

Buckinghamshire Archaeological Officer's Report

To: Buckinghamshire Historic Environment Forum

Date: 29th March 2006

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A. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1 To advise the Forum of the work of the County Archaeological Service since the last BHEF meeting.

B. PROPOSED ACTION

2 The Forum is particularly invited to NOTE:

- a **the Service's Performance Indicators and contribution to national indicators BV 205 and 219**
- b **progress with strategic projects**
- c **recent development-related archaeological casework in the county and SUPPORT the County Council in their efforts to protect the industrial heritage of the Great Western Railway by writing to the local MP.**
- d **progress in securing publication of archaeological reports.**

C. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 3 At present the service comprises three core staff with a base budget of £107,000 and two externally funded posts funded by the Chilterns Conservation Board, English Heritage and the Heritage Lottery Fund. Another externally funded post (Getting to Know Bernwood) came to an end in October 2005.

D. SUPPORTING INFORMATION

4 **Archaeology Service Performance Indicators**

Service volume measures and Performance Indicator statistics collected for the service as part of the County Council's performance management system are presented for the 1st and 2nd quarters of 2005. The service contributes to national BV indicator 205 – a checklist of Quality in Planning Services and, through information supplied from the SMR, to the Conservation Area Appraisal BV 219.

Performance Indicator	3rd Quarter 2005	4th Quarter 2005
Planning applications responded to within 14 days (target 90%)	88%	94%
Success rate at appeal (target 50% annual success rate)	0 of 0	0 of 0
Percentage of evaluations with a positive outcome (target 60%)	71%	50%
Sites and Monuments Records data inputting backlog (target: reports < 10; Collections < 5400 by April 05)	Reports=21 Collections = 3628	Reports=9 Collections = 3556

Volume measures	3rd Quarter 2005	4th Quarter 2005
Total number of consultations handled	108	142
Number of planning applications handled	77	95
Number of development-related archaeological fieldwork projects	17	9
Number of reports received by the SMR	39	52
Number of Sites and Monuments Records enquiries handled:		
commercial	23	17
non-commercial	20	17

5 **Strategic Projects**

This section provides a summary of projects with a strategic, conservation and/or interpretation nature. Most of these projects are being pursued in partnership with other organisations and involve drawing in substantial amounts of external funding.

The HLF funded “**Getting to Know Bernwood Forest**” Community Archaeology Project came to an end in October 2005 with a display running at the County Museum until March 2006. An education pack has been sent to local schools and is available on the county council web site.

The **Monument Management Project** has completed scrub clearance at Stewkley moat, which is within the village’s Conservation Area. A management plan has been commissioned from Albion Archaeology for Danesfield Camp (Medmenham).

A bid was made in partnership with the Chiltern Conservation Board for project planning grant under the Landscape Partnership scheme. The proposed project, the “Making of the Chiltern Landscape”, is intended to focus on the area’s rich prehistoric heritage building on research by active local groups. Unfortunately the bid has had to be withdrawn for further consultation on the advice of the HLF. It is intended that a meeting be held with the HLF to identify a way forward.

Progress with **Unlocking Buckinghamshire’s Past** (agenda item 7) and **Historic Landscape Characterisation** (agenda item 8) has been reported separately.

6 **Archaeology and Development**

Advice has been given on heritage policies in the Local Transport Plan and archaeological policy in the South Bucks Local Development Framework. Detailed studies for the Aylesbury LDF are in progress (agenda item 9). A list of development-related fieldwork to the end of December 2005 is provided in appendix A. The most significant cases are:

Excavations in advance of construction of the **Stoke Hammond and Linslade Bypass** have been completed and the post-excavation analysis is proceeding rapidly. Investigations by Network Archaeology have revealed a post-medieval fishpond/ditched enclosure at Chelmscote, evidence for twelfth century occupation and agricultural activity and an extensive area of Late Bronze Age/Iron Age settlement and fields straddling the Beds/Bucks county boundary. The site is to be published in Records of Buckinghamshire.

An appeal against refusal of planning permission for major redevelopment at the **National Society for Epilepsy, Chalfont St.Peter** was rejected but unfortunately the heritage arguments were not endorsed by the inspector who took a very narrow view of the listed building’s setting and gave little weight to the site’s overall historic character. The site is recognised as a pioneering example of its type but unfortunately illustrates the limitations of the existing designation

regime (only four buildings are listed) and difficulties that can arise in managing change at such sites.

The heritage impact of the proposed **London Crossrail** Scheme continues to cause significant concern. According to Crossrail, electrification of the Great Western Railway to Maidenhead will necessitate the demolition of nine road over-bridges built for Brunel in 1835-8 as part of the original design of his broad gauge railway. These bridges form part of what is considered to be the most complete early railway in the world and therefore of national/international heritage importance. Parts of the GWR are on the UK's tentative list of World Heritage Sites. English Heritage has recommended four of the nine bridges for listing and a decision is awaited. Two of the bridges (Dog Kennel and Thorney Lane, Iver) lie in Buckinghamshire, Dog Kennel has been recommended for listing as the best example in the group. The County Council lodged an objection to the demolition of the two Buckinghamshire bridges without a full technical assessment through the unusual procedure of a parliamentary petition. Unfortunately the legal cost of petitioning (c£40k) cannot be found within existing budgets and it is therefore unlikely that the County Council will be able to proceed – a Cabinet Member decision is awaited.

7 **Publication update (Appendix B)**

Further progress can be reported on the matter of archaeological publication as several reports have been submitted to the Editor of Records of Buckinghamshire and progress is being made on others. There are still a few delayed and “difficult” cases; including **Rose Cottage, Penn** where the developer has recently gone into voluntary liquidation.

E. BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. Archaeological Reports submitted to the SMR
2. World Heritage Sites. The Tentative List of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. DCMS, 1999.
3. Crossrail. Technical Assessment of Historic Railway Bridges. RPS Planning and Environment, 2005.

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