

## AGENDA ITEM 9

### **Buckinghamshire Historic Landscape Characterisation Project**

To: Buckinghamshire Historic Environment Forum

Date: 26<sup>th</sup> March 2003

Author: Senior Archaeological Officer

#### A. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1 To advise the Forum of progress with the Buckinghamshire Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) Project including an outline of the methodology and emerging uses.

#### B. PROPOSED ACTION

- 2 **The Committee is invited to:**

**NOTE progress with the Buckinghamshire Historic Landscape Characterisation Project and ENDORSE the recommendation for the Forum to consider a formal report to members in March 2004.**

**CONSIDER the desirability of the Forum taking a lead role in promoting an initiative to give greater recognition to designed landscapes.**

#### C. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 3 Bucks HLC is being funded jointly by Buckinghamshire County Council and English Heritage. The total project budget is £48.6k, 85% of which is provided by English Heritage. Funding for an extension to cover Milton Keynes has recently been agreed.

#### D. SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 4 The genesis of English Heritage's national Historic Landscape Characterisation Programme can be found in a White Paper brought out in 1990. *This Common Inheritance* invited English Heritage and the Countryside Agency to consider whether it was desirable to create a register of landscapes of historic significance to inform the planning process. A registers of historic parks had been under development since 1996 but this selective approach was, on reflection, felt to be inappropriate to the wider historic landscape, all of which has an historic dimension. Instead, a new approach based on the characterisation of the historic dimension of the whole landscape was developed in Cornwall in 1993/4 and has been slowly "rolled-out" on a county by county basis across England since then. This approach was endorsed by the Government in PPG 15 (Planning and the Historic Environment) published in 1995. More recently, in *The historic environment: a force for our future* the

Government commended character assessment and re-affirmed its commitment to the policy principles set out in PPGs 15 and 16.

- 5 The desirability of undertaking a Bucks Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) Project was endorsed by the Countywide Archaeological Advisory Committee as part of its consideration of the Buckinghamshire Archaeological Management Plan in 1999/2000 (Policy Action Points 5.3 and 5.4). Bucks HLC began in August 2002 and is currently due to be completed in December 2003 (but as noted above it may be extended to cover Milton Keynes). It is a computer based archaeological mapping method for defining the historic and archaeological dimension of the present day landscape. It can explain how and why the landscape looks as it does, identify time depth and facilitate sustainable management. A project methodology document has been prepared - **a short presentation by the Historic Landscape Officer will outline the Bucks methodology.** The project methodology for Buckinghamshire has been devised by the analysis of other HLC projects that have been successfully completed or are currently in progress. Among the projects reviewed were, Cumbria, Cheshire, Devon, Lancashire, Shropshire and the East of England. In addition the demands and idiosyncrasies of the Buckinghamshire landscape have also been taken into account and new approaches and techniques have also been introduced. The principal products of an HLC exercise are typically a series of Geographical Information System (GIS) - based data sets and a supporting report. This information will be made available to partner organisations.
- 6 Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) aims to provide tools which are readily understandable by the non-specialist and useable in a variety of land management contexts. The Bucks HLC will help develop tools for practical input into landscape management decisions at a local level including, if appropriate, 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 DEFRA 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)
- 7 A draft report and recommendations for implementation is expected to be available in time for the March 2004 meeting of HEF. It is suggested that the Forum could consider making a formal report to its constituent bodies. In the interim, the information emerging from the project will be used to seek to inform the Milton Keynes and South Midlands study and other work of the County Archaeological Service. Options for follow-on projects are being explored for the medium term. These include a more in depth study of the Chilterns AONB and an “Extensive Urban Survey” for historic urban areas.
- 8 The Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust have also written to all Chief Planning Officers expressing concern about the lack of recognition for unregistered designed landscapes in the county. This topic, which is of such importance to the Buckinghamshire landscape cuts across professional divides between archaeology, buildings and landscapes - it might make a good subject for this forum to promote co-ordinated action.

E. BACKGROUND PAPERS

*“A future for our past”*. The Buckinghamshire Archaeological Management Plan. BCC 2000.

*Planning Policy Guidance 15 (Planning and the Historic Environment)*. Departments of the Environment and National Heritage 1995.

*This Common Inheritance*. Department of National Heritage White Paper 1991.

*The historic environment: a force for our future*. DCMS 2001.

**CONTACT OFFICER: ALEXANDER (SANDY) KIDD 01296-382927**