

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGICAL MANAGEMENT PLAN: REVIEW AND FUTURE

To: Buckinghamshire Historic Environment Forum

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A. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1 To review the achievements of the Buckinghamshire Archaeological Business Plan and promote discussion of future plan provision.

B. PROPOSED ACTION

2 The Committee is invited to:

- a) **WELCOME progress made with implementing the Buckinghamshire Archaeological Business Plan.**
- b) **ENDORSE the proposal to prepare a draft 3 year plan (2005-7) for consideration at the March 2005 forum meeting.**

C. RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

- 3 Preparation of the draft plan can be contained within existing resources. Further consideration will need to be given to options for design and publication.

D. SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 4 The Buckinghamshire Archaeological Management Plan was approved by the County Council's Environmental Services Committee in October 2000. It contained an Action Plan covering five years from April 2000 to April 2005. The Action Plan had five sections covering policy, the Sites and Monuments Record, planning advice, conservation advice and management and resources. For each action a priority, timetable and performance measure were specified. For this review each action has been assessed as achieved/on target, work in progress or not achieved/off target:

	Achieved/On target	Work in progress	Not achieved/Off target
Policy	6	3	4
SMR	22	4	3
Planning	18	3	0
Conservation	8	3	1
Management	12	2	0
Total	66 (74%)	15 (17%)	8 (9%)

5 What went well ...

The service has engaged with the challenge of the Milton Keynes and South Midlands Growth Agenda securing substantial English Heritage funding and support for historic landscape characterisation and influencing the Panel Report into the draft MKSM Strategy.

Excellent progress has been made with modernising the Sites and Monuments Record. Use of the SMR has doubled and customer satisfaction is universally high. The “Unlocking Buckinghamshire’s Past Project” elicited strong support and has secured £150,000 HLF funding for public and educational resources allowing us to build links to the Education Department and local schools.

We have achieved such a good response rate for planning consultations that we were able to increase our target from 80% to 90% within 14 days. Planning notification maps have been brought up to date to ensure that our most important sites are effectively protected from harmful development. Archaeological fieldwork standards are maintained through consistent briefs, specifications and monitoring with robust enforcement action being pursued where necessary. Important discoveries have been made and publicised. Public involvement, rarely a high priority for developers, has been achieved at a number of sites.

Close working arrangements have been developed with the Chilterns Conservation Board and the County Council’s Countryside Initiatives Team as well as regular contacts with the Department of the Environment Food and Rural Affairs, the National Trust and the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group. Through these partnerships, funding has been secured for a number of projects, including most notably Getting to Know Bernwood, Chiltern Historic Landscape Characterisation and Whiteleaf Hill. This was recognised in plan to be an effectively un-resourced area and it is particularly gratifying to have major positive achievements to report, exceeding all expectations. Public interest in local archaeology is on the increase with several local groups now active.

English Heritage supported the appointment of an Archaeological Planning and Conservation Officer to the team has been essential to service delivery enabling over £400,000 of external funding to be secured over the plan period. The continuation of this post is currently the subject of a bid under the Medium Term Plan process.

6 What did not go so well ...

The proposed Extensive Urban Survey and some other more aspirational projects have been delayed due to workload pressures. It is now hoped Urban Survey will follow on from and complement the historic landscape project whilst other project priorities need to be reviewed.

Backlog SMR data inputting has made progress but has proved an even more daunting task than originally reckoned. Although “high priority” inputting is more-or-less on target, the medium and lower priority backlogs will not be eliminated by 2004 and 2007 as originally envisaged within current resources.

Planning work has been generally successful but there have been a few (relatively minor) damage cases and it has been necessary to reduce to target success rate with appeal decisions from an aspirational 100% to a more realistic 50%. A significant backlog of unpublished excavations had built up by 2003 but pro-active action over the past year is making significant inroads into this problem.

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Future Directions

The fundamental objective of the plan, to provide a new clarity of purpose and direction for the County Archaeological Service following its transfer to Environmental Services in 1998 has been achieved. For the future a number of basic questions arise:

- What key changes have there been in the past five years?
- What challenges and opportunities are likely to present themselves in the foreseeable future?
- What purpose would a new Plan serve?
- What duration should a new Plan cover?
- What format should it take?

Changes

- ❖ There has been extensive consultation over proposed changes to national historic environment policy but few changes have yet been enacted.
- ❖ Our understanding of the local historic environment has developed, particularly through historic landscape characterisation, which has provided a new framework for informing changes in land use.
- ❖ The archaeology service has increased its capacity to deliver both core planning and SMR services and a wider public agenda.

Challenges and Opportunities

- ❖ New legislation is proposed in 2007 to integrate and simplify heritage protection. Some responsibilities may be transferred from national to local government. National planning policy guidance will be amended to reflect these changes.
- ❖ Sites and Monuments Records will be expected to develop into Historic Environment Records and are to be given statutory status in 2007.
- ❖ BVPIs may be introduced for aspects of the historic environment.
- ❖ Changes to planning law will give greater weight to regional and sub-regional plans. There will be a challenge to influence both these and local development frameworks. The Growth Area agenda will provide particular challenges.
- ❖ The introduction of Environmental Stewardship gives an opportunity to protect historic assets in the countryside, to contribute to wider rural strategies and to secure a little additional income.
- ❖ Partnerships can provide opportunities for improving service delivery and securing funding (e.g. the establishment of the Chiltern Conservation Board gives the opportunity for a higher profile for the historic environment in the Chilterns). Obtaining match-funding may be challenging.

- ❖ The “Unlocking Buckinghamshire’s Past” project will provide for on-line service delivery and a wider community and educational role for the service. There is increasing public interest in active involvement in archaeology and the wider historic environment – presenting both challenges and opportunities.
- ❖ The Historic Environment Forum and creation of a fully-fledged “Historic Environment Record” could provide an opportunity for genuine partnership working between archaeologists and built conservation officers.
- ❖ Local authority budgets continue to be constrained giving rise to pressures to increase income generation and demonstrate “best value”, some emerging proposals would be particularly challenging for the County and Heritage Group. A specific challenge will be to secure the future of the Archaeology Planning and Conservation Officer Post.

Purpose

The essential purpose of the 2000-2005 plan was to stabilise the core archaeology service giving it a clear focus and realistic programme for growth. That purpose has been achieved. It is suggested that further growth is not realistic and that the emphasis for the next 3 to 5 years should be on:

- ❖ Preparing for and responding to new legislation and BVPIs.
- ❖ Ensuring proper recognition of the historic environment in strategic plans and strategies (e.g. community plan). Working more closely with Countryside Initiatives towards a “seamless” integration of landscape, ecology and historic environment planning.
- ❖ Continuing the strategic programme of historic landscape characterisation, especially urban characterisation, partnership projects and specific applications (e.g. growth areas).
- ❖ Developing the Sites and Monuments Record into a fully-fledged Historic Environment Record performing in the upper quartile of national benchmarks.
- ❖ Maintaining high performance in development control advice, developing cost-effective support for Environmental Stewardship and implementation of the Monument Management Project.
- ❖ Building on successful partnerships to deliver mutually beneficial outcomes.
- ❖ Establishing achievable priorities for “public archaeology”. Should priorities be driven by education or social needs or by the active groups (often the more affluent members of society)? Given limited resources how to we formulate a realistic deliverable programme?
- ❖ Developing a higher and broader profile for the Historic Environment Forum.
- ❖ Securing the resources necessary to achieve the above. Consider seeking external validation of service quality (e.g. Institute of Field Archaeologists “Registered Archaeological Organisation” status).

Duration

- ❖ It is suggested that the new plan should cover the “medium term” (2005-2007) as this is both the period of the County Council’s Medium Term Plan and also leads up to the Government’s proposed heritage legislation. Whilst shorter in duration than the previous plan it will be necessary to review the plan in the light of any new legislation.

Format

- ❖ The structure of the existing plan remains generally applicable i.e.
 1. Background and Principles : overview of current state of knowledge, legal and policy framework, risk assessment and management strategies. As noted above, this section would only require minor revision to reflect the current situation but needs to be amended to reflect proposed legislative and policy changes which the service is to plan for.
 2. Role of the County Archaeology Service : This section requires updating to reflect the current service structure and broader range of activities and partnerships developed by the enlarged team. It sets the scene for the Action Plan and provides justification for its content.

- 3. Action Plan : will require major review and update.
- 4. Best Value : this concluding section looks at the plan, both objectives and delivery mechanisms, through the lens of “best value”.
- ❖ It is proposed to publish in web format.

8. Conclusion

It is suggested that there is a useful purpose in having a 3 year plan to set out the nature of the service to be provided, its business strategy and to prepare the Archaeology Service for the proposed historic environment BVPIs and Heritage Act in 2007. The consultation draft plan would be brought to the Bucks Historic Environment Forum in March 2005.

E. BACKGROUND PAPERS

A future for our past : The Buckinghamshire Archaeological Management Plan.

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