

AGENDA ITEM: 8

The Historic Environment Forum : Future Directions

To: Buckinghamshire Historic Environment Forum

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A. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1 To suggest future directions for the Forum's activities, particularly to establish wider recognition for the Forum as providing a strategic overview on historic environment policy in Buckinghamshire.

B. PROPOSED ACTION

2 The Committee is invited to:

- a) **REQUEST the Chairman to write to the responsible Portfolio Holder in each local authority introducing this initiative and asking for the support of their officers and historic environment champion.**
- b) **ESTABLISH an officer working party to develop a framework for an Historic Environment Strategy and for taking forward its completion and promotion.**

C. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 3 There would be a commitment of staff time and a need for modest funding for publications and a seminar/conference. The possibility of sponsorship might be explored (e.g. from English Heritage) and/or contributions sought from member authorities.

D. SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 4 The Government's consultation paper on heritage protection "*Protecting our historic environment: Making the system work better*" promoted a more holistic approach to the historic environment, notably creating a unified designation and consent regime, developing Historic Environment Records and suggested creating sub-regional teams. The consultation met with a mixed, although mostly broadly favourable, response but it remains to be seen how much will be taken forward in the promised White Paper.
- 5 Prior to the heritage protection review the policy statement "*The historic*

environment : a force for our future” had emphasised the public benefits of the historic environment and introduced the concept of local authority “historic environment champions”. Guidance on the appointment of champions is being prepared by DCMS.

- 6 The Bucks Historic Environment Forum is potentially well placed to provide a “sub-regional” framework for historic Buckinghamshire in order to promote awareness of historic environment issues both amongst member organisations and more widely with partners, including at a regional scale. Nevertheless, there remain some weaknesses in that the Forum has a low profile, poor attendance from certain members and has yet to fully assimilate and gain recognition for its wider historic environment remit. These factors are probably strongly inter-linked. In particular there is a perception that the Forum still focuses on archaeology and has relatively little relevance to building conservation.
- 7 If the Forum is to increase its effectiveness it is suggested that it could:
 - a) Develop and publish a **Historic Environment Strategy** to articulate the sector’s priorities and ensure their recognition in statutory policies (e.g. Local Development Frameworks, Cultural and Community Strategies). The success of the Buckinghamshire Archaeological Management Plan (which runs to March 2005) and the Historic Environment chapter of the Chilterns AONB Management Plan could provide models.
 - b) Promote the Forum and its Strategy through **publication and a seminar/conference** particularly aimed at elected members and others responsible for policy formulation and implementation.
 - c) Promote the role of **historic environment champions** seeking to establish itself as the recognised county forum for champions. A starting point would be for the Chairman to write to each member council asking them if they have nominated a champion.
 - d) To **review the structure and agenda of meetings** to ensure a balance of interests is represented and an emphasis on holistic approaches encouraged.

E. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Protecting our historic environment: Making the system work better.
DCMS (July 2003)

The historic environment : a force for our future. Government Policy Statement.

Historic Environment Records Consultation. DCMS (July 2003)

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