

HERITAGE AT RISK

To: Buckinghamshire Historic Environment Forum

Date: 25th March 2009

Authors: Report by the County Archaeologist

A. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1 To inform the Forum on the outcome of English Heritage's Heritage at Risk survey of 2008.

B. PROPOSED ACTION

- 2 **The Forum is invited to:**

NOTE the conclusions of the survey and CONSIDER whether the Forum would like to receive annual updates on this issue as a start on monitoring the sustainability of Buckinghamshire's historic environment.

C. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 3 None directly from reporting but potentially major where repairs or mitigation required to buildings, landscapes or ancient monuments.

D. SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 4 Since 1999 English heritage has published an annual Buildings at Risk Register covering grade I and II* buildings at risk of neglect or decay. The register has now been developed to cover 'Heritage at Risk' comprising scheduled ancient monuments, registered historic parks and battlefields as well as grade I and II* listed buildings. Grade II listed buildings are not covered, although nationally 57% of local authorities maintain a register of grade II buildings at risk. Conservation areas, unscheduled archaeological sites and the wider historic landscape are not covered.
- 5 With around 68,000 designated assets to assess nationally each year the methodologies used by English Heritage are necessarily very rapid and based on professional knowledge and judgment. At a detailed level the data should therefore be handled with care but it is nevertheless the best available national dataset for measuring the condition of the historic environment and therefore providing an indicator of sustainability.
- 6 The table [to follow] annexed to this report summarises the current situation in Buckinghamshire compared to the averages for the South East and England. It will be seen that Buckinghamshire is a above the regional and

national averages for buildings at risk largely due to seven structures at Stowe which are nevertheless subject to active management by the National Trust or Stowe House Trust. Dropmore and Mentmore have development-led restoration plans affected by the economic downturn. Dinton Castle is the subject of a current urgent works notice. Broughton Barn has also been subject to urgent works and is a problematic case where efforts to find a way forward have yet to bare fruit. Aylesbury Vale and Wycombe Districts are understood to maintain registers of grade II buildings at risk.

- 7 There are fewer scheduled ancient monuments at risk than either the regional or national average. Most high risk sites are endangered by arable cultivation, although there are ruined structures at St.John's Hospital, Wycombe. Sites under arable cultivation are being targeted for environmental stewardship schemes but as these are voluntary this measure may not be effective. It had been expected that the Heritage Protection Bill would address the thorny issue of 'class consent' for cultivated scheduled ancient monuments. The County's Monument Management scheme funded by English Heritage may also be available to assist with SAMs in danger of falling into the high risk category but unfortunately resources and staff time to take this forward are limited.
- 8 Members may wish to consider the value of annual reporting on Heritage at Risk indicators, whether any local indicators would be of value and what actions might be taken to address issues arising.

E. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Heritage at Risk Register 2008, English Heritage

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