

## AGENDA ITEM 7

### **Buckinghamshire Archaeological Officer's Report**

To: Buckinghamshire Countywide Archaeological Advisory Committee

Date: 20<sup>th</sup> March 2002

Author: Senior Archaeological Officer

#### A. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1 To advise the Committee of significant events since the last CAAC meeting.

#### B. PROPOSED ACTION

##### 2 The Committee is invited to:

- a **NOTE the Service's Outputs and Performance Indicators and the generally satisfactory performance in relation to the latter**
- b **APPROVE the reorganisation of the County Archaeological Service and RECOGNISE the need to secure long term funding for this enhanced provision.**
- c **NOTE progress with Strategic and Conservation Projects**
- d **NOTE recent development-related archaeological casework in the county and APPROVE the Chairman to write to the Bursar of Eton College in thanks for the gift of Rowing Lake Education Packs to the County's schools.**

#### C. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

3 All costs are contained within established budgets.

#### D. SUPPORTING INFORMATION

##### 4 **Archaeology Service Output Measures and Performance Indicators**

Output and Performance Indicator statistics collected for the service as part of the County Council's best value monitoring programme are presented for the 3rd and 4th quarters of 2001.

<b>Output</b>	<b>3rd Quarter 2001</b>	<b>4th Quarter 2001</b>
Total number of consultations handled	186	116
Number of planning applications handled	119	98
Number of archaeological fieldwork projects monitored	17	12
Number of reports received by the SMR	38	16
Number of Sites and Monuments Records enquiries handled: commercial	12	14
Number of Sites and Monuments Records enquiries handled: non-commercial	21	27

<b>Performance Indicator</b>	<b>3rd Quarter 2001</b>	<b>4<sup>th</sup> Quarter 2001</b>
Planning applications responded to within 14 days (target 80%)	95%	96%
Number of successful appeals against advice (target 0)	0 (but see note 7 below)	0
Number of important sites destroyed or damaged by development or related activity without adequate mitigation (target 0)	0	0
Sites and Monuments Records data inputting backlog	6939	6615

Overall figures for planning and conservation consultations received in 2001 and those identified as potentially of archaeological interest were almost identical to those of 2000 suggesting that the revised development control procedures brought in from the latter half of 1999 are being consistently applied.

Use of the Sites and Monuments Record has continued to rise with significant increases in non-commercial consultations. Ian Scrivener-Lindley has been working on a short-term secondment from Essex County Council undertaking backlog data inputting alongside a study for the Structure Plan Review (see 6

below). This has led to the first significant reduction in the SMR data inputting backlog for at least four years.

## **5 Reorganisation of the County Archaeological Service and Best Value Review**

A report to the September 2001 Committee meeting highlighted the increasing workload pressures facing the CAS and the need to reorganise the service to comprise a Sites and Monuments Record Officer and an Archaeological Planning and Conservation Officer both reporting to the Senior Archaeological Officer. Part funding has been secured from English Heritage for a 3 year period to support the appointment of a Planning and Conservation Officer, initially on a 3 year fixed term contract. Interviews are to be held on Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> March and it is hoped to have the new arrangements in place by the end of April. Julia Wise will work full time on the SMR and will be responsible for the “Unlocking Buckinghamshire’s Past” Outreach Project. The appointment of a full time SMR Officer was an essential pre-requisite for making this HLF bid. Funding will need to be secured in due course to continue the planning and conservation post beyond its initial three years.

The CAS is currently being covered by a best value review of the County Council’s planning service. The results of this review will be reported to the next meeting but it is to be hoped that the Buckinghamshire Archaeological Management Plan will be endorsed as a commitment to “continuous improvement”.

## **6 Strategic and Conservation Projects**

This section provides a summary of projects which are not based directly upon our development control functions but are of a more strategic, conservation and interpretation nature. Most of these projects are being pursued in partnership with other organisations and involve drawing in substantial amounts of external funding. The nature and progress of current projects is summarised in appendix A.

The main highlight has been approval of the Heritage Lottery Fund application for the **Whiteleaf Hill Restoration Project**. The contract for the archaeological elements of this project, involving survey, re-excavation and reconstruction of a barrow and a local outreach/education programme, has been let to (to be confirmed). The project will last for two years with site works due to commence imminently.

The CAS is undertaking a study of land to the **NW of Aylesbury** to inform the County Structure Plan Review. This is an area with significant historic environment constraints including a Roman “small town” and associated sites, many small medieval settlements and historic parks and gardens from the Tudor period (Quarrendon) through to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Rothschilds). The impact of major development on the historic environment of this area has already been controversial in the current AVDC Local Plan Review. The aim of this study is to ensure recognition of historic environment issues at an early

stage of plan preparation. The study will be linked to an **Historic Landscape Characterisation Project** for the whole county for which funding is being sought from English Heritage and to the **Bernwood Project**.

The project design for the **Unlocking Buckinghamshire's Past SMR Outreach Project** is in preparation with the intention of submitting the bid in this summer. There has been an excellent response to the public and educational consultation. The next sub-committee meeting is to be held on the 1<sup>st</sup> April. A full report will be given to the September meeting.

Geophysical survey on the site of the Roman villa at **The Rye, High Wycombe** has discovered a substantial stone structure beneath the playing fields adjacent to the Bassetbury swimming pool. The discovery may well be related to previous finds of pila tiles, presumably from a bath house, and antiquarian reports of a "fortress". The advisability of further investigation is being considered in collaboration with the Chilterns AONB Office and English Heritage.

Unfortunately it has not proved possible to progress the proposed **Desborough Castle Community Archaeology Project** reported to the last CAAC meeting due to the completion of Wycombe District Council's Castlefield Regeneration Project. It is hoped that it may be possible to undertake such a project in the future.

## 7 **Archaeology and Development**

A list of recent fieldwork is provided in appendix B - the highlights are summarised below:

Excavation was successfully completed on the Iron Age, Roman and early Saxon site on the line of the **Aston Clinton bypass** which was reported to the previous meeting. A late 6<sup>th</sup> century pagan Saxon cemetery was unexpectedly discovered during the archaeologically supervised stripping of topsoil close to the Tring Roundabout. Nineteen graves were excavated, including a female inhumation burial with two saucer brooches and a necklace of glass beads. The project attracted much local and media interest and is proving to be of considerable archaeological interest too. Initial indications are that elements of the medieval and modern landscape may have their origins in the latter half of the first millennium BC whilst the Saxon cemetery lies at the frontier between Saxon settlement and a surviving area of British control centred on the Roman town at Verulamium.

Evaluation trenching on **Castle Hill, Buckingham** located the deeply buried remains of the castle rampart. Buckingham Castle was probably constructed in the early 12<sup>th</sup> century within the defensive circuit of the Late Saxon burh. The castle is not well documented and appears to have been reduced to a ruin in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and finally levelled for conversion to a bowling green around 1670. The evaluation focussed on a strip of land along the eastern side of the hill where a retaining wall is collapsing into properties below and is in

need of consolidation. The CAS is advising Buckingham Town Council on how to minimise the archaeological impact of essential works.

The CAS has become involved in several building recording projects. At the **Royal Canadian Memorial Hospital , Cliveden** and the **Princess Mary RAF Hospital at Halton** the service has recommended recording prior to demolition of these unlisted but historically significant military hospitals. These projects illustrate a potential gap in provision for the unlisted built heritage outside conservation areas. Integrated below and above ground archaeological recording is been undertaken at **Bury Farm Moat, Great Missenden** in connection with conversion of listed barns to domestic accommodation within a medieval moated site. The project illustrates the both the potentially major archaeological impact of barn conversion and the benefits of integrating building and below ground archaeological recording and analysis.

The Inspector's decision on the site at **Rose Cottage, Penn**, where an evaluation reported to the last meeting had revealed a well preserved brick-built kiln of 17<sup>th</sup>/18<sup>th</sup> century date, was received. Unfortunately it did not support an archaeological reason for refusal, although this was probably inevitable given the local planning authority's failure to cite archaeology as a reason for refusal. The appeal was dismissed on non-archaeological grounds and a new application submitted.

It must be admitted that an unusually high proportion of the smaller projects undertaken in the period from September 2001 to February 2002 have produced negative results. Whilst it is neither appropriate nor realistic to expect all investigations to produce positive results, it is proposed to keep the situation under review.

An education pack has been produced on **The Archaeology of the Eton Rowing Lakes** by Oxford Archaeology for Eton College and Eton Aggregates. Seventy copies have been given to the County Council for distribution to schools.

#### E. BACKGROUND PAPERS

*"A future for our past"*. The Buckinghamshire Archaeological Management Plan.

Archaeological Reports submitted to the SMR

*The Archaeology of the Eton Rowing Lake. Key Stage 2 Education Pack.*

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