

Buckinghamshire Archaeological Officer's Report

To: Buckinghamshire Historic Environment Forum

Date: 24th September 2008

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 proposed extension of charging to address pressures identified in the County Council's Medium Term Plan**
- b progress with the Bucks Historic Towns Project and other 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 two full-time externally funded posts supported by English Heritage and other partners. Kim Biddulph (UBP Project Officer) left at the end of March and unfortunately budgetary pressures have precluded appointing an assistant for the Historic Environment Record. David Radford (Archaeological Planning and Conservation Officer) left in early August to take up the post of Oxford City Archaeologist. Interviews have been held and it is hoped that the vacancy will be filled by the end of October.
- 4 As a consequence of the County Council's Medium Term Plan Review the Service's income target has been increased forcing the service to seek to recover a proportion of the cost of the archaeological planning advisory service. The shortfall is estimated at £12,000 in 2008/9 and

£18,000 in 2009/10. 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 prepared but progress has been delayed by David Radford's departure; which has also reduced the short-term financial pressure.

- 5 Although a bid was been made under the Medium Term Plan for a new Historic Environment Record Assistant post from 2010/11 to implement the Heritage Protection Reform it is understood that no growth bids have been accepted.
- 6 The Planning and Environment Service is currently part of a major council project known as the 'Built Environment Contract'. This involves a process of 'competitive dialogue' with a number of private consultancies over future service delivery from April 2009. Due to the confidential nature of the detailed discussions we do not know what, if any, effect this contract will have on the County Archaeological Service.
- 7 Earlier in the year the County Council decided that the service should seek admission to the Institute of Field Archaeologists Registered Archaeological Organisations scheme of professional accreditation. However, although an application was drafted its submission has been postponed pending resolution of the above organisational and funding issues.

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 2008	2nd Quarter 2008
Planning applications responded to within 14 days (target 90%)	94%	92%
Success rate at appeal (target 50% annual success rate)	0 of 0	0 of 0
Percentage of evaluations with a positive outcome (target 60%)	3 of 4	3 of 4
Sites and Monuments Records data inputting backlog (collections recalculated March 2008) (targets: reports < 30; collections 3350 by March 2009)	Reports = 20 Collect = 3413 Total = 3433	Reports = 31 Collect = 3491 Total = 3522

Volume measures	1st Quarter 2008	2nd Quarter 2008
Total number of consultations handled	165	155
Number of planning applications handled	129	117
Number of development-related archaeological fieldwork projects	8	14
Number of reports received by the SMR	55	46
Number of Sites and Monuments Records enquiries handled:		
commercial	21	30
non-commercial	13	24
UBP web-site users	960	787

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 **Buckinghamshire Historic Towns Project** is underway with funding principally supplied by English Heritage supported by Buckinghamshire County Council and Milton Keynes Council. A steering group meeting was held on 11th July and the next is to be held on 14th November. Studies of Beaconsfield and Haddenham are out to public consultation. The draft reports on Buckingham and Long Crendon will follow shortly whilst Amersham, Bletchley, Fenny Stratford and Newport Pagnell are in preparation. 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 **Monument Management Project** funded by English Heritage is implementing a Conservation Management Plan for Danesfield Iron Age Hillfort (Medmenham) secured by a section 17 agreement under

the Ancient Monuments Act. An interpretation board has been installed at the adjacent hillfort of Medmenham Camp.

7 **Planning related archaeological fieldwork**

A list of development-related fieldwork from January to June 2008 is provided in appendix A. The most significant results have been at **Berryfields Major Development Area** near Aylesbury where a small Iron Age settlement has been excavated and at **Denham Minerals Area 4** where stripping of overburden revealed two small in-situ Early Mesolithic flint scatters. Sampling of peat deposits also revealed fragments of possibly worked wood which have been radiocarbon dated to the Early Mesolithic.

8 **Publication update (Appendix B)**

Progress with publication is generally satisfactory with two reports recently published in Records of Buckinghamshire. Outstanding cases are listed in appendix B.

E. BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. Archaeological Reports submitted to the Bucks HER

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