

Appendix A: Buckinghamshire Archaeological Officers' Report

To: Buckinghamshire Historic Environment Forum

Date: 16th April 2024

Authors:

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A. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To advise the Forum of the work of the County Archaeological Service (BCAS) since the last BHEF meeting (14th September 2023).

Report Summary

Buckinghamshire Council Archaeology Team had a busy year end to 2023. Now part of the wider Heritage & Archaeology team, we have seen the benefits of working collaboratively with our heritage colleagues, most notably in relation to the Local Heritage List project, cross-team training, and wider Council projects. We continue working a 40/60 split in working from the office and home.

The Archaeology Officers dealt with over 600 consultations in 2023. High levels of planning consultations drive archaeological fieldwork in the county, and over the course of the year 120 fieldwork events took place in Buckinghamshire. Fieldwork ahead of large-scale development continued at pace, including South-East Aylesbury Link Road (SEALR), solar farms and large urban extensions.

B. PROPOSED ACTION

The Forum is particularly invited to NOTE:

- resources
- strategic issues and projects
- recent planning-related archaeological work
- HER enhancement projects

C. RESOURCES

The Council's Archaeology Service forms part of the 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), and Paul Clements is the HER Assistant.

Service Review & Restructuring

The Heritage and Archaeology Team is within the Environmental Specialists and combines the Archaeology Team with the Heritage/Conservation Officers. Joanna Horton is the Team Leader. The team is managed by Eliza Alqassar as Historic and Built Environment Manager. Eliza also manages the Ecology team whilst Rebecca Hart manages the other Environmental Specialists teams which includes Arboriculture, BMERC (Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Environmental Record Centre) and Urban Design and Landscape. The specialist teams will form part of a Service Review, to be undertaken this year.

D. SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Strategic Issues/Projects

High Speed 2:

HS2/Fusion – The pre-construction fieldwork has now been completed, although works at Fleet Marston, Chetwode Mill, Grim's Ditch and Wendover will continue to be monitored during the construction phase. Interim reports, full reports, and post excavation assessments (PXAs) are being supplied to the Historic Environment Record. We await news of the appointment of archaeological contractors to the post-excavation assessment and reporting phase, which is likely to take a number of years to complete.

Bi-weekly meetings have taken place to progress the Schedule 19 application for the excavation of the Scheduled Grims Ditch. HS2 has supplied the documentation to the Secretaries of State for the Department of Culture Media and Sport and the Department for Transport for approval and to Historic England for approval. Chris Welch the Historic England Inspector covering HS2 has approved the draft documentation.

New National Designations:

There has been 1 new addition to the national list – The former Groves sergeants' mess at RAF Halton was listed at Grade II in July 2023. The mess building had been missed from previous listings of the Groves and Henderson Barracks complex in 2005, in error, so the building's inclusion corrects this mistake. The mess building was built in 1920 and is one of the designs for buildings at RAF Halton which provided a template for the planning of barracks buildings on RAF bases in the inter-war period.

In December the New County Council Offices (the tower block) in Walton Street, Aylesbury were granted a certificate of immunity from national listing until December 2028, at the request of Buckinghamshire Council.

Statutory Historic Environment Record (HER):

On 26th October the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act received Royal Assent and passed into law. Amongst the many parts of the LURA there is a clause (Clause 230, pages 276-278) which introduces a new statutory duty for local authorities to maintain an historic environment record for its area. Buckinghamshire Council currently manages the Buckinghamshire Historic Environment Record, whilst Milton Keynes Council manages the Milton Keynes HER and both will be expected to continue to do so as a new statutory duty fulfilling all new requirements from the Act.

The Government has confirmed that it anticipates an implementation period for the HER Clause to allow local authorities time to ensure they are able to meet the new duty. The implementation period also includes the development of new standards and guidance for HERs to be produced by the Government in consultation with non-departmental bodies such as Historic England and specialist groups such as ALGAO (Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers, an LGA Special Interest Group) of which both local authorities are members. The implementation date has still to be set.

There will be a burden on local authorities to meet this new statutory duty. It is expected that the financial impact of this will be met by Government within the annual local government finance settlement, although this will not be ringfenced.

Chalk Cherries and Chairs Project

The archaeology team have been working with the Chilterns Conservation Board on a project called The Mystery of Grim’s Ditch, a sub project of a wider lottery funded project called Chalk, Cherries and Chairs. This project seeks to connect local people to the wildlife and cultural heritage of the Central Chilterns. The Mystery of Grim’s Ditch sub project looked to carry out further research about Buckinghamshire’s largest and longest Scheduled Monument and engage more people with this enigmatic heritage asset.

As part of the project, between June and December 2023, the archaeology team have;

- Visited two primary schools to talk to them about Grim’s Ditch and prehistory in general.
- Carried out two days of geophysical survey with the two Buckinghamshire Young Archaeologist Clubs, and the CCC New Shoots participants to try and identify the route of the ditch in an area where the location was uncertain.
- Led three guided walks along the ditch.
- Worked with a volunteer to seek answers to any new questions which arose from interaction with local people.

Planning related archaeological work

Volume measures	3rd Quarter 2023	4th Quarter 2023
Total number of consultations handled	124	148
Number of planning applications handled	110	124
Consultations responded to within 21 days (target 90%)	98%	91%

Number of development-related archaeological fieldwork projects requested	35	32
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:

There has continued to be local interest over a site near Buckingham ('Buckingham burials' reported to BHEF in March 2019). This excavation took place in 2018/19 and since then post-excavation cleaning and conservation of the skeletons has been undertaken. We understand that Network Archaeology have been in discussion with the developer and have provided them 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. We contact Network Archaeology on a regular basis to see if we can help expedite these works. The recording and study of the human remains was due to commence this March and Network have said that they will provide regular updates, with a completion date set for November this year. The scientific analysis will unfortunately take much longer and while samples will be taken this year it is un-likely we will see all the information derived until well into 2025. We will get updates as the different strands of data are studied in this order: DNA sex information first, ancestry second, and pathogens last.

General

The Team has been busy with planning applications; large scale solar farm proposals are a regular issue together with woodland planting schemes at varying scales.

South-East Aylesbury Link Road (SEALR)

The archaeological monitoring and targeted excavation of the South-East Aylesbury link Road (SEALR) are progressing with AECOM and CFA. Work on site began again in February 2024 but excavation conditions have been very difficult with water-logged sites.

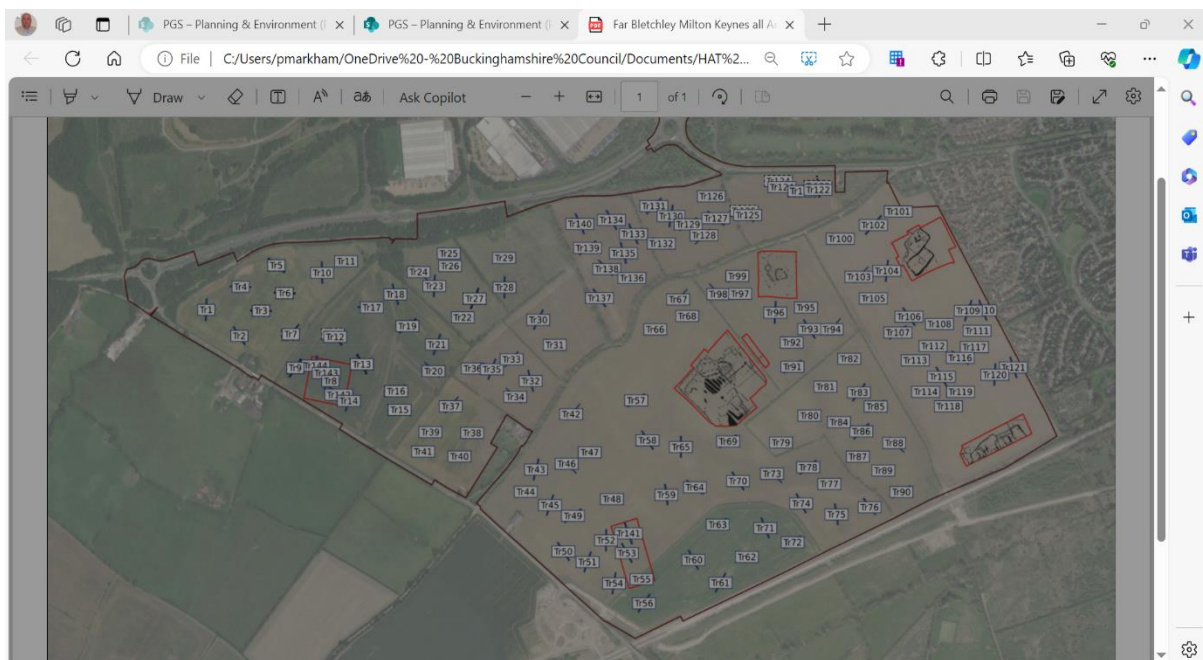


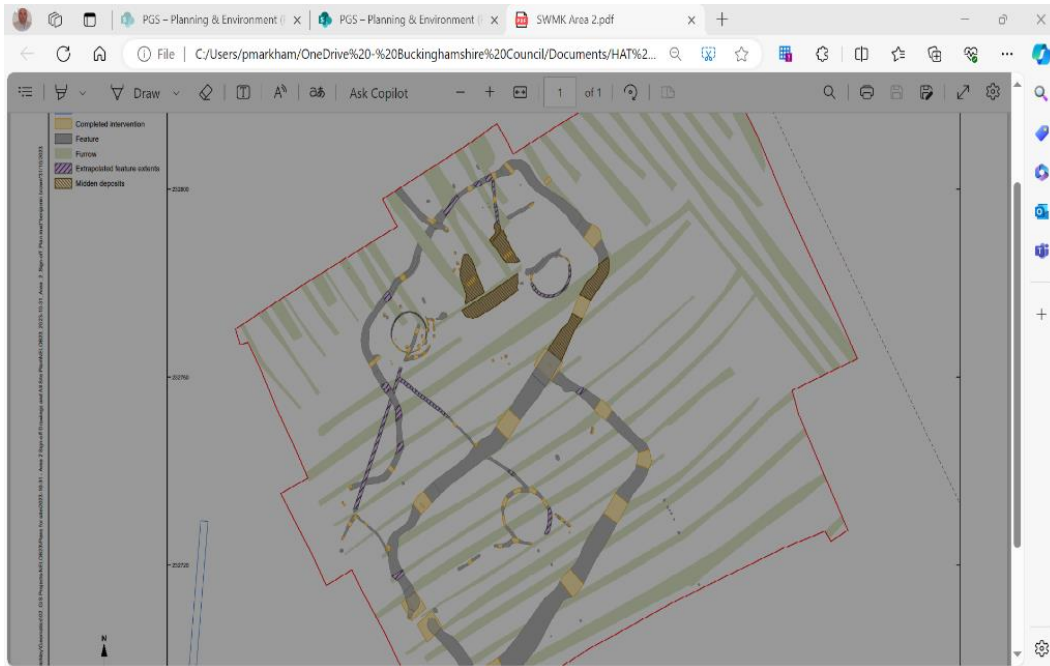
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Hampden Fields Major Development South of Aylesbury

The next phase of evaluation is to begin in Spring 2024 with Oxford Archaeology undertaking the work. This major development is for up to 3,000 dwellings and a 60-bed care home/extra care facility; provision of land for a Park and Ride site; a total of 6.90ha of employment land; provision of two primary schools (one 2 form entry and one 3 form entry); a mixed-use local centre (3.75ha) with provision for a food store of up to 1,200 square metres, further retail (including a pharmacy), restaurant and café units, a doctor's surgery, gym, public house, multi-functional green infrastructure (totalling 108.43ha) including parkland, sports pitches, sports pavilions, children's play areas, informal open space, allotments, community orchards and landscaping. It was decided that to de-risk the development further evaluation in the form of trial trenching would be undertaken. Evaluation was undertaken approximately ten years ago and included geophysical surveys and trial trenching.

Land South of A421





Little Kimble

In 2023 an archaeological excavation was carried out by Thames Valley Archaeological Services (TVAS) ahead of a new development of 45 residential units at Little Kimble on behalf of Cala Homes Ltd. This excavation revealed a wealth of finds and features from several time periods, the earliest feature being a Neolithic or Bronze Age pit, filled with worked flints and pottery.



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A high number of metal finds were recovered from the excavation, with a full metal detector survey of the site yielding 44 coins and personal dress items such as rings, bracelets and brooches. The recovery of these dress items combined with several organic examples such as bone hairpins gives us a rare glimpse into the fashion of the times as well as the trade links with the wider Roman world. Out of the coin assemblage, seven pre-Roman conquest coins were found. These included two Iron-Age gold quarter staters and two bronze coins, and three silver Roman coins, one of which dates to the Roman Republic and was likely minted in Rome itself. These high status finds, along with imported Samian pottery from Gaul, indicate the trade links the settlement had with the Roman world before the conquest. Due to its position along a known road and trade route, it is possible that this site could have started out as a trading settlement. A collection of these finds can currently be seen on display at the Discover Bucks Museum. Words and image below taken from our blog: [Excavations at Little Kimble, Buckinghamshire | Buckinghamshire Council](#)



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Publication update (Appendix C)

Outreach and Publicity

Members of the Team have undertaken a number of outreach and partnership activities in the period July - December 2023.

Activities include:

- Installation and unveiling of Local Heritage List artworks in Buckingham library in July
- Stalls and activities at the County Show in August
- Weekend of geophysics with Young Archaeologist Club branches in September
- Bucks Archaeological Society market stall at Aylesbury for Heritage Open Day in September
- Displays for the Bucks Local History Network conference in October which was themed on the Local Heritage List
- In person 'Meet the Archaeologist' event at Chesham library for October half term
- Talk to Thomas Harding School, Chesham, in November
- Led guided walks for the Mystery of Grim's Ditch project
- Hosted work experience student placements in July
- Bucks Archaeological Society Council Meetings
- National HER Forum meeting in July
- ALGAO (Association of Government Archaeological Organisations) meetings, including AGM, Planning and Legislation sub-Committee, HER Committee, South-East Area catchup
- Thames Valley Police Rural Crime Partnership meetings

The Heritage and Archaeology team maintain X and Facebook pages and a blog on the council's website. Between July and December 3 blogs were published relating to HS2 excavations at Fleet Marston Roman town, the unveiling of the Local Heritage List artwork at Buckingham library, and the work of the Local Heritage List. Posts on X and Facebook included the listings of 2 K8 phone boxes at stations in Buckinghamshire, church mass dials as well as promoting our blogs.

Link to Heritage and Archaeology team Blog -

<https://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/blogs/archaeology/>

X - <https://twitter.com/BucksCArch>

Facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100063571718566>

Local Heritage List

In January 2023 we saw the adoption of the first phase of our first ever county-wide Local List. This list ensures that non-designated heritage assets are taken into consideration in the planning process. Having launched the project in 2022, we have now received over 3,400 nominations, which have been carefully researched and assessed by the project team and an excellent group of volunteers. Sites added to the list include buried archaeological remains, upstanding earthworks, areas of ridge and furrow, historic buildings, parks and

gardens, public art and significant landscapes. The list and associated information can be found here: [Home - Buckinghamshire's Local Heritage List \(local-heritage-list.org.uk\)](http://local-heritage-list.org.uk) The review of archaeological sites for the **Local Heritage List** is now complete and in addition to the 81 archaeological sites already adopted onto the Local Heritage List, a further 26 sites have now been assessed as worthy of inclusion. The second phase of sites will be formally adopted onto the list in June 2024. A welcome result to a lot of hard work.

Historic Environment Record (HER) report

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

Performance Indicator	3rd Quarter 2023	4th Quarter 2023
Historic Environment Records data inputting backlog (targets: reports < 30 by March 2024)	Reports = 10 Collect = 511 Total = 521	Reports = 12 Collect = 511 Total = 523

	3rd Quarter 2023	4th Quarter 2023
Number of Countryside Stewardship applications handled	5	0
Number of reports received by the HER	35	30
Number of Historic Environment Records enquiries handled: commercial	26	29
non-commercial	4	1

Paul has been dealing with the bulk of HER enquiries and all the Countryside Stewardship applications in 2023 to free Julia up to work on the Local Heritage List project.

Countryside Stewardship Scheme in 2023

In 2023 HER consultations to support Countryside Stewardship funding applications continued in the same format as previous years. The application window for 2023 opened in February and closed in September. This year Paul has received and dealt with 27 applications for 4,609 hectares of land in Buckinghamshire with 8 applications at Mid-Tier and 19 applications at Higher Tier.

The transition to the proposed new Environmental Land Management Scheme is still expected to go live in 2024, however government has provided very little detail of the HER consultation process to date, and the opening of the application window has also been delayed, currently with no date for commencement.

Buckinghamshire's Heritage Portal

Statistics on user numbers and page views have been collected monthly from September 2020, when analytical tools were added to the website.

2023	Users	Page views	% new users	% regular users
July	3,407	9,724	98%	2%

August	3,442	9,567	97%	3%
September	3,506	9,020	96%	4%
October	4,219	10,432	97%	3%
November	3,965	9,957	96%	4%
December	3,599	7,917	96%	4%

Initially 85% of Heritage Portal users were based in the UK, but the geographic spread of users has been widening consistently and we now have users in every continent and sub-continent, however in the second half of 2023 the figures for users based in the UK consistently increased with 85% of users based in the UK in December, up from 73% in June 2023. The surprising number of users based in Andora (5% of users) and Benin (2% of users) reported to the last two meetings has ceased, with neither country appearing in the top 10 of user countries after June. In September Romania appeared in the top 10 of user countries for the first time, and in October Saudi Arabia appeared for the first time.

In July 2023 a new version of Google Analytics, the tool used to generate the statistics for the Heritage Portal was released, which appears to be generating statistics for new and repeat website visits in a different way. Previously we were consistently recording about 85-87% of new users, with 13-15% of regular users; from July the figure for new users is much higher, as shown in the table above.

HER enhancement and volunteer projects

The two consultants from Skylarkeology completed work on the first of the Aerial Investigation and Mapping projects in north Buckinghamshire and in February 2024 started working on the second project which covers the area around Aylesbury. These are Historic England-funded projects which record and map evidence from aerial photography and LiDAR directly in the HER database. The data is a significant new source of information and will be particularly useful for development management, strategic planning and for the Buckinghamshire Local Plan.

The HER volunteer working on the milestones project continues to work on enhancing the records for milestones.

Emergency Recording Fund

At the September 2020 BHEF committee meeting it was agreed that following the transition to a Unitary authority, that Buckinghamshire Council would contribute 80% (£800) of the annual contributions to cover the total previously contributed by the legacy district and county councils. As per previous agreements, Milton Keynes Council would contribute 15% (£150) and the Buckinghamshire Archaeology Society would contribute 5% (£50).

The current fund stands at £8750.

No funds have been spent since 2013, when the fund was used to excavate a Roman casket burial.

E. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Archaeological Reports submitted to the Buckinghamshire HER

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