

AGENDA ITEM 9

Buckinghamshire Archaeological Officer's Report

To: Buckinghamshire Countywide Archaeological Advisory Committee

Date: 16th October 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 **NOTE the reorganisation of the County Archaeological Service.**
- c **NOTE progress with Strategic and Conservation Projects**
- d **NOTE recent development-related archaeological casework in the county.**

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 1st and 2nd quarters of 2002.

Output	1st Quarter 2002	2nd Quarter 2002
Total number of consultations handled	145	114
Number of planning applications handled	108	93
Number of archaeological fieldwork projects monitored	14	15
Number of reports received by the SMR	63	52
Number of Sites and Monuments Records enquiries handled: commercial	18	12
Number of Sites and Monuments Records enquiries handled: non-commercial	33	20

Performance Indicator	1st Quarter 2002	2nd Quarter 2002
Planning applications responded to within 14 days (target 80%)	86%	96%
Number of successful appeals against advice (target 0)	0	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	6537	6549

Unfortunately the target of eliminating the “high priority” element of the SMR backlog by the end of September 2002 has not been met, although progress has been made (the total backlog has been reduced from a peak of 7268 in June 2001 to 6492 in September 2002). To improve this situation a student will be undertaking some work on the SMR this autumn and funding has been identified to appoint an SMR Assistant for a 3 month period in the spring with the aim of achieving this objective by April 2003.

5 Reorganisation of the County Archaeological Service and Best Value Review

The CAS was reorganised in May 2002 and now comprises a Sites and Monuments Record Officer (Julia Wise) and an Archaeological Planning and Conservation Officer (David Radford), both reporting to the Senior Archaeological Officer.

The Planning & Conservation Officer Post is part funded by English Heritage for a 3 year period. We are working with DEFRA and other partners to develop the conservation dimension of this post which will aim, amongst other things, to target agri-environment grants towards the conservation of

archaeological sites and historic landscapes and improving access and interpretation. A full report on this work will be presented to a future meeting.

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.

In addition, David Green has joined the CAS team on a short-term English Heritage funded contract to undertake an historic landscape characterisation project (see section 6 below for further details). Tanya Berks, a student on the Oxford University Professional Archaeology Diploma Course, will be joining the service for three months this autumn.

The CAS is currently being covered by the **Best Value Review** of the County Council’s planning service. Inevitably the focus of the review is on the wider planning function rather than the archaeology service itself. Nevertheless, the review does acknowledge the service’s good response rate to consultations and strength in partnership working. The need to consolidate the new planning post is recognised. An Improvement Plan is being prepared and will be reported to the next meeting.

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 the commencement 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 Oxford Archaeology. Survey work began in the summer leading up to four small-scale excavations undertaken for an Open Day held on the 15th September. In parallel, the museum has organised a display based on the 1930s excavation of the Neolithic barrow in Princes Risborough library. Further archaeological investigation involving local volunteers and a schools educational programme is planned for later this year and next year when the Neolithic barrow will be re-excavated and reconstructed and Whiteleaf Cross restored.

The CAS has begun an **Historic Landscape Characterisation Project** funded largely by English Heritage which will provide a GIS-based historic landscape map of the county and an accompanying report. The Bucks HLC will help develop tools for practical input into landscape management decisions at a local level including, if appropriate, further supplementary planning guidance.

The overall outcome should be a heightened understanding and appreciation of the historic landscape across the community and in all aspects of planning and land management. The potential uses of HLC are numerous – in Buckinghamshire the following are likely to be the main immediate uses:

- **Landscape Characterisation** - provision of historical depth to support and complement the *Landscape Plan for Buckinghamshire*
- **Land Use Planning** – especially informing strategic planning, contributing to supplementary planning guidance and providing a context for archaeological development control advice.
- **Conservation** - particularly in relation to the Chilterns AONB, the County Council’s proposed “Bernwood Project” in northwest Bucks and the targeting of MAFF agri-environment grants.
- **Public Outreach** – On-line access to the Bucks HLC will be an important component of the “Unlocking Buckinghamshire’s Past” SMR Outreach Project. Opportunities will be sought to engage local communities through this project and the interpretation strands of conservation projects.
- **Research** – HLC will help stimulate research into the county’s historic landscapes (for example in relation to the Bernwood & Whittlewood Projects and by feeding into the proposed Solent-Thames sub-Regional Research Frameworks Project)

At present the project is only covering the modern administrative county but it is hoped that it can be extended to cover Milton Keynes and the remainder of the Chilterns AONB in Oxfordshire (Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire having already been covered by similar projects). A full report will be made to the next meeting

As promised at the previous meeting, a separate report is provided on the **Unlocking Buckinghamshire’s Past Project**.

7 **Archaeology and Development**

Part 1 of the Inspector’s report on the **Aylesbury Vale Local Plan Inquiry** was published in August 2002. The Part 1 report covers strategy, general policies and policies and proposals for Aylesbury. By and large the inspectors treatment of archaeological matters is supportive. Changes are recommended to the archaeological policies to bring them closer into line with PPG 16 but the recommendation to include non-scheduled sites on Proposals Maps is neither very practical nor desirable. We will explore with AVDC other means of meeting the inspector’s concerns on this matter. The report endorses the major developments to the north of Aylesbury at Berryfields and Weedon Hill and the need for a “Western Link Road” but also recognises the need to safeguard archaeological sites, especially the scheduled monument at Quarrendon. Although critical of AVDC’s Country Park policy, the inspector did conclude that “the only logical place for the Park would be between Berryfields and Weedon Hill”. The CAS is encouraging and supporting AVDC in its efforts to develop a sustainable management strategy for the SAM and its setting.

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

Evaluation trenching at the **Former Sanderson Site, Denham**, has located a stratified sequence of peat and alluvial deposits dating to the Late Pleistocene to Neolithic periods surviving beneath a 1920s/30s factory. Beneath the peat was a buried land surface which has been radiocarbon dated to 10230 ± 80 BP and contains small quantities of worked and burnt flint. The site is of exceptional importance as it is contemporary with a nationally important Upper Palaeolithic and Mesolithic site discovered at the nearby Three Ways Wharf, Uxbridge in the 1980s. The presence of a complete environmental sequence spanning the end of the last glaciation and the beginning of the Holocene in association with well preserved archaeological evidence is particularly significant. The CAS is working with the developers, the Museum of London and South Bucks District Council to develop a “mitigation strategy” to minimise the impact of redevelopment.

Extensive trial trenching has been completed at the **Berryfields MDA, Aylesbury** confirming the presence of an Iron Age settlement and Roman “ladder settlement” previously detected by geophysical survey but despite much trenching of “blank areas” only a low density of other features were found suggesting that the geophysical survey is generally reliable. The Roman settlement, and probably at least part of the Iron Age settlement, are to be preserved in-situ.

A single evaluation trench at **Kiln Barn, Lacey Green** found the infilled ditch of Grim’s Ditch (a later prehistoric linear earthwork) as anticipated but surprisingly, as the site is high in the Chilterns, it had a waterlogged fill. A report is still awaited on this work but if good environmental evidence does survive along Grim’s Ditch this would potentially enable a much better understanding of long term landscape change in the Chiltern Hills.

An excavation at the **Former Cement Works at Pitstone** in advance of housing development unexpectedly revealed extensive dispersed early/middle Saxon occupation instead of the Iron Age activity predicted from the evaluation. The probable explanation is that some Saxon and Iron Age pottery can be confused.

With the support of English Heritage, the CAS has recommended refusal of a planning application for a new house at **Moat View, Terrick, Ellesborough** on the grounds of its impact on the visual setting of a scheduled moat. An unusual aspect of the application was the requirement to demolish a 19th century stables (a curtilage structure of a grade II listed building and now in residential use) adjacent to the moat in order to allow the new house to be categorised as a replacement dwelling. CAS and EH considered the stables to be beneficial to the setting of the moat and recommended that they should not be demolished nor should the proposed new building be sited too close to the moat.

E. BACKGROUND PAPERS

“A future for our past”. The Buckinghamshire Archaeological Management Plan.

Archaeological Reports submitted to the SMR

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