

AGENDA ITEM: 6

GUIDANCE ON THE HISTORIC INTEREST OF MODERN CIVIC, INDUSTRIAL AND MILITARY COMPLEXES

To: Buckinghamshire Historic Environment Forum

Date: 30th March 2005

Authors: Report by the Senior Archaeological Officer

A. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1 To recommend actions to improve awareness of the heritage interest of 19th and 20th century civic, industrial and military complexes and management of change affecting them.

B. PROPOSED ACTION

2 The Committee is invited to:

- a) **ADOPT the attached draft guidance note as a report to member organisations**
- b) **CONSIDER what further action may be appropriate to improve the information resource and decision-making framework and if appropriate,**
- c) **AGREE to consider a costed project design for “stage 1 industrial heritage resource assessment” at the September meeting.**

C. RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

- 3 The circulation of an informal guidance note has minimal resource implications.
- 4 It is proposed to establish the cost of a “stage 1 industrial heritage report”. The Forum could consider funding a consultant’s report through the emergency recording fund, although the protocol for that fund would need to be broadened.

D. SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 5 Large 19th and 20th century civic, industrial and military complexes are one of the distinctive characteristic features of late nineteenth and twentieth century Buckinghamshire. They range from hospitals to schools, from quarries to railway works, and from wartime airfields to military communications and research stations.
- 6 Many of these complexes have come to, or will shortly reach, the end of their operational lives in their original function. As “brownfield land” they are often considered prime development sites.
- 7 Only a minority of these sites benefit from any conventional heritage designations (listing, scheduling or inclusion on the register of parks and gardens). Many of the individual structures would not be eligible for listing under the strict criteria applied to later 19th and 20th century buildings. Experience suggests that comprehensive redevelopment proposals can be prepared with little or no recognition of the heritage interest beyond any existing designations, and planners may be unaware of the potential heritage interest and therefore not seek appropriate advice.
- 8 A working group of the Historic Environment Forum has identified the vulnerability of this industrial archaeology and heritage resource as one of the most significant challenges facing Buckinghamshire’s historic environment. The purpose of this paper is to raise awareness of the issues and seek support for further initiatives to assist informed conservation. The aim is not to prevent appropriate redevelopment but to encourage more sensitive schemes through recognition of each site’s historic character. This approach could encompass more re-use of existing buildings, better and more locally distinctive new design, reflection of historic layouts in new development and proper provision for mitigation (e.g. by recording). The mix of strategies will inevitably vary from site to site depending on the nature of heritage interest and development.
- 9 A further issue is the lack of systematic information on many aspects of this resource. Certain types of military sites have been addressed by the Defence of Britain Project. English Heritage have undertaken surveys of Hospitals, Cold War sites and certain classes of industrial site. A study of the Wycombe chair industry has recently been undertaken by a student and sites added to the Sites and Monuments Record. Nevertheless, there is a need for a rapid “resource assessment” as a first step to identify those industries which should be prioritised for further study and conservation based on their importance in Buckinghamshire, the quality of existing information, the likely significance of the resource and the pressure upon it. This “stage 1 industrial heritage report” would be compiled from existing information and could feed into the South East Regional Research Frameworks Project. Subsequent stages would then focus on specific industries compiling new information where appropriate and identifying priority sites and issues. Such work would be ideal for local groups working with specialist support following the model of “Defence of Britain” and might be eligible for an HLF grant.

E. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Historic Environment Forum paper September 2004.

CONTACT OFFICER: ALEXANDER (SANDY) KIDD 01296-382927

THE HERITAGE OF MODERN CIVIC, INDUSTRIAL AND MILITARY COMPLEXES: AN ADVICE NOTE

Introduction

This advice note has been prepared by the Buckinghamshire Historic Environment Forum to promote recognition of the heritage interest of modern civic, industrial and military complexes and to encourage best practice in considering proposals for major development affecting them. It is intended for use by local planning authorities in preparing local development frameworks, scoping Environmental Assessments and considering planning applications. It will also remind owners and prospective developers to consider the heritage interest of such sites.

The nature and significance of the resource

Large civic, industrial and military complexes are one of the distinctive characteristic features of late nineteenth and twentieth century Buckinghamshire. They range from hospitals to schools, from quarries to railway works, and from wartime airfields to military communications and research stations. Notable examples across the county include the Epilepsy Colony at Chalfont St.Peter, the Royal Canadian Memorial Hospital at Cliveden, Pinewood Studios, the railway works at Bletchley and Wolverton, the RAF hospital and training base at Halton and Bletchley Park code-breaking centre. Although not restricted to a single site, the factories of the Wycombe chair-making industry also fall into this category.

Only a minority of these sites are currently recorded on Sites and Monuments Records, although it is worth noting that the recently completed Buckinghamshire Historic Landscape Characterisation Project attributed some X sites covering Y hectares to these general categories. Some of these sites are already of recognised heritage importance but many are simply "off the radar screen". The loss, without formal recording, of the Victorian lunatic asylum at Stone, the Nestle factory (Aylesbury) and Pitstone cement works illustrates the issue. As well as sometimes having a wider historic interest informing understanding of the major social, economic and military challenges of modern times, these complexes also form part of the heritage of local communities just as much as earlier buildings and archaeological sites, indeed as many people have worked in or visited these places as part of their daily lives they are often more familiar.

Informed conservation

The challenge of managing the legacy of the twentieth century has recently been recognised by English Heritage in a consultation paper *Change and Creation: historic landscape character 1950-2000*. Coverage by conventional heritage designations is usually at best patchy and sites as a whole can be

perceived to fall between the professional responsibilities of historic buildings conservation and archaeology. It is important to recognise that many of these complexes are in the process of a fundamental change from operational sites to modern “archaeology” or “heritage”, and there is only a narrow window of opportunity to select those elements worthy of preservation and capture a full record prior to conversion or demolition. Whilst it is neither possible nor desirable to preserve all twentieth century complexes it is appropriate to ensure that major development proposals affecting them recognise and properly consider any heritage interest. Where change is necessary, schemes can also reflect a site’s heritage in a variety of ways such as the layout and design of buildings and open space, installation of public art or street names. This can help give an invaluable “sense of place” to new developments.

Planning policy and procedure

Planning Policy Guidance 15 (Planning and the Historic Environment) advises that local planning authorities should expect developers to assess the likely impact of their proposals on the site or structure in question, and to provide such written information, or drawings as may be required to understand the significance of a site or structure before an application is determined (paragraph 2.11). It also notes that some historic buildings are of intrinsic archaeological interest and that the provisions set out in Planning Policy Guidance 16 (Archaeology and Planning) should apply to them, including requirements for assessment and recording. PPG 15 and 16 explicitly apply whether a site is designated or not, indeed one outcome from assessment could be a review of designations.

In order to implement this policy planning authorities are urged to follow some simple guidelines when considering proposals for the redevelopment of modern civil, industrial and military complexes:

1. Ensure that the Local Conservation Officer and County Archaeological Officer are consulted at an early stage in the preparation of development proposals to identify any heritage interest, and throughout the gestation of the scheme.
2. Ensure that owners and prospective developers are informed of any heritage interest and requested to take account of it in their proposals, engaging specialist consultant advice and assessment where necessary.
3. Expect prospective developers to take account of heritage interests in planning applications, including recognition that such an understanding can inform good new design as well as preserving the best of the past.
4. Require appropriate recording of sites, buildings, landscapes and buried remains that cannot be preserved and the deposition of a report in the County Sites and Monuments Record.

The Buckinghamshire Historic Environment Forum is a co-ordinating and advisory body for organisations with an interest in the management of the historic environment of the historic county of Buckinghamshire. It includes representatives from Buckinghamshire County Council, Milton Keynes Council and Aylesbury Vale, Chiltern, South Bucks and Wycombe

District Councils, the Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society, Chilterns Conference, National Trust, DEFRA, English Heritage and the Diocese of Oxford.