

Buckinghamshire Archaeological Officer's Report

To: Buckinghamshire Historic Environment Forum

Date: 28th March 2007

Author: County Archaeological Officer

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 resource issues raised by the County Council's Medium Term Plan**
 - b **the Service's Performance Indicators and contribution to national indicators BV 205 and 219**
 - b **progress with strategic projects**
 - c **recent archaeological fieldwork**
 - d **progress in securing publication of archaeological reports.**

And to AUTHORISE the Chairman to write to Wycombe District Council to express the Forum's concern at the treatment of the historic environment in their draft Local Development Framework

C. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 3 At present the service comprises three core staff and three externally funded posts funded by the Chilterns Conservation Board, English Heritage and the Heritage Lottery Fund. The service has been successful in securing funding for urban survey which will secure two of the external posts for another 2 and 3 years respectively. Unfortunately funding for the Unlocking Bucks Past outreach post is expected to run out this summer.
- 4 As a consequence of the County Council's Medium Term Plan Review it was accepted that the Service's income target should be increased

by £6000 per annum for the next three years by charging District Councils for a proportion of the services received. However, an approach to the Districts has been put on hold following the councils' decision to jointly seek enhanced two-tier Pathfinder status and subsequent changes to the overall budgets of the Countryside and Heritage Group. At present it is not clear how this funding gap will be bridged – an update report will be made to the next meeting.

D. SUPPORTING INFORMATION

5 **Archaeology Service Performance Indicators**

Service performance indicator statistics are collected for the County Council's performance management system. 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. Over the next year the service will explore and hopefully seek admission to the Institute of Field Archaeologists Registered Archaeological Organisations scheme of professional accreditation.

Performance Indicator	3rd Quarter 2006	4th Quarter 2006
Planning applications responded to within 14 days (target 90%)	97%	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%)	5 of 6	0 of 1
Sites and Monuments Records data inputting backlog (target: reports < 30; collections < 3500 by April 07)	Reports = 23 Collect = 3500 Total = 3523	Reports = 23 Collect = 3497 Total = 3520

Volume measures	3rd Quarter 2006	4th Quarter 2006
Total number of consultations handled	182	112
Number of planning applications handled	121	86
Number of development-related archaeological fieldwork projects	21	7
Number of reports received by the SMR	47	83
Number of Sites and Monuments Records enquiries handled: commercial	16	19

non-commercial	14	10
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6 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 draft county resource assessments for the **Solent-Thames Research Framework Project** have been completed and are available on the BCC Archaeology web site. A consultative meeting hosted by the Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society at the Aylesbury Civic Centre on Saturday 3rd March 2007 attracted 80 participants and a range of positive feedback. Further comments on papers are invited upto end of April 2007 when the information will feed into regional syntheses with the aim of focussing and improving future research into the historic environment at a county and regional scale. The overall project covers Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Hampshire, Oxfordshire and the Isle of Wight.

The **Unlocking Buckinghamshire's Past** was due for completion this financial year but delays in completing the IT contract mean that it will continue to summer 2007. A "version 1" web site has been available on BCC's web site from September but has not been heavily promoted pending improvements planned to completion by end March. Reallocation of resources has allowed the project officer to run a programme of school's activities using the new learning materials are promoting their use. A public event is being planned on Whiteleaf Hill on 21st March to celebrate both projects – this is particularly appropriate as UBP has used the recent research at Whiteleaf as the basis for its "virtual excavation" module. The possibility of a follow-on project to UBP run from the schools improvement team is being explored.

The **Monument Management Project** has prepared a Conservation Management Plan for Danesfield Iron Age Hillfort (Medmenham) for which a section 17 agreement has now been prepared to enable conservation works to go ahead. An interpretation board is to be installed at the adjacent hillfort of Medmenham Camp.

Following on from the successful open day at **Quarrendon**, a working party has been set up chaired by Chris Williams (BCC Chief Executive) to find a way forward for the site. The working party includes the current landowners and development consortium as well as local councils, heritage and conservation bodies. The first meeting focussed on an exchange of information and views identifying key issues following which some further research is being carried out. The possibility of a Time Team investigation is being explored.

Funding was secured last year from the Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund for a six month **Colne Valley HLC project**, which has now been completed. This detailed report maps and analyses how the landscape of this vulnerable area on the edge of London has changed over the past 200 years, noting especially the effects of urban fringe and aggregates extraction. Through the definition of local historic landscape zones it has been possible to highlight areas where significant historic landscapes do survive and hopefully these can be used to better inform and target conservation action in the future. Progress on the **Chiltern HLC Project** has been slower and completion is now anticipated for summer 2007. Also the HLC Officer has worked on the **Buckinghamshire Environmental Character System (BECS)** with other country council partners. A comprehensive geological and topographical map has been prepared which is now informing Landscape Character Assessment for Aylesbury Vale District currently being undertaken by Jacobs Babbie.

In addition to projects led by the team mention should be made of the **Whiteleaf Project** which won the Institute of Field Archaeologists Award at the British Archaeological Awards 2007 for the best archaeological project displaying professional ethics. The partnership between the local authority, an enthusiastic local group and a professional archaeological contract unit (Oxford Archaeology) was cited by the judges as a key factor. The Whiteleaf Project is run by Julia Carey of BCC's countryside team with advice and support from the archaeology service. Fieldwork is conducted by Oxford Archaeology.

The service has also provided substantial support to the Countryside Initiatives Team through the appointment of Chris Blandford Associates to prepare the County's **Strategic Green Infrastructure Plan**. The emerging plan contains a significant historic environment element.

7 Archaeology and Development

An issue has arisen with the **Wycombe Local Development Framework** where advice provided by the Archaeology Service has not been incorporated into the Core Strategy or Sites Allocation. As a result the Draft Core Strategy is weak in its coverage of the historic environment, not even mentioning archaeology or historic landscape (copy of proposed policy attached appendix C). The reason for this is not entirely clear and the matter is being taken up with Wycombe District Council with the support of Bucks County Council's Strategic Planners. Unfortunately the deadline for formal objections to the Core Strategy has passed.

The proposed demolition of the grade II listed Dog Kennel Bridge on the Great Western Railway at Iver was raised with Dominic Greaves MP by Mr Pushman. A copy of the letter from the Minister responsible

for **Crossrail** to Mr Greaves explaining the decision is attached (appendix D). Regrettably, it does not seem possible to take this matter further.

Archaeological and historic landscape information and advice has been provided for the **Nash, Weston Turville and Whaddon Conservation Area Reviews**.

A list of development-related fieldwork from July to December 2006 is provided in appendix A. At the **Weedon Hill MDA** excavation revealed a scattering of Bronze Age features and a Roman settlement. The latter included an unusual late Roman rectangular ditched enclosure containing a rectangular stone-based pit or trough and another unusual kiln-like structure. Many of the ditch fills appeared rich in organic remains from which extensive samples have been taken for environmental analysis and radiocarbon dating. Very tentatively, the site may be indicative of diversification of the Roman agricultural economy in keeping with recent recognition elsewhere in the county of horticultural trench systems (vinyards?).

8 **Publication update (Appendix B)**

There remain a few delayed and “difficult” cases; although some progress seems to be being made on **Rose Cottage, Penn.**

E. BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. Archaeological Reports submitted to the SMR

CONTACT OFFICER: ALEXANDER (SANDY) KIDD 01296 382927

