

**Buckinghamshire Archaeological Officer's Report**

To: Buckinghamshire Historic Environment Forum

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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. AGREE the revised performance indicator for planning appeals.**
- b **NOTE progress with Strategic and Conservation Projects**
- c **NOTE recent development-related archaeological casework in the county and SUPPORT the action of Aylesbury Vale District Council in issuing an Article 4 Direction to protect medieval open fields at Ludgershall.**
- d **NOTE progress on addressing the publication backlog and APPROVE the proposals to a) obtain legal advice on planning enforcement and b) explore referral of Network Archaeology to the IFA for non-publication.**

**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 2003.

<b>Output</b>	<b>3rd Quarter 2003</b>	<b>4th Quarter 2003</b>
Total number of consultations handled	182	130
Number of planning applications handled	155	106
Number of archaeological fieldwork projects monitored	15	14
Number of reports received by the SMR	42	6
Number of Sites and Monuments Records enquiries handled: commercial	20	12
Number of Sites and Monuments Records enquiries handled: non-commercial	12	22

<b>Performance Indicator</b>	<b>3rd Quarter 2003</b>	<b>4th Quarter 2003</b>
Planning applications responded to within 14 days (target 90%)	83%	86%
Number of successful appeals against advice ( <i>revised target 50% rejection of appeals</i> )	100% (Won 1)	50% (Won 1, Lost 1)
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	Reports = 32 Collections = 5676	Reports = 34 Collections = 5676

There was a slight falling off of planning response times in the summer of 2003 which has been recognised and action taken to bring these back towards the target 90% rate.

The Archaeology Service has been experiencing an increase in planning appeals affecting sites on which we have given advice, normally a request for evaluation prior to the determination of the application. This is apparently part of a recognised national trend for more applications to go to appeal rather than a reflection of the nature of our advice as in no case has the archaeology been the primary reason for refusal. Nevertheless, we have noted rather mixed treatment of archaeology in inspector's decisions with little apparent consistency. In two appeals (**Permiculture Association, Cublington** and **Bierton House**) the inspector upheld our advice but in two others (**River Road, Taplow** and **80 Aylesbury Road, Bierton**) a condition was felt to be sufficient. Since the two Bierton developments were close by, similar in nature and benefited from near identical evidence no logical reason for the discrepancy between these two decisions can be found. For this reason it is proposed to set a more realistic 50% target for full endorsement of our case by planning inspectors.

## 5 **Sites and Monuments Record**

The SMR has benefited from the implementation of the SMR Disaster Management Plan involving the installation of smoke detectors in Annexe A, the purchase of fire-proof filing cabinets for irreplaceable elements of the collection and security digital copy of a selection of the aerial photographic collection.

The Bucks SMR participated in a national assessment of resources required to reach the government's proposed benchmark standard. It is hoped that this initiative will give rise to ear-marked funding for SMRs linked to assigning them statutory status.

## 6 **Strategic and Conservation Projects**

This section provides a summary of projects that are not based directly upon our planning 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 achievements since the last meeting have been the appointment of Kim Biddulph to work on the **Unlocking Buckinghamshire's Past** project and the submission of the *"Milton Keynes Urban Expansion Historic Environment Assessment"* to the MKSM Panel Inquiry. The latter report was prepared for English Heritage as an extension to the **Bucks Historic Landscape Characterisation Project**.

An attempt in December 2003 to appoint a project officer for the **"Getting to Know Bernwood Forest" Community Archaeology Project** was unsuccessful and the post is being re-advertised.

## 7 Archaeology and Development

A list of recent fieldwork is provided in appendix B. For the most part work over the winter has been small-scale. The main highlight was **Denham Preferred Minerals Area 4** where extensive trial excavation has confirmed the existence of nationally rare and important Early Mesolithic occupation sites sealed beneath peat deposits and apparently in-situ. The report is awaited with interest and will form the basis for recommendations to the county planning authority.

At **Ludgershall** a plot of land on the edge of the village has been offered for sale in small “sub-plots”. The land contains well preserved ridge and furrow earthworks, part of the village’s medieval open field system. The remains are of recognised national importance and were placed at risk of sub-division by fences and paths causing damage both to their physical form and open visual character. In response to concerns raised by the local parish council, and with the support of English Heritage, the County Archaeological Service advised and supported Aylesbury Vale District Council in the issuing of an Article 4 Direction revoking specific permitted development rights. There is now a 6 month period during which the direction must be confirmed by the Secretary of State if it is to remain in place. This is a nationally rare example (and a test case) of a little used section of Planning Policy Guidance 16 which enables the use of Article 4 Directions to protect archaeologically sensitive sites from a clear and specific threat.

## 8 Publication update (Appendix C)

Further progress can be reported in response to the resolution on archaeological publication passed at the March 2003 meeting. Two reports (**The Orchard, Aylesbury** and the **Aylesbury-Chalgrove Pipeline**) have been published by Thames Valley Archaeological Services in their in-house monograph series. Reports on **Oxford Road Mill, Aylesbury** and **Land off Main Road, Ashendon** are with the Editor of Records of Buckinghamshire. Assurances have been received from the archaeological contractors that the delayed reports on the **Victorian School, Wing; Sainsburys, Chesham** sites are once again being actively progressed but further monitoring of progress is required.

On the negative side, a “hard core” of sites are proving more intractable. No progress has been made with the two sites affected by the bankruptcy of Tempus Reparatum. It seems inescapable that only planning enforcement action will achieve the desired outcome. Prior to embarking on this course it will be necessary to gain legal advice on the prospects of success. Also, despite general assurances received from Network Archaeology that they will progress their backlog sites no specific timetable or action has yet been forthcoming. Network Archaeology have also failed to provide even basic summary

notes to Records of Buckinghamshire and South Midlands Archaeology in recent years. Network Archaeology is one of the Institute of Field Archaeologist's Registered Archaeological Organisations so it is suggested that the matter should be referred to the IFA registration committee.

E. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Archaeological Reports submitted to the SMR

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