

Buckinghamshire Archaeological Officer's Report

To: Buckinghamshire Historic Environment Forum

Date: 10th March 2010

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, including the review of charging policy**
- b progress with strategic projects**
- c recent planning-related archaeological work**
- d progress in securing publication of archaeological reports.**

And to CONSIDER

- e options and funding for developing the historic environment record with a view to supporting a funding bid**

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. We have also been joined for 6 months by Alex Goodwin, a business administration trainee from Aylesbury College.
- 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 2009 the minimum charge for commercial HER enquiries increased to £90. An options paper on

charging for planning-related advice will be put to the Cabinet Member for Planning and Environment.

D. SUPPORTING INFORMATION

5 **Archaeology Service Performance Indicators**

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

Performance Indicator	3rd Quarter 2009	4th Quarter 2009
Planning applications responded to within 14 days (target 90%)	91%	87%
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 8
Historic Environment Records data inputting backlog (targets: reports < 30; collections < 900 by March 2010)	Reports = 29 Collect = 2321 Total = 2350	Reports = 50 Collect = 2244 Total = 2294

Volume measures	3rd Quarter 2009	4th Quarter 2009
Total number of consultations handled	183	142
Number of planning applications handled	132	98
Number of development-related archaeological fieldwork projects	25	23
Number of reports received by the HER	41	113
Number of Historic Environment Records enquiries handled:		
commercial	13	17
non-commercial	14	10
UBP web-site users	561	716

6 Historic Environment Record

Use of the Historic Environment Record by direct enquirers remains at a modest level compared to high point reached in 2005-6 but represents less than 5% of users including those using the UBP website. Volunteers are continuing to make inroads into the remaining collections backlog.

A grant has been obtained from English Heritage to make HER information available across the national Heritage Gateway portal whilst at the same time we will be migrating the UBP web site to new software compatible with that system. Subject to confirming technical and contractual matters we hope the updated system will be fully operational by summer 2010.

There is a further opportunity to bid for funding for HER development in 2010/11. English Heritage in partnership with the Institute of Historic Building Conservation and the Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers is developing a strategy for HPR compliant HERs. It is envisaged that implementation of this strategy will take place between 2010 and 2015, subject to funding being available. In 2010/11 English Heritage are intending to invest a sum of £400,000 in projects dedicated to assisting HERs in the move towards full HPR Compliance in England. The scheme opened for project proposals on 15th February with a deadline of 15th April 2010. Guidance has been issued, from which the following is an extract:

Strand 2: Expanding the Content and Coverage of HERs for HPR Coverage.

Funding will be available to local authorities or organisations working in close association with them. A maximum of £40,000 will be available for any one project.

English Heritage will especially welcome applications which include multiple HERs, and/or which integrate different tiers of local government. Project teams which include HER officers and curatorial expertise from district and county/AONB/NPA level will be particularly welcomed.

English Heritage will favour applications which demonstrate integration and partnership between different tiers of local government. Project teams which include local authority curatorial representation from those with expertise of the historic built environment and landscapes will be particularly welcome.

Projects will deliver the following kinds of HPR enhancement or test cases:

Projects which test the methodology and applicability of making available the full range of commonly encountered historic environment data (for example the built environment – especially event and condition data relating to designated buildings and landscapes: HLC characterisation) through the HER or integrated within it. Here EH will be looking for creativity in accessing relevant data sources (born digital or digitised as part of project), developing consistency of standards and logicity of approaches, building on current good practice towards a common national approach, and wider consultation with user groups.

Projects which test the capture of, and/or demonstrate electronic access to valuable thematic or period based datasets at a regional or national level (for example relevant

'event' or 'monument' data held by active local groups or national amenity societies). Such projects will not consider one-time downloads, but must explore effective updating/live linkage, and must include the owners of such data sources at all stages of project planning and implementation.

Projects will be eligible if they can provide confirmation of the following:

- *Evidence of commitment to the principles of Heritage Protection Reform by the authorities managing the relevant HER(s) and associated Local Planning Authorities.*
- *Evidence of long-term commitment to HER development*
- *Evidence for demonstrable cooperative working with built environment and landscape partners*
- *Evidence of commitment to providing public access to HERS for example through Heritage Gateway (see <http://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/gateway/>)*

An outline of a possible bid will be circulated for discussion.

7 **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 by English Heritage supported by Buckinghamshire County Council and Milton Keynes Council. Studies of Bletchley & Fenny Stratford Newport Pagnell and Wendover are currently out to public consultation. The project is contributing to the South Bucks Townscape Character Study being undertaken by Chris Blandford Associates for South Bucks District Council in support of their Local Development Framework. Presentations of the results are to be made in each district council area.

Funding has been secured from English Heritage for a popular publication and training day to promote the **Chiltern Historic Landscape Characterisation Project**. The publication is to be available for the training day on Friday 30th April and copies will be sent to local councils and community groups across the Chilterns AONB.

Progress with the **Solent-Thames Research Frameworks Project** has remained poor and a review meeting with the consultancy responsible for this project is to be held in April

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 completed a conservation survey of the church ruin estimating the cost of consolidation and repair at just over £30,000. Several possible sources of funding are being investigated. Land transfer has been postponed due to the delay in commencing development at Berryfields MDA.

The **Langley Park Restoration Project** is well underway focussing on works to the Rhododendron Garden, new paths and the lake. Works to the lake have revealed a ha-ha and foundations of a boathouse alongside Langley Park House.

AVDC has indicated it would accept amendments to address most historic environment concerns relating to the **Submission Draft of the Aylesbury Vale LDF Core Strategy**. Overall its treatment of the historic environment was generally positive and welcomed. AVDC has consulted on a green infrastructure strategy which includes Quarrendon Leas as a 'flagship project'.

8 **Planning related archaeological work**

Despite the economic down-turn development-related casework has recovered to normal levels of activity. Evaluation has been undertaken on a major speculative green-field development proposal on the outskirts of Aylesbury at '**Quarrendon Fields**'. The results show extensive early Roman settlement and as the development would also affected the setting of the Quarrendon scheduled ancient monument the service has recommended the application be refused.

Negotiations continue regarding a major flood alleviation scheme in the **floodplain at Marlow** which would include burial of a prehistoric barrow cemetery beneath a landscaped area. Small-scale investigations have been carried out in the area over the past decade by the Marlow Archaeological Society and it is hoped that the Environment Agency will afford them an opportunity to complete and publish their work alongside planning-related mitigation.

Draft proposals have been received from English Heritage for listing Cold War rocket research structures at the former **Westcott Royal Ordnance Factory**.

Emergency works at **Dinton Castle** allowed a record of the structure to be made by Northamptonshire Archeology (funded by the Buckinghamshire Historic Buildings Trust). It is hoped the record will assist in future decisions regarding the ruin.

A full list of development-related fieldwork from July to December 2009 is provided in appendix A.

9 **Publication update (Appendix B)**

The **Taplow Court** excavation has been published by Oxford Archaeology, funded by English Heritage. Progress has been made on Network Archaeology's outstanding work. Progress on other projects is being pursued.

E. BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. Archaeological Reports submitted to the Bucks HER

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