

**BUCKS LOCAL AUTHORITY CONSERVATION PROVISION**

To: Buckinghamshire Historic Environment Forum

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Authors: Senior Archaeological Officer

**A. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1 To inform the Forum of the conclusions of the *Survey of Local Authority Conservation Provision in England* conducted on behalf of English Heritage and the Institute of Historic Buildings Conservation and to present a preliminary overview of the situation in Buckinghamshire in relation to this.

**B. PROPOSED ACTION**

**2 The Committee is invited to:**

- a) **NOTE the report and summary of the local situation.**
- b) **CONSIDER the implications of the report and the local situation in responding to the Reviews of Heritage Protection and Historic Environment Records.**
- c) **REQUEST the Chairman to write to the relevant Portfolio Holder at Aylesbury Vale District Council to impress the need to at least retain the existing staffing level of their conservation service.**
- d) **ESTABLISH an officer Working Party to consider options for joint projects and pooling resources in the historic environment sector.**

**C. RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS**

- 3 None directly but implementation of the recommendations of the national report would have significant resource implications, even just to bring Bucks up to the current (inadequate) national average.

**D. SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

4. The *Survey of Local Authority Conservation Provision in England* published in February 2003 was undertaken by Oxford Brookes University for English Heritage and the Institute of Historic Buildings Conservation (IHBC). It collected a wide range of information on staffing levels, budgets, skills and salaries, organisational structures and workloads as well as seeking to gain a general impression of the quality of service
5. The key findings of the Oxford Brookes have been widely circulated in a short report on *Local Authority Conservation Provision* issued jointly by DCMS, English Heritage and IHBC (see appendix A). The overall message is one of concern:

*“The overwhelming impression is of a conservation service that is frequently over-stretched, under-resourced and operating without many of the necessary policy and data “building blocks” that would ensure an effective, efficient and balanced service.*

*Local authorities are likely to face considerable difficulties in addressing their responsibilities for managing the historic environment unless they can identify more resources and incentives to improve performance, such as the introduction of local performance indicators which reflect the extent of the historic assets in their care.”*

Ten Action Points are identified based on the following issues which need to be addressed:

1. A balanced comprehensive service to nationally agreed templates.
  2. Specific guidance on balancing conflicting priorities and a suite of local performance indicators.
  3. Local authority conservation management needs to be more integrated.
  4. Need for easily accessible, interlinked historic environment databases.
  5. An increased role for conservation specialists in regeneration activity.
  6. Unlock the potential of proactive urban design skills of conservation professionals.
  7. Ensure conservation has a higher political profile appointing historic environment champions.
  8. An increased ability to undertake more proactive work will require greater resources.
  9. A strategy to raise professional standards for local authority staff.
  10. Central Government, English Heritage and other agencies need to consider how they can more effectively engage with local authorities.
- 6 A short summary of local built conservation provision is provided in appendix B. At a very general level this suggests that conservation staffing in new Bucks is below the (inadequate) national average with only 6.5 FTE posts compared to the 8 which might be expected on the basis of listed building numbers. Furthermore, it is understood that the future of one conservation post in AVDC is currently under review – it is suggested that this is a matter of concern on which the Forum may wish to make representations. Availability of grants, up to date conservation area appraisals, buildings at risk registers and local lists is patchy. The Sites and Monuments Record maintained by the County Council is not easily accessible to District Conservation Officers and would require further development of its built heritage information to be fully effective in an integrated historic environment record role.
- 7 The Review of Heritage Protection suggests that one possible approach to service improvement is more pooling of resources. It may be worth considering whether some areas of work, such as developing the historic environment record and buildings at risk registers, might best be progressed as partnership projects (perhaps attracting external funding). It is suggested that a working party be set up to assess priorities and practical options for such joint projects.

#### E. BACKGROUND PAPERS

*Local Authority Conservation Provision.* DCMS, English Heritage and IHBC, 2003.

*Local Authority Conservation Provision in England*, Oxford Brookes University, 2003.

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