

# WAYMARK LAND & HERITAGE

## Early-Stage Heritage Intelligence Pilot Framework

This document sets out a proposed pilot framework to test the value of early-stage, non-intrusive heritage intelligence as a complementary layer within the UK planning system.

## 1. Purpose of the Pilot

The pilot is designed to assess whether early-stage, non-intrusive heritage intelligence can improve preservation outcomes by identifying artefact presence and historic land-use indicators prior to intrusive investigation or construction activity.

## 2. Background and Rationale

Current heritage assessment frameworks are effective at identifying known assets and structural remains. However, portable artefacts within topsoil are frequently discovered only after mechanical excavation has begun, resulting in loss of context and irreversible damage.

## 3. Pilot Geography

The pilot will operate across two initial counties:

- Shropshire – predominantly rural, rich multi-period landscape, active development pressure.
- Cheshire – mixed rural and peri-urban context, extensive agricultural land, infrastructure growth.

These counties provide a representative testing environment for both rural and edge-of-urban sites.

## 4. Site Selection

Between 10 and 15 development sites per county will be included, focusing on greenfield and long-worked agricultural land at pre-application or early planning stage.

## 5. Methodology

All work will be strictly non-intrusive and undertaken with written landowner permission. Activities include controlled surface and shallow topsoil detection, GPS-logged observations, and photographic documentation. No excavation or mechanical disturbance will occur.

## 6. Relationship to Existing Practice

The pilot does not replace desk-based assessment, geophysical survey, or archaeological evaluation. It provides an additional early evidence layer to inform proportionate decision-making and focus downstream investigation.

## 7. Outputs

Each site will receive a short, planning-friendly report. A pilot summary report will collate findings, identify patterns, and document observed benefits.

## 8. Success Criteria

Success will be measured through earlier identification of artefact-rich areas, reduced reliance on chance discovery, improved planning confidence, and positive stakeholder feedback.

## 9. Funding Position

The pilot is developer-funded and optional, with no cost to local authorities or central government.

## 10. Closing Statement

This pilot provides an opportunity to shift heritage discovery from accidental to intentional, strengthening preservation outcomes without regulatory burden.