

AGENDA ITEM 12

Buckinghamshire Monument Conservation Project

To: Buckinghamshire Historic Environment Forum

Date: 26th March 2003

Author: Senior Archaeological Officer

A. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1 To advise the Forum of the development of a Buckinghamshire Monument Conservation Project aimed at measuring and minimising the risk of damage to important archaeological monuments from non-development related sources.

B. PROPOSED ACTION

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

SUPPORT the aims and continued development of the Buckinghamshire Monument Conservation Project.

APPROVE the targets for the financial year 2003/4 specified in paragraph 8.

C. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 3 Funding is being sought from English Heritage for on-site conservation work. Staff costs are contained within established budgets.

D. SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 4 It has long been recognised that archaeological monuments are at risk from activities which fall outside the planning process. The English Heritage *Monuments at Risk Survey of England 1995* (MARS) studied what was believed to be a representative sample of English monuments dividing them into three risk categories:

High risk: Monuments under imminent threat of wholesale destruction or serious loss.

Medium risk: Some chance of the monument being damaged or partly destroyed in the short to medium term.

Low risk: No perceptible threat.

Nationally, the MARS study concluded that an average one monument had been destroyed per day since the Second World War. The study indicated that 2% of monuments were at high risk; 28.4% at medium risk and 48.5% at low

risk (for the remaining 21% risk could not be assessed). Perhaps unsurprisingly monuments in arable land were found to be at the greatest overall risk followed by those under forestry and developed land. The report made many recommendations of which the most relevant for this report were that a programme of local risk assessments is developed and linked to a local action plan for risk aversion.

5 In *The historic environment: a force for our future* the Government called upon local authorities to adopt a positive approach to the management of the historic environment within their area and monitoring its condition. Nationally and regionally, the first step has been taken by English Heritage in publishing its *State of the Historic Environment Report 2002* (see agenda item 6) but this is only a general overview with little or no new information on archaeological monuments. In the East Midlands Region English Heritage has undertaken a pilot scheduled monuments at risk survey.

6 Locally, the need to develop a non-development conservation dimension to the County Archaeological Service's work was recognised in the *Buckinghamshire Archaeological Management Plan*. There is also a need to identify suitable historic environment condition indicators for measuring the effectiveness of sustainability strategies, including the County Structure Plan (and its successors) and the Chilterns AONB Management Plan. The Chilterns AONB Management Plan includes two historic environment indicators:

- Number of scheduled ancient monuments in positive management
- Number of listed buildings on the "at risk" register

It must be stressed, however, that the purpose of this project is not simply to gather statistics but to gather information to guide, prioritise and implement practical management solutions. The appointment of David Radford to the post of "Archaeological Planning and Conservation Officer" in 2002 has provided a staff resource within the County Archaeological Service to carry this initiative forward, indeed the funding from English Heritage was supplied partly with this in mind. Some work has been started including provision of advice to DEFRA on Countryside Stewardship Schemes and publicising the availability of advice to farmers and landowners. A total of 23 new Countryside Stewardship agreements were offered in Buckinghamshire last year with a total value of just over £100,000. Our advisory service should help improve the quality and success rate of Buckinghamshire stewardship applications with regard to the historic environment in general and archaeological remains in particular. In future we aim to use Historic Landscape Characterisation to inform our input into stewardship.

7 Archaeological conservation management and condition monitoring is also undertaken by some other organisations. Within the County Council, the Countryside Strategic Initiatives Team is responsible for scheduled ancient monuments on Bacombe Hill, Whiteleaf Hill and the Thornborough Bridge. Likewise, Wycombe District Council manages Desborough Castle and Castle Hill, High Wycombe. The National Trust employs archaeologists to advise on

the management of monuments on its land. English Heritage has a Field Monument Warden who monitors the condition of scheduled monuments and will advise landowners on good practice. DEFRA provides grants to farmers and landowners for sustainable management but their in-house provision for archaeological advice is limited. The proposed Bucks Project will aim to supplement rather than replace or cut across existing provision. A strategic overview will be established to enable us to target particular problem sites or issues.

8 It is proposed that the general aims of the project should be:

- a) To identify and quantify significant threats to archaeological monuments in Buckinghamshire.
- b) To develop and implement a prioritised Monuments at Risk Action Plan.
- c) To seek to improve public access to monuments and interpretation of sites which can be visited.

It is envisaged that the Monuments at Risk Action Plan should aspire towards comparable status to a Biodiversity Action Plan. Various mechanisms for improving monument management are available, including Countryside Stewardship Schemes, Heritage Lottery grants and grants from English Heritage.

9 In financial year 2003/4 it is proposed to identify the following targets:

- a) Complete a preliminary “Monuments at risk” register covering the 139 scheduled ancient monuments within new Bucks. This will identify overall risk and, where appropriate, threat factors. The intention is to base the register wherever possible on site visits made by professional archaeologists (normally from the CAS, English Heritage or National Trust) within the past five years - this could then be rolled forward in a process of “quinquennial review”. Where access cannot be obtained then aerial photography may have to be utilised as a primary source.
- b) Continue to improve information for farmers, landowners and agencies such as DEFRA and the Forestry Commission.
- c) Establish a Monument Management Project with c £10k funding per annum from English Heritage. Discussions have been opened with English Heritage on a funding arrangement based on similar projects in operation in other counties.
- d) Prepare a draft “Monuments at Risk Action Plan” for the Bucks HEF analysing the major threats to archaeological monuments in the county and proposing prioritised strategies to address them.

E. BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

Monuments at Risk Survey of England 1995. English Heritage and Bournemouth University 1998.

State of the Historic Environment Report 2002. English Heritage.

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

CONTACT OFFICER: ALEXANDER (SANDY) KIDD 01296-382927