaeological resource centre which is defined by the Archaeological Archives Forum as:

*‘An accredited centre dedicated to the collection and curation of archaeological archive material that is staffed and managed to provide the best possible access to the archaeological resource for the purposes of enquiry, exhibition, learning, research and general interest.’*

This definition is also similar in many respects to that of museums (Museums Association 1998) as places that:

*‘enable people to explore collections for inspiration, learning and enjoyment. They are institutions that collect, safeguard and make accessible artefacts and specimens that they hold in trust for society.’*

Taking all of the above into account and the fact that the specific detailed features of such a repository can be determined by an accreditation process, SMA suggests the following definition:

**A publicly accessible repository for archaeological archives is:**

***‘An accredited repository for the collection, curation and safe-guarding of archaeological archive material which is pro-actively managed and developed by staff qualified to ensure continued public engagement with, and the best possible access to the archaeological resource, for the purposes of enquiry, exhibition, learning, research, inspiration, enjoyment and general interest.’***