

Buckinghamshire Archaeological Officer's Report

To: Buckinghamshire Historic Environment Forum

Date: 25th March 2009

Author: County Archaeologist

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 **changes in staffing and investigation of charging to address pressures identified in the County Council's Medium Term Plan**
- b **performance indicators and the outcome of a residents panel survey**
- c **progress with the Bucks Historic Towns Project and other strategic projects and CONSIDER if the Forum would like a presentation on the emerging Solent-Thames sub-regional research strategy to the September meeting**
- d **recent archaeological fieldwork**
- e **progress in securing publication of archaeological reports.**

C. RESOURCES

- 3 At present the service comprises three core staff plus two full-time largely externally funded posts supported by English Heritage working on the Historic Towns Project. David Radford (Archaeological Planning and Conservation Officer) left in early August to take up the post of Oxford City Archaeologist and has been replaced by Eliza Alqassar. Ruth Beckley, currently Historic Environment Characterisation Assistant, will provide maternity cover for Eliza's post from July.
- 4 As reported to previous meetings the County Council's Medium Term Plan has led to pressure to increase income from fees and charges to

recover a greater proportion of the costs of the historic environment record and archaeological planning advisory service. Following a meeting with Chief Planning Officers it was agreed that County and Districts would seek to agree a policy for charging developers and consultants for certain planning-related functions. A draft charging policy has been consulted upon and an initial legal opinion received – further investigation of legal issues will however be necessary before a new policy can be finalised.

- 5 It was reported to the September meeting that the Planning and Environment Service was part of a major council external partnership contract project known as the 'Built Environment Contract' eventually awarded to Ringway Jacobs. It was subsequently decided that the whole of Planning and Environment would be excluded from the contract, although this would not exclude exploring closer working arrangements in the medium/long term.
- 6 Last year the County Council decided that the service should seek admission to the Institute for Archaeologists Registered Organisation scheme of professional accreditation. However, although an application was drafted its submission has been postponed pending resolution of the funding issues. It is hoped to submit an application later this year.

D. SUPPORTING INFORMATION

7 **Archaeology Service Performance Indicators**

Service performance indicator statistics are collected for the County Council's performance management system.

Performance Indicator	3rd Quarter 2008	4th Quarter 2008
Planning applications responded to within 14 days (target 90%)	92%	85%
Success rate at appeal (target 50% annual success rate)	0 of 0	1 of 1
Percentage of evaluations with a positive outcome (target 60%)	2 of 3	0 of 1
Sites and Monuments Records data inputting backlog (collections recalculated March 2008) (targets: reports < 30; collections 3350 by March 2009)	Reports = 37 Collect = 3331 Total = 3368	Reports = 35 Collect = 3331 Total = 3366

Volume measures	3rd Quarter 2008	4th Quarter 2008
Total number of consultations handled	137	228
Number of planning applications handled	109	179
Number of development-related archaeological fieldwork projects	10	5
Number of reports received by the SMR	69	44
Number of Sites and Monuments Records enquiries handled:		
commercial	21	30
non-commercial	13	24
UBP web-site users	763	638

- 8 The economic down-turn has reduced the number of archaeological fieldwork projects to between 1/3 and 2/3 of previous levels. There is, however, little sign of a decline in planning and other consultations requiring appraisal for archaeological impact.
- 9 Use of the HER also showed a modest dip in the 3rd and 4th quarters after a strong start to the year. Declining use of the UBP website evident from the 2nd quarter could be attributable to the loss of Kim Biddulph's promotion and marketing skills in March. A Residents Panel survey concluded that 86% of people surveyed enjoyed the UBP web site and 79% would use it again but 94% had not known about it prior to the survey so more promotion was identified as a recommendation which is to be taken forward this year as far as is possible within existing limited resources. A summary of the survey results is attached.
- 10 A favourable appeal decision was obtained at Mellors Barn, Crafton (Appeal Ref: APP/J0405/A/08/2076026/NWF) where the inspector held that the conversion of a barn to residential use including provision of a new access road would fail to preserve the character or appearance of the conservation area and would harm the setting of the earthworks associated with the former medieval settlement.
- 11 **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 **Buckinghamshire Historic Towns Project** is funded principally supplied by English Heritage supported by Buckinghamshire County Council and Milton Keynes Council. Studies of Beaconsfield, Buckingham, Haddenham and Long Crendon have been out to public consultation. Consultations on Amersham, Bletchley, Fenny Stratford, Newport Pagnell and Princes Risborough will follow shortly. The report on Aylesbury, which is currently in preparation, has already been used to inform a Town Master plan. The latest project newsletter is attached.

The **Solent-Thames Research Frameworks Project**, a joint project run by Oxford-Wessex Archaeology and funded by English Heritage has produced a complete series of 'resource assessment' papers for the county. These are now being synthesised at a regional level. The county papers are available on BCC's web site and are to be published by the Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society. The regional project is now preparing a bid for funding the strategy stage. It is suggested that a presentation on this could be made to the September meeting.

The **Chiltern Historic Landscape Characterisation** project is nearing completion with the final elements focusing on the use of English Heritage's new Conservation Principles; completion of a challenging but innovative historic routeways study and publication of a popular booklet.

At **Quarrendon Leas** Jacobs have been appointed to design and manage the phase 1 access and conservation works involving the construction of a DDA compliant footpath which will link the Berryfields development site to the church/moat area. The project is funded by Aylesbury Vale Advantage, Buckinghamshire County Council and English Heritage and delivered in partnership with the Buckinghamshire Conservation Trust.

7 **Planning related archaeological fieldwork**

A list of development-related fieldwork from July to December 2008 is provided in appendix A. The most significant results have been at **All Souls Quarry near Wexham** where a circular Bronze Age enclosure was overlain by a complex Roman site which formed an extension of a substantial settlement investigated in previous years. Incidentally, the site also illustrated the limitations of magnetometer survey on the Thames river gravels as few of the features had been detected - this effect has been repeated elsewhere in South Bucks so we are now taking a more precautionary approach with greater insistence on validation of 'negative' geophysics results by trial trenching.

A number of planning applications have been made at **Westcott Royal Ordnance Factory** as well as consultation regarding possible future allocation for further employment use in relation to the Aylesbury Vale

LDF. This is a nationally important Cold War rocket research establishment containing a number of structures worth of protection through listing or scheduling. Other less significant structures are being recorded prior to demolition. The service is working closely with Aylesbury Vale District Council, English Heritage and developers but the situation is not helped by the very long delays currently experienced with heritage designation, especially scheduling.

8 Publication update (Appendix B)

Progress with publication is generally satisfactory with progress on several reports and the publication of the Aston Clinton Bypass. Outstanding cases are listed in appendix B.

E. BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. Archaeological Reports submitted to the Bucks HER

CONTACT OFFICER: ALEXANDER (SANDY) KIDD 01296 382927

Report:	Unlocking Buckinghamshire's Past Resident Survey Feedback
Report Reference:	N:\Planning and Environment\Business Performance Unit\Live Projects\SJ C&H surveys 09
Reporting from:	Elaine Wright - Business Performance Manager
Reporting to: (for information)	Mike Woods - Countryside and Heritage Group Manager Mike Walker - Rights of Way and Access Group Manager
Reporting to: (for action)	Julia Wise - Sites and Monuments Record Officer

		Ref
1 The Residents Panel		
1.1	The residents panel is 'A randomly selected panel of 2000 Buckinghamshire residents which is representative of the county's population'	
1.2	The campaign was directed at on-line panel members of which 82 people responded to the campaign.	
1.3	The analysis assumes that the responders are representative Buckinghamshire residents	
2 Key Results		
2.1	86% of respondents enjoyed using the website	
2.2	79% of respondents will use the website again	
2.3	94% of respondents did not know about the Unlocking Buckinghamshire's Past website before taking part in the survey.	
3 Key Recommendations		
3.1	The website is more widely advertised in libraries, museums and on the BCC website.	
3.2	The website is more widely advertised with key interest groups – teachers, history, walking and conservation groups	
4 Detailed Findings		
4.1	96% of respondents found the website easy to navigate.	
4.2	86% of respondents enjoyed using the website especially the use of photographs, maps and timelines.	2.1

4.3	The feedback ‘the whole site is brilliant and deserves the widest possible publicity especially in schools’ reflects 96% of the responses.	
4.4	Respondents commended the comprehensive and detailed nature of the information with good indexing, search functions and links to further information.	
4.5	79% of the respondents said they will use the website again and 84% will recommend the website to others especially as an education tool.	2.2
4.6	94% of the respondents had not known about the Unlocking Buckinghamshire’s Past website until they were provided with the link. However, they would have expected to have been signposted to the site by: Libraries 96% Museums 84% BCC’s website 84%	
4.7	Respondents specifically noted the need to publicise the site especially at local level and in schools.	
4.8	Whilst most responses commended the search engines some respondents found: The search engines threw up nothing or too many results The search facility frustrating – lacking clear instructions The search facility unsuccessful	
4.9	Other comments have been incorporated into the recommendations below.	
5	Recommendations	
5.1	The website is more widely advertised in libraries, museums and on the BCC website.	3.1
5.2	The website is more widely advertised with key interest groups – teachers, history, walking and conservation groups	3.2
5.3	A research of frequent interested and potential users should be undertaken before future web developments	
5.4	Practical research into user access, layout feedback should be undertaken by a representative or residents panel before future web developments.	
5.5	The web page should encourage users to use the feedback link.	