

Buckinghamshire Archaeological Officer's Report

To: Buckinghamshire Historic Environment Forum

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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 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**
 - c **progress with strategic projects**
 - d **historic environment issues related to the Aylesbury and Wycombe Local Development Frameworks**
 - e **recent archaeological fieldwork**
 - f **progress in securing publication of archaeological reports.**

C. RESOURCES

- 3 At present the service comprises three core staff and a part-time assistant plus two full-time externally funded posts supported by the Chilterns Conservation Board and English Heritage. Heritage Lottery funding for Unlocking Bucks Past has now run out but the post is being continued on a part-time temporary basis providing a chargeable service to schools.
- 4 As a consequence of the County Council's Medium Term Plan Review the Service's income target is to be increased forcing consideration of recovering a proportion of the cost of services currently provided free of

charge to the District Councils. An approach is to be made to District Chief Planning Officers linking in to Pathfinder and the Heritage Protection Reform. In addition, bid has been made under the Medium Term Plan for a new Historic Environment Record Assistant post from 2010/11 to implement the Heritage Protection Reform

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 archaeological advice and information supplied from the SMR, to the Conservation Area Appraisal BV 219. In the past 6 months archaeological and historic landscape information and advice has been provided for the **Penn, Taplow Riverside, Uxbridge Lock and Weston Turville Conservation Area Reviews**. 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	1st Quarter 2007	2nd Quarter 2007
Planning applications responded to within 14 days (target 90%)	91%	89%
Success rate at appeal (target 50% annual success rate)	0 of 0	0 of 0
Percentage of evaluations with a positive outcome (target 60%)	2 of 3	4 of 6
Sites and Monuments Records data inputting backlog (target: reports < 30; collections < 3500 by April 07)	Reports = 18 Collect = 3447 Total = 3465	Reports = 29 Collect = 3447 Total = 3476

Volume measures	1st Quarter 2007	2nd Quarter 2007
Total number of consultations handled	120	176
Number of planning applications handled	113	152
Number of development-related archaeological fieldwork projects	16	16
Number of reports received by the SMR	68	30
Number of Sites and Monuments Records enquiries handled:		
commercial	17	22
non-commercial	19	16

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 **Unlocking Buckinghamshire's Past** project is nearing completion with final amendments to the web site design being completed in August. A public event was held on Whiteleaf Hill on 21st March to celebrate the success of both the Unlocking Buckinghamshire's Past and Whiteleaf Projects – both substantially funded by the Heritage Lottery. The project completion report for UBP will be submitted in October. As noted above, a limited education service is being maintained on a chargeable basis, including providing advice and support to a Colne Valley Park heritage outreach project. A promotion plan is to be developed as part of the ongoing continuity for the project.

Progress with the **Monument Management Project** has been slow due to delays in implementing works last financial year and confirming continuity of English Heritage funding. A Conservation Management Plan has been prepared 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.

The **Buckinghamshire Historic Towns Project** is now underway with funding principally supplied by English Heritage supported by Buckinghamshire County Council and Milton Keynes Council. The first steering group meeting was held in June and next is to be held on 8th October. A flier endorsed by all the partners and district councils has been sent to town and parish councils and other stakeholders. Pilot studies of Beaconsfield and Haddenham together with an accompanying method statement are now well advanced.

The draft report for the **Chiltern HLC Project** is to be considered at a meeting of the Chiltern Historic Environment Group on 25th September with further reports on built heritage and routeways in preparation.

The HLC Officer is also leading on the **Buckinghamshire Environmental Character System (BECS)** and the **Landscape Character Assessment for Aylesbury Vale District** currently being undertaken by Jacobs Babbie.

7 Strategic Planning

As reported to the March meeting, an objection has been lodged to 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. The Forum's Chairman wrote to Wycombe District Council expressing these concerns following on from which the County Archaeological Officer met planning officers of Wycombe District Council. The Wycombe view is that further more detailed historic environment policies can be included in a forthcoming Development Control DPD and that in the interim "saved" Local Plan policies remain in place. Further consideration is being given in consultation with BCC's strategic plans team on how to proceed.

A consultation has been responded to on the **Aylesbury Vale Core Strategy and Aylesbury Allocated Sites** (Preferred Options) Development Plan Documents. These documents seek to accommodate 21,200 new dwellings with associated employment and infrastructure in the district in the period 2006-2026; and these figures are likely to increase in response to recommendations in the panel report into the South East Plan. The proposal is for the bulk of the housing (16,800) to be at Aylesbury, mostly on green field sites forming a "southern growth arc". An additional major housing allocation is now expected to be southwest of Milton Keynes in the vicinity of Newton Longville with a further possibility of expansion west from Leighton Linlade. The historic environment implications of the expansion of Aylesbury and Milton Keynes have been assessed and had some influence in the selection of preferred directions for growth which have largely avoided the most sensitive areas around each town. Nevertheless, there will be a need for field survey and evaluation for buried archaeological remains and for continued promotion of the recognition of the historic environment and archaeological sites as a key element in green infrastructure.

8 **Planning related archaeological fieldwork**

A list of development-related fieldwork from January to June 2007 is provided in appendix A. The most significant results have been:

Trial trenching revealed that the "at risk" listed aisled barn at **Broughton Manor Farm** sat within an outer moated enclosure attached to an extant moat. Within the existing farmyard ground levels had been raised and it is argued that the barn cannot pre-date the 13th century. Survival of archaeological deposits within the modern farmyard was poor but in the adjacent field two phases of moat ditches along with traces of stone buildings and surfaces were found accompanied by a substantial assemblage (610 sherds) of unabraded pottery dating from the late 11th century to the mid 16th century. The results will inform consideration of a possible "enabling development" linked to restoration of the barn.

At **Townsend, Haddenham** evaluation trenching revealed a concentration of medieval occupation comprising pits, ditches and walls of 11th to 13th century date. The development has been restricted to the less sensitive parts of the site so the majority of the remains will be preserved in-situ.

The **Hardwick – Marsh Gibbon Gas Pipeline** traverses 20km of open countryside to the northwest of Aylesbury. Evaluation revealed a number of Roman, and possibly earlier, sites along the preferred route and some amendments were made to minimise impact. Nevertheless, a Roman stone building was uncovered during a pre-development excavation north of Woodham. This is believed to be the only Roman stone building to be excavated in the county since the 1980s. After planning and sample excavation the building was reburied and the pipeline directionally drilled underneath the structure preserving it in-situ. Elements of several other Iron Age and Roman sites have been discovered during the watching brief of construction, including a waterlogged Roman well the timbers of which have been recovered and preserved for museum storage. Overall the pipeline is adding to our emerging understanding of the pre-medieval settlement pattern of the Bernwood area of northwest Buckinghamshire; the hinterland of the Roman roadside settlement or “small town” at Fleet Marston.

The ongoing excavations at **Taplow and The Lea (Denham) quarries** have revealed further evidence for the extensive later Bronze Age and Roman agricultural landscapes found across the gravel terraces of South Buckinghamshire.

In addition, a site visit was made to the site of **Westcott Royal Ordnance Factory** with representatives of English Heritage to examine structures built to test rocket motors during the Cold War. The site includes a number of very unusual structures some of which are likely to be worthy of scheduling. In view of potential threats from redevelopment, a request to prioritise designations at Westcott has been put to English Heritage’s Heritage Protection Department.

9 **Publication update (Appendix B)**

Progress with publication is generally satisfactory as outlined in appendix B. However, there remain a few delayed and “difficult” cases; although progress has been made on **Rose Cottage, Penn** where the threat of planning enforcement action by Chiltern District Council has secured a payment to the archaeological contractor to complete the work.

At the **Weedon Hill MDA** the post-excavation assessment of environmental samples has suggested that an unusual late Roman rectangular ditched enclosure containing a rectangular stone-based pit or trough and a kiln-like structure was probably a malting. Although evidence for malting is widespread in Roman Britain, such a discrete

purpose built malting complex is unusual and lends support to previous suggestions that the site may be indicative of diversification in the local Roman agricultural economy.

E. BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. Archaeological Reports submitted to the SMR
2. Aylesbury Local Development Documents
3. Wycombe Local Development Documents

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