

AGENDA ITEM 6

Buckinghamshire Archaeological Officer's Report

To: Buckinghamshire Historic Environment Forum

Date: 26th March 2003

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A. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1 To advise the Committee of the work of the County Archaeological Service since the last BHEF 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 change in the Archaeology Service's management**
- c **INVITE the Regional Director of English Heritage to address the Historic Environment Forum**
- d **NOTE progress with Strategic and Conservation Projects**
- e **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 3rd and 4th quarters of 2002.

Output	3rd Quarter 2002	4th Quarter 2002
Total number of consultations handled	170	124
Number of planning applications handled	112	102
Number of archaeological fieldwork projects monitored	6	11
Number of reports received by the SMR	27	25
Number of Sites and Monuments Records enquiries handled: commercial	14	9
Number of Sites and Monuments Records enquiries handled: non-commercial	9	12

Performance Indicator	3rd Quarter 2002	4th Quarter 2002
Planning applications responded to within 14 days (target 80%)	93%	92%
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	6492	6442

Work on the SMR data inputting backlog continues. A student undertook SMR data inputting in autumn 2002. An SMR Assistant has been appointed for a 3 month period with the aim of eliminating the “high priority” element of the SMR backlog by April 2003. Between September 2001 and mid-March 2003 over 700 priority records have been input reducing this element of the backlog from a high point of 778 items in to less than 250 (NB: during this time 183 new items were added to the backlog).

5 Best Value Review and Improvement Plan

Last year the CAS was covered by the **Best Value Review** of the County Council’s planning service. Inevitably the focus of the review was on the wider planning function rather than the archaeology service itself. Nevertheless, the BV Review did acknowledge the service’s good response rate to consultations, strength in partnership working and the need to consolidate the new planning post. An Improvement Plan has been prepared as part of which it has been decided to relocate the CAS within the organisational structure of a new “Planning and Environment Service” – from 31st March 2003 the service will be part of the “Environment” service grouping and will report to Mike Woods. The change will bring the

archaeology service organisationally closer to its partners in Countryside Services.

6 **State of the Historic Environment Report**

English Heritage published its first annual *State of the Historic Environment Report* in November 2002 comprising a national overview and regional summaries. The report is available on the internet from www.historicenvironment.org.uk. It provides some headline statistics derived from other studies and identifies a number of threats and challenges for the historic environment. One clear message is that for many potential indicators there is poor or no quantitative data available. Particular issues which are highlighted are: poor decisions and unregulated development; insensitive new design; climate change; the quality of educational provision and social exclusion. The under-resourcing of local authority historic environment services is highlighted as are the levels of Buildings at Risk (2.4% of grade I and II* buildings in the South-East; less than the national average of 3.7%) and the impact of agriculture on archaeological monuments. The overall challenges are summarised in two questions:

- Has the value and significance of the historic environment been identified, understood and communicated?
- Is what is valuable and significant being sustained effectively for the future?

In order to assist the Forum to understand this emerging regional and national picture it is proposed that the Forum invite Mr Bill Startin, Regional Director of English Heritage to address the September meeting of the BHEF.

7 **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 achievement since the last meeting has been the submission to the Heritage Lottery Fund of the **Unlocking Buckinghamshire's Past** SMR outreach project bid in December 2002. Letters of support have been received from Aylesbury Vale and Wycombe District Councils and another is understood to be on the way from South Bucks. There has been no response from Chiltern District Council. We hope to have a decision from the HLF by June 2003 for a start in September 2003.

A full report is provided on the **Historic Landscape Characterisation Project** (Agenda item 10).

8 Archaeology and Development

The service has been very busy with input into the the Milton Keynes and South Midlands Development Studies (see agenda item 12) and progressing the updating of planning notification maps.

A written statement was supplied for a planning appeal at **18 The Avenue, Worminghall** in support of refusal of planning permission by Aylesbury Vale District Council on the grounds of failure to provide an archaeological evaluation. The appeal was rejected on archaeological grounds amongst other matters.

A report was received from Oxford Archaeology on building recording prior to demolition of a cob-built cottage known as **The Kya, Ludgershall**. Tree-ring dating carried out on salvaged timbers showed that the cottage had been built in 1569 and that its full significance had regrettably not been recognised prior to demolition. A short report on the circumstances and implications is supplied in appendix C.

Fieldwork has been relatively quiet over the winter period. A list of recent fieldwork is provided in appendix B - the highlights are summarised below:

At **Chessvale Bowls Club, Chesham**, an evaluation has found unexpected evidence for rare Middle/Late Bronze Age occupation, including the deliberate deposition of a whole pot in a pit. The location of the site on a valley side overlooking the River Chess suggests that similar locations may have significant potential for prehistoric archaeology – an hypothesis perhaps borne out by the discovery of undated (but probably prehistoric) pits at the former **Ercol Site, High Wycombe**.

Excavation along **Phase 1 of the Stoke Hammond bypass** has recorded the plough-truncated remains of an Iron Age settlement and field system found by a County Council evaluation undertaken in the mid-1990s.

The list of fieldwork reports for 2000 and 2001 is now available on the County Archaeological Service web site which will be updated with annual summaries from now on.

E. BACKGROUND PAPERS

State of the Historic Environment Report 2002. English Heritage.

Archaeological Reports submitted to the SMR

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