

Appendix A: Buckinghamshire Archaeological Officers' Report

To: Buckinghamshire Historic Environment Forum
Date: 10th September 2020
Authors: Senior Archaeology Officer (Phil Markham), Archaeology Officer (Lucy Lawrence), Historic Environment Record Officer (Julia Wise), Historic Environment Record Assistant (Paul Clements)

A. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1 To advise the Forum of the work of the County Archaeological Service (BCAS) since the last BHEF meeting (5th March 2020).

Report Summary

- The Team has been working hard to continue to deliver an excellent service to our customers throughout the pandemic.
- Buckinghamshire's Heritage Portal website was launched in August and replaced UBP (Unlocking Buckinghamshire's Past). It is the culmination of a number of years of hard work by the team and we trust that our colleagues and members of the public find it a useful and enjoyable resource.
- HS2/Fusion - field work is progressing with some significant findings near Wendover. We are consulted over project plans, updates and are invited to site meetings. The works process has been streamlined to speed up getting onto site and we have approved these changes.
- East-West Rail - Lucy has been working hard over this period assessing nearly one hundred Project Plans/Written Schemes of Investigation (WSIs) which have been supplied by Atkins who are working for Network Rail. Fieldwork has been progressing during the pandemic, following government guidance.
- Heathrow – The consultants Wood have ceased works on the historic environment whilst the appeal progresses.

B. PROPOSED ACTION

- 2 The Forum is particularly invited to NOTE:
 - resources
 - strategic issues and projects
 - recent planning-related archaeological work
 - completion of the project for external hosting and upgrade of the HER database and the new Buckinghamshire's Heritage Portal website

- the HER Audit assessment

C. RESOURCES

- 3 The Councils' Archaeological Service forms part of the new Planning, Growth and Sustainability Directorate. Philip Markham is the Senior Archaeology Officer, Lucy Lawrence is the Archaeology Officer, Julia Wise is the HER Officer (part time), Paul Clements is the HER Assistant and Eliza Alqassar is the Environment Team Leader.

D. SUPPORTING INFORMATION

4 Strategic Issues/Projects

High Speed 2: We continue to provide advice through the HS2 Ltd Heritage Sub-Group and the most recent meeting was in June. Few Schedule 17 works consultations have come through recently but until the pandemic started we were being invited to the monthly update meetings.

Fieldwork has continued by Fusion during the pandemic, following government guidance, and is taking place in a number of areas with some significant archaeology being recorded. Fusion and/or their archaeological contractors supply us with draft project specifications for comment and we sometimes request minor amendments. HS2 and their partner organisations have decided that the process of drafting project plans, agreeing field work and updating project plans should be streamlined as the scheme is progressing rapidly and everyone wants sufficient time to appropriately address the required field work. We have agreed that this is a sensible approach.

The two Historic Environment Research and Delivery Strategy (HERDS) Managers, Rachel Wood and Dan Hounsell, employed by Fusion, who keep us informed on works, have been joined by Iain Williamson due to the large number of sites coming up. They ensure that all field work and recording is undertaken to the same standard and format. We are being invited to monitor the work and make comments, which appears to be working well. So far there are 177 HS2-related fieldwork events completed and ongoing in Bucks. This number will rise as new sites come on line.

Works are commencing to the north of St Mary's at Stoke Mandeville and works on the graveyard are expected to commence before the end of the year. Significant features and finds have been excavated near Wendover, as detailed in the press releases from HS2/Fusion and the Council. This site included a Neolithic/early Bronze Age large pit circle 65m in diameter and a high status Roman burial in a lead coffin. Unfortunately this site and the St Mary's site cannot be preserved in situ as there are directly impacted by the line of HS2.

East–West Rail: Lucy has been working hard over this period assessing nearly one hundred Project Plans/Written Schemes of Investigation (WSIs) which have been supplied by Atkins who are working for Network Rail. These need to be approved by conditions attached to the TWAO consent (Transport and Works Act Order). Unfortunately this is not the most simplistic system and many of the WSIs have needed amendments, which eats into the agreed timescales for approval. Many of the near one hundred WSIs are for relatively small areas of work such as road widening and passing places to upgrade roads for development traffic.

Heathrow New Runway: We understand that the consultant has ceased working on historic environment issues. The planning appeal is likely to take 12 – 18 months.

Western Rail Link to Heathrow: Archaeological evaluation and fieldwork has been undertaken and a report supplied. Due to access and ownership issues further evaluation will be required following consent.

Chalk, Cherries, Chairs and the Chilterns Hillforts Project: These are two projects being run by the Chilterns Conservation Board. Members of the Environment Team attend steering group meetings and provide advice and we have provided financial support and HER information to both projects. Within the Chalk, Cherries and Chairs project BCAS are most heavily involved with the ‘Mystery of Grim’s Ditch’ and ‘Routes to the Past’ projects.

New National Designations:

The existing listing description for the Grade II* 14th century timber-framed barn at New Manor Farm, Broughton has been amended.

St Francis’ Vicarage on Amersham Road, High Wycombe has been added to the list at Grade II. Designed by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott and built in 1929-1930, the vicarage is a rare example of the architect’s domestic buildings.

5. **Planning related archaeological work**

Volume measures	1st Quarter 2020	2nd Quarter 2020
Total number of consultations handled	124	127
Number of planning applications handled	111	103
Planning applications responded to within 21 days (target 90%)	110 (99%)	101 (98%)
Number of development-related archaeological fieldwork projects	30	25
Success rate at appeal (target 50% annual success rate)	N/A	N/A

A full list of development-related fieldwork is provided as Appendix B.

Significant archaeological investigations include:

The most significant investigation which has just been completed is the HS2 excavation near Wendover where a Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age circular alignment of pits 65m in diameter has been uncovered. This large site has also included a high status Roman burial in a lead coffin.

The CEMEX mineral site near Langley is progressing prior to the phased mineral extraction and an Iron Age settlement has been partially excavated, the remaining section is currently beneath a bund and there are traces of an underlying Bronze Age field system.

There has continued to be considerable local and media interest over a site near Buckingham (reported to BHEF in March 2019). This excavation took place in 2018/19 and since then post-excavation cleaning and assessment of the skeletons has been underway. We understand that Network Archaeology have provided the developer with updated costings to cover the rest of the post-excavation works, to include DNA analysis and carbon 14 dating, together with the publication and archiving of this significant site.

6 Publication update (Appendix C)

7 Outreach and Publicity

In February 2020 Lucy gave a talk on the Archaeology of HS2 in Buckinghamshire to a joint meeting of Archaeology in Marlow and Marlow Archaeological Society members.

In March 2020 Julia prepared a poster display on Buckinghamshire Hillforts for a joint Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society and Prehistoric Society lecture on hillforts held in Amersham.

A number of planned public outreach events have been cancelled, postponed or moved online following the Covid-19 lockdown and subsequent restrictions on activities. The team continues using social media for public outreach and will explore new opportunities for online displays and presentations.

8 Historic Environment Record (HER) report

The HER performance indicator statistics are shown in the tables below:

Performance Indicator	1st Quarter 2020	2nd Quarter 2020
Historic Environment Records data	Reports = 13	Reports = 21

inputting backlog (targets: reports < 30 by March 2020)	<u>Collect = 512</u> Total = 525	<u>Collect = 512</u> Total = 533
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Volume measures	1st Quarter 2020	2nd Quarter 2020
Number of Countryside Stewardship applications handled	11	10
Number of reports received by the HER	36	55
Number of Historic Environment Records enquiries handled: commercial	25	19
non-commercial	13	10

Countryside Stewardship Consultations

In 2020 the HER was consulted on 23 Countryside Stewardship applications covering 3,464 hectares within Buckinghamshire. Of these, 10 (43%) were for Higher Tier schemes and 13 (57%) were for Mid-tier schemes. The HER was able to provide added value to 43% of the applications and responded to all the consultations within the 20-day period required by Natural England.

The numbers of Stewardship consultations remain low as a direct result of the Rural Payments Agency making significant changes to the consultation process in an attempt to cut costs, as reported to previous Forum meetings. The bulk of Mid-tier applications were processed without any input from the HER; we are hopeful that there aren't significant detrimental impacts on heritage in the county as a consequence of these changes, however we have heard from a couple of landowners who felt unable to proceed with recent agreements despite their applications being approved, due to the inflexibility of the scheme requirements. The Countryside Stewardship scheme is expected to continue until 2024 when a new Environmental Land Management scheme, currently being piloted, will come on stream.

HER Audit

The HER Audit was completed on schedule at the end of March, with Historic England's Heritage Information Partnerships team assessing the HER against nationally agreed standards and best-practice. We're pleased to report that the HER received a clean bill of health, with particular strengths in record content and coverage and in public access and engagement. We have already made progress with the agreed Action Plan to address outstanding issues and areas for future work. *A summary of the Audit Report is below.*



- Audit Rating Key:**
- No future action required, maintain as existing
 - One or more actions required
 - One or more substantial actions required
 - A number of significant actions are required
 - Significant action is required in most/all areas

A: Content and Coverage	
<p>A1</p> <p><i>Success and Achievement:</i> Dynamic content. Monuments, events recorded, displayed on GIS & linked to sources.</p> <p><i>Areas for Future Work:</i> Create Her Forward Plan and Disposals Policy.</p>	<p>A2</p> <p><i>Success and Achievement:</i> Recording covers full range of heritage assets with no period/thematic limits.</p>
B: Data Standards and Security	
<p>B1</p> <p><i>Success and Achievement:</i> Stores, incorporates, provides digital data in formats assisting data exchange.</p> <p><i>Areas for Future Work:</i> Revise and complete HER Recording Manual and establish regular cycle of updating.</p>	<p>B2</p> <p><i>Success and Achievement:</i> Reference Collection secure. Adequate regard for long term preservation. Information Services & Access & Charging Policies in place.</p> <p><i>Areas for Future Work:</i> Create Systems Security Policy. Revise Recording Manual. Develop data back-up procedures and recovery testing. Review compliance with UK data storage legislation.</p>
C: Access and Engagement	
<p>C1</p> <p><i>Success and Achievement:</i> Information made available to all and can interpret and mediate to users. A range of options available for access. Committed to developing access through technical innovation.</p>	<p>C2</p> <p><i>Success and Achievement:</i> Active work to engage audiences and promote access.</p> <p><i>Areas for Future Work:</i> Develop forward plan and cycle of revision guided by user feedback. Expand and enhance guidance issued to data providers.</p>
D: Infrastructure (Service Delivery)	
<p>D1</p> <p><i>Success and Achievement:</i> HER formally adopted by host authority. Mission Statement & Disaster/Business Continuity Plan in place, also Service Level Agreements.</p> <p><i>Areas for Future Work:</i> Create Forward & Succession Plans. Increase staff familiarity with disaster & business continuity planning procedures.</p>	<p>D2</p> <p><i>Success and Achievement:</i> Enjoys appropriate IT and administrative support. Suitably qualified and experienced staff.</p> <p><i>Areas for future work:</i> Laptops and PCs to be replaced. Database to be externally hosted. Increase capacity to accommodate HER user visits and volunteers.</p>

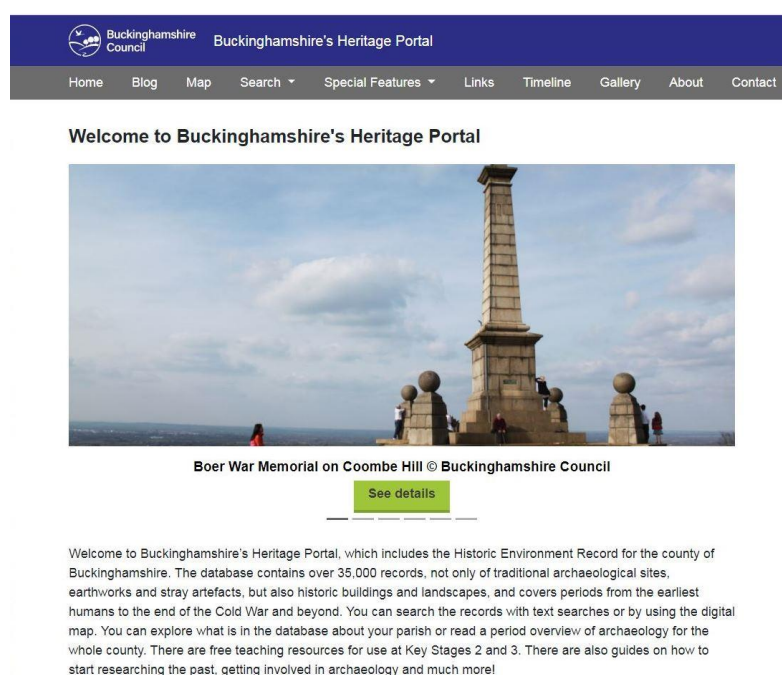
For further details about Audit Outcomes A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2, D1 and D2 please see the HER Audit Specification.

External Hosting and HER Website Project

Progress with the external hosting project was reported at the last Forum meeting in early March. Following two weeks of user testing, the move to external hosting was made on 9th April, with the database upgraded to the latest version of the HBSMR software. It has taken several months to ensure that the HER is able to have access to the latest versions of the corporate and OS mapping but this is now completed. The switch to remote hosting was extremely timely as it has meant that the team has been able to provide an

advice and enquiry service from home and haven't been subject to many of the network interruptions experienced by our colleagues. The remote hosting has also seen a huge improvement in database speed, as was anticipated.

Development of the new website got underway in June, with particularly intense periods of work and testing in July and early August. The website went live with a 'soft launch' on 13th August and a press release and other publicity followed after a short period to ensure that the website was running successfully through the corporate website. The website is now externally hosted but using a sub-domain URL and re-routed through the corporate website. Redirections are also in place to preserve existing hyperlinks to and from other websites and users' bookmarks.



Above: a screenshot of the website homepage.

The new website has a fresh look and feel, with a dedicated blog and moderated user feedback. It's designed to be accessible on most laptops, tablets and mobile phone formats and has intuitive text searching and mapping tools better suited to contemporary users. Information from the HER database is published live, so new records will be available immediately. Additional HER datasets will be accessible to our conservation and historic buildings colleagues through the website.

HER enhancement and volunteer projects

Paul updated the HER with the latest information from the Portable Antiquities Scheme database in May and June. This has added 7,279 new records to the HER, all of which have needed editing to make them compatible with the HER database.

The Pillbox Study Group has made their records available to the HER and we will be working through the spreadsheet of 107 new sites in Buckinghamshire adding the information to the HER in due course.

The HER volunteer working on the milestones project is currently editing the existing entries with additional new information. She has been working from home during lockdown.

The Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust Research and Recording Project is continuing to make good progress with 73 reports completed, 6 reports in draft and work underway on a further 7 gardens. The volunteers have completed a discrete project researching artists' gardens in Buckinghamshire, and are now researching public parks and gardens as a contribution to a national Gardens Trust project.

9. Emergency Recording Fund

See Agenda Item 5.

E. BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. Archaeological Reports submitted to the Buckinghamshire HER

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