

Buckinghamshire Archaeological Officer's Report

To: Buckinghamshire Historic Environment Forum

Date: 22nd September 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.**

C. RESOURCES

- 3 At present the service comprises three core staff; although Eliza Alqassar now works part-time (Monday to Wednesday). In addition David Green is externally funded post supported by English Heritage working on the Historic Towns Project and also internally project funded to manage the preparation of a Landscape Character Assessment for Chiltern, South Bucks and Wycombe Districts. Ruth Beckley and Alex Goodwin left in April 2010.
- 4 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 agreed in principle with the District Councils. A decision paper on charging is to be put to the Cabinet Member for Planning and Environment shortly. Further savings will be required over the next three years.

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 2010	2nd Quarter 2010
Planning applications responded to within 14 days (target 90%)	82%	%
Success rate at appeal (target 50% annual success rate)	0 of 0	0 of 0
Percentage of evaluations with a positive outcome (target 60%)		
Historic Environment Records data inputting backlog (targets: reports < 30; collections < 900 by March 2010)	Reports = 41 Collect = 1277 Total = 1318	Reports = 37 Collect = 1277 Total = 1314

Volume measures	1st Quarter 2010	2nd Quarter 2010
Total number of consultations handled	147	156
Number of planning applications handled	107	117
Number of development-related archaeological fieldwork projects		
Number of reports received by the HER	41	160
Number of Historic Environment Records enquiries handled:		
commercial	21	23
non-commercial	9	6
UBP web-site users	968	716

6 **Historic Environment Record**

Use of the Historic Environment Record by for non-commercial purposes has dropped off in the first half of 2010, probably as online access has improved this is more convenient with direct contact only being necessary for specific detailed queries. Inroads continue to be made into the collections backlog - by the end of June it was at its lowest level since records began in 1997.

An English Heritage grant has allowed HER information to be made available across the national Heritage Gateway portal. Exegesis SDM Ltd have also migrated the UBP web site to new software compatible with that system.

There was a further opportunity to bid for funding for HER development in April and a bid was submitted to provide Conservation Officers with direct access to the digital HER. Unfortunately the HE21 funding stream was over subscribed and our bid was not successful.

Options and proposals for future HER development are outlined in a separate paper.

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 Aylesbury, Bletchley & Fenny Stratford, Burnham, Newport Pagnell, Princes Risborough and Wendover are currently out to public consultation. The project is contributing to Townscape Character Studies being undertaken by Chiltern and South Bucks District Councils in support of their Local Development Frameworks. Presentations of the results are to be made in each district council area. The project is due to be completed in autumn 2011.

The launch of the Chiltern Conservation Board and English Heritage sponsored **Chiltern Historic Landscape Characterisation Report** is to be held on 13th October 2010. Copies will be sent to local councils and community groups across the Chilterns AONB.

Progress with the **Solent-Thames Research Frameworks Project** has remained slow with negotiations continuing with Oxford-Wessex Archaeology and English Heritage.

At **Quarrendon Leas** a sources of funding are being investigated for conservation of the church ruin with a linked educational project. Land transfer had been postponed due to the delay in commencing development at Berryfields MDA but it is hoped that progress can be made over the next six months.

The **Langley Park and Combe Hill Monument Restoration Projects** are managed by BCC Country Parks and the Natural Environment Team respectively and are now complete, or nearing completion.

A separate report will be provided on **High Speed 2**.

8 **Planning related archaeological work**

Considerable uncertainty pervades the field of planning and development due to the combination of economic downturn, revocation of Regional Spatial Strategies and proposed reforms to introduce 'localism'. This uncertainty particularly affects Aylesbury Vale where it is intended to withdraw the Proposed Core Strategy leaving the scale and location of new development undetermined at present.

The Environment Agency flood alleviation scheme in the **floodplain at Marlow** on the site of a prehistoric barrow cemetery which was reported to the March 2010 was granted planning consent subject to conditions but seems unlikely to proceed for the foreseeable future due to lack of funding.

A full list of development-related fieldwork from January to June 2010 will be tabled as appendix A.

9 **Publication update (Appendix B)**

A revised post-excavation programme has been agreed with Oxford Archaeology for the joint publication of the **Dorney Rowing Lake and Maidenhead, Windsor and Eton Flood Alleviation Scheme**. The situation with other projects is summarised in appendix B.

E. BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. Archaeological Reports submitted to the Bucks HER

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