

Buckinghamshire Archaeological Officer's Report

To: Buckinghamshire Historic Environment Forum

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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 resources and performance indicators**
- b progress with strategic projects**
- c recent archaeological fieldwork**
- d progress in securing publication of archaeological reports.**

C. RESOURCES

- 3 At present the service comprises three core staff plus a full-time largely externally funded post supported by English Heritage working on the Historic Towns Project and a maternity cover post (Ruth Beckley) in the Archaeological Planning and Conservation Officer role.
- 4 As reported to previous meetings, financial constraints on the County Council continue to grow leading 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. A draft charging policy has been consulted upon and legal opinion received. From 1st October the minimum charge for commercial HER enquiries will increase from £45 to £90. Charges for planning-related advice are still under consideration as it is acknowledged that they are more problematic.

D. SUPPORTING INFORMATION

5 Archaeology Service Performance Indicators

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

Performance Indicator	1st Quarter 2009	2nd Quarter 2009
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%)	2 of 3	4 of 4
Historic Environment Records data inputting backlog (collections recalculated March 2008) (targets: reports < 30; collections < 900 by March 2010)	Reports = 28 Collect = 2884 Total = 2912	Reports = 35 Collect = 2421 Total = 2456

Volume measures	1st Quarter 2009	2nd Quarter 2009
Total number of consultations handled	126	180
Number of planning applications handled	102	125
Number of development-related archaeological fieldwork projects	5	19
Number of reports received by the HER	138	102
Number of Historic Environment Records enquiries handled:		
commercial	16	17
non-commercial	10	13
UBP web-site users	1314	tbc

- 6 Whilst the economic down-turn has reduced the pace of development, and casework dipped in the 1st quarter, the 2nd quarter saw a return to more normal levels of activity. There has been a rash of large-scale speculative development proposals on the outskirts of Aylesbury, Buckingham and Winslow, west of Milton Keynes and at Pinewood (Iver). A major flood alleviation scheme is also being designed at Marlow. All of these schemes require assessment and several would have major archaeological implications.

7 Use of the HER by direct enquirers remains at a modest level compared to high point reached in 2005-6. However, use of the UBP has returned to buoyant levels and the website came second in a national web-based poll of on-line historic environment records. Volunteers and a short-term consultancy contract have made significant inroads into the remaining collections backlog, which is now at less than half of its peak level reached in 2002.

8 **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 Amersham, Beaconsfield, Buckingham, Haddenham, Long Crendon and Princes Risborough have been out to public consultation. Consultations on, Bletchley, Fenny Stratford, Newport Pagnell, Stony Stratford, Olney and Wendover will follow shortly. Presentations of the results are to be made in each district council area.

It had been intended to make a presentation on the **Solent-Thames Research Frameworks Project** to this meeting but due to delays at the consultancy responsible for this project, workload pressures within BCC and the need to consider the PPS consultation this has had to be deferred to a future meeting.

At **Quarrendon Leas** a DDA compliant footpath has been built which will link the Berryfields development site to the church/moat area. IJP Building Conservation have been appointed to undertake conservation work on the church ruin. The project is funded by Aylesbury Vale Advantage, Buckinghamshire County Council and English Heritage and delivered in partnership with the Buckinghamshire Conservation Trust. Land transfer has been postponed due to the delay in commencing development at Berryfields MDA.

Restoration of **Brill Windmill** has been completed, managed by the Natural Environment Team. A group has been convened to help raise funds for restoration of **Coombe Hill Monument**. The **Langley Park Restoration Project** is well underway focussing on works to the Rhododendron Garden, new paths and the lake.

Comments were made on the **Submission Draft of the Aylesbury Vale LDF Core Strategy**. Its treatment of the historic environment was generally positive and welcomed. A number of specific concerns have been raised, including most significantly the lack of recognition of

Quarrendon Leas as a strategic green infrastructure site and an indication that a crematorium would be located adjacent to it. It is hoped that these concerns will be addressed by AVDC in its submission statement. Recently AVDC has decided to consult on a green infrastructure strategy which includes Quarrendon Leas as a 'flagship project'.

9 Planning related archaeological fieldwork

A list of development-related fieldwork from January to June 2009 is provided in appendix A.

Bronze Age and Iron Age settlements were found during the construction of compounds for the **M25 widening**. One of the three sites was re-buried and preserved in-situ.

An Iron Age ring ditch (apparently a structural wall trench for a roundhouse) was found in an **Anglian Water Buckingham – Brackley pipeline** construction corridor southwest of Stowe Park. It is presumably part of larger settlement as a cropmark enclosure is recorded in the field. The corridor was surprisingly lacking in other finds with notably no trace of the Alchester to Towcester Roman road which is supposed to be have been followed by the Stowe Avenue.

Human remains found in a trial trench dug beside **Holman's Bridge, Aylesbury** have been radiocarbon dated to the mid-13th century [CHECK], quite possibly this was a criminal or other social outcast. Further investigation is planned.

Large-scale geophysical surveys have been conducted at **Fleet Marston** and '**Salden Chase**' (north of Newton Longville) to inform major development proposals. At Salden Chase, five probable later prehistoric/Roman settlements have been discovered within an 297 hectare site. This appears to mirror evidence from Milton Keynes itself for a dense concentration of farmsteads of this period. Further evaluation has been requested to clarify and confirm these results. At Fleet Marston the western end of a large Roman roadside settlement has been surveyed, several small areas of prehistoric/Roman activity identified and the extent of the deserted medieval village of Fleet Marston clarified. Further evaluation is being undertaken on the medieval village site, where earlier remains may also be present. The development proposal, which is not on an allocated site, offers some positive benefits in taking part of the Roman settlement out of cultivation and returning the redundant parish church to use. However, its effect on the setting of the grade II* listed church is not considered acceptable.

Discussions have been held with the Environment Agency about a flood alleviation scheme in the floodplain below **Marlow**. The scheme

lies on the site of a prehistoric barrow cemetery and Neolithic settlement of regional/national importance. Evaluation and mitigation measures are still under discussion but it seems likely that the principal monuments will be buried beneath spoil from the excavation of the adjacent flood storage area. This site has been investigated over a number of years by the Marlow Archaeological Society who it is intended will be involved in the mitigation works.

10 **Publication update (Appendix B)**

The Rose Cottage medieval/post-medieval tile factory at Penn has been published as a result of pressure brought to bear through Chiltern District Council. Outstanding cases are listed in appendix B. There are several cases where the threat of enforcement action of some kind may be required to secure completion and several more where the prospects appear bleak. In the latter category are the two Berton sites, and perhaps the Chesham supermarket. Progress with the joint Maidenhead-Windsor Flood Relief Scheme/Dorney Rowing Lake publications is also disappointingly behind schedule. At previous Forum meetings it has been suggested that options for progressing stalled sites be brought forward. Regrettably within the County Service there is at present only limited capacity given other workload pressures to monitor and pursue compliance with these requirements. Pro-actively addressing 'failed projects' such as Church Farm, Berton is unfortunately not possible, and it is not easy to see how resources to do so could be secured unless an experienced archaeologist or research student were to volunteer their services.

E. BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. Archaeological Reports submitted to the Bucks HER

CONTACT OFFICER: ALEXANDER (SANDY) KIDD 01296 382927