

**To: West Area Planning Committee**

**Date: 13 March 2013**

**Report of: Head of City Development**

**Title of Report: Oxford Archaeological Action Plan 2013-18**

## **Summary and Recommendations**

### **Purpose of Report:**

To describe the work involved in the completion of the Oxford Archaeological Plan (OAP) project and the production of an Oxford Archaeological Action Plan.

### **Key Decision: No**

**Report approved by: Michael Crofton-Briggs**

**Finance: David Watt**

**Legal: Michael Morgan**

**Policy Framework:** (NPPF) National Planning Policy Framework  
Oxford Core Strategy 2006 – 2026  
Adopted Oxford Local Plan 2001 – 2016

### **Recommendation(s):**

1. To note the completion of the Oxford Archaeological Plan and the production of the Oxford Archaeological Action Plan.
2. To recognise the challenges highlighted in the report and endorse the council's commitment to 1) developing a high quality evidence base on the historic environment and 2) providing effective archaeological development control advice.
3. The Committee's comments on the proposed action plan are invited.

## **Summary**

1. The City Council Archaeologist, David Radford, will provide a short powerpoint presentation highlighting some recent exciting archaeological discoveries and explaining the purpose of the action plan.
2. The City Council's Heritage and Specialist Services Team have completed a three year English Heritage funded project to produce a number of evidence base studies for Oxford:

- An archaeological resource assessment (a summary of archaeological work undertaken by period).
  - An archaeological research agenda (questions we would like to ask of surviving archaeological remains).
  - Historic landscape characterisation mapping for the local authority area.
  - Historic urban characterisation mapping for the historic core.
  - The production of 44 historic urban character statements for the historic core.
  - The production of an Archaeological Action Plan.
3. The culmination of the OAP project has been the production of a six year Archaeological Action Plan for Oxford. The function of the archaeological action plan is:
- To signpost the online results of the assessment, research agenda and characterisation projects which are available for download on the archaeological pages of the City Council web site: <http://www.oxford.gov.uk/PageRender/decP/OxfordArchaeologicalPlan.htm>.
  - To provide a short overview of the city's historical development and highlight some exciting recent discoveries in order to provide a context for these reports.
  - To flag up some strategic issues regarding long term archaeological asset management and provide a 'framework of encouragement' for larger developers and land owners aimed at promoting cost effective and sustainable outcomes through the development control process.
  - To provide an action plan for archaeological development control service delivery. Having undertaken a synthesis of previously accumulated archaeological information the focus of the plan is the improvement of the quality and scope of the Urban Archaeological Database, seeking to improve public access to this data and encouraging community participation and engagement in the process of archaeological investigation.
4. The Oxford Archaeological Action Plan Document is attached (Appendix 1).
5. An example Historic Urban Character Statement is attached (Appendix 2).

## Background

6. Oxford has an exceptional archaeological heritage. For example over the last ten years excavations have revealed a Neolithic mortuary enclosure and henge, the remains of prehistoric burial mounds, a Viking mass grave, a likely medieval alchemy kit, previously unrecorded medieval cemeteries, the remains of medieval friaries, hospitals, University halls and colleges, evidence for the development of brewing and more. The pace of discovery opens up a series of opportunities and challenges that the Archaeological Action Plan addresses.
7. The archaeological investigations mentioned above have transformed our understanding of Oxford from the evolution of a 'sacred landscape' in prehistoric times through to the establishment of the Saxon fortress, the development of Norman infrastructure, the evolution of the commercial town, the college landscape, post-medieval re-building and subsequent industrial transformation. This information is brought together in the OAP project. A fuller overview is provided in the Archaeological Action Plan.
8. The OAP project brings together two national English Heritage initiatives, the Urban Archaeological Strategy programme and the Historic Characterisation Programme.
9. The Urban Archaeological Strategy (UAS) programme was established to improve the management of England's urban archaeological resource by supporting the creation of Urban Archaeological Databases, Resource Assessments and Strategies for over 30 historic towns and cities. English Heritage funded the establishment of an Urban Archaeological Database for Oxford in 2002.
10. The Historic Characterisation Programme involves the use of digital maps to record information about historic landscape character (including aspects of land use, building and plot form). Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) mapping has now been completed for the bulk of England at a County level. Oxfordshire County Council are currently undertaking a three year project to complete mapping for the remainder of the County, linking previous studies for adjacent counties (and also the completed studies for Oxford and the Oxfordshire Chilterns). The use of HLC studies is now referenced in the National Planning Policy Framework (Paragraph 170).
11. Historic Urban Character mapping is a more detailed level of study that seeks to allow the identification of broad character areas within towns. It represents one of a number of complimentary approaches to characterisation which include Conservation Area Appraisals and the use of the Character Assessment Toolkit. The 44 character area statements provide a brief description of each area, highlight key characteristics and

provide summary information about historical, evidential, aesthetic and communal value.

12. In January 2009 a project application was submitted to English Heritage for an Urban Archaeological Strategy project. Funding was obtained and a project officer was funded by English Heritage for a year from April 2010 to undertake data collection and report writing, managed by the City Council Archaeologist.
13. Subsequently the archaeological assessments and agendas have been through a programme of referee review and public consultation. Detailed comments were obtained from period referees and via a research agenda seminar. No public comments were received, perhaps reflecting the size and complexity of the documents. No other assessment project has attempt a comparable consultation exercise.
14. The Historic Urban Character Assessment statements have been through closed and public consultation. 145 people joined as consultees and twelve responses were received. Comments ranges from specific factual corrections to comments on the report layout, use of maps and images and the level of detail achieved within different sections of the reports. A number of the comments focused on the level of detail in the reports and raised issues that may be more properly addressed by other studies. As a result of the consultation corrections have been made to the text and character mapping.
15. The Action Plan document has been subject to a closed consultation of stakeholders and specialists. Comments were received from several local specialists and the chair of the Estates Bursar Committee. The responses to the document have been positive.
16. The intention is to produce a limited print run of the action plan for libraries, councillors and key land owners and to make a web based version available through the City Council archaeological web pages.
17. The OAP project forms part of the evidence base for the Oxford Heritage Plan which will facilitate the further development of heritage policy for the city.

#### **Financial implications of the Action Plan**

18. There are no specific financial implications.

#### **The requirements of The Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equalities Act 2010**

19. The requirements of The Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equalities Act 2010, to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations has been taken into account and it is

considered that the design, delivery and evaluation of this project and the associated consultation did not have any effect on equality for any of the protected characteristics.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

- 1. To note the completion of the Oxford Archaeological Plan and the production of the Oxford Archaeological Action Plan**
- 2. To recognise the challenges highlighted in the report and endorse the council's commitment to 1) developing a high quality evidence base on the historic environment and 2) providing effective archaeological development control advice.**
- 3. The Committee's comments on the proposed action plan are invited.**

### **Name and contact details of author:**

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### **Background papers:**

English Heritage, 1992, Managing the Urban Archaeological Resource

English Heritage, 1996, Frameworks for our past.

English Heritage, 2000, Power of place.

English Heritage, 2005, Discovering the past shaping the future Research Strategy

English Heritage, 2005, English Heritage Research Agenda.

OCC Heritage and Specialist Services Team 2009 Oxford Archaeological Plan: archaeological and historic characterisation, assessment and strategy.

Project Design

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