

NASNEWS

January 2003

COUNTY COUNCIL PLANS SAVAGE CUTS TO HERITAGE

In its draft budget proposals published last month, Northamptonshire County Council announced its intention to disinvest (cut) at least two thirds of the Historic Environment Team, (Northamptonshire Heritage as was). The longer-term future of this local service must now be in doubt. The existing proposals intended to take effect from April 2003 form part of a wider package of cuts brought forward by a council that was recently branded 'weak' by the Audit Commission.

The Historic Environment Team provides the local District and Borough Councils with advice on which planning applications will affect important archaeological sites. It also plays a vital role in monitoring and collating results of all planning related archaeological fieldwork and ensures that high standards of fieldwork are maintained by archaeological contractors working in the county. Specialist archaeological and historic buildings advice is provided to both the public and private sector as well as to the wider public and includes input into Government's agri-environmental and forestry programmes helping maximise local historic environment benefit on agricultural land and woodlands. Specialist surveys are commissioned or conducted, such as that recently on ridge and furrow, to increase understanding and encourage active conservation. The team maintain and provide access to the Sites and Monuments Record (SMR), staffing of which is proposed to be cut by at least 50%. This must have a detrimental impact on the SMRs existing high level of service, and on its bid to seek HLF funding to improve access. Ironically, in a national assessment conducted by ALGAO and RCHME in 1999 the SMR, whilst not without scope for improvement, was identified as the best in the country. Another success storey now under threat is that of the Portable Antiquities scheme Northants Finds Liaison Officer whose post is hosted by the NCC. Is Northamptonshire about to lose this post, piloted in the county, at a time when the Portable Antiquities Scheme is currently being extended to be nationwide? Also worrying is the loss of the post of County Archaeologist, (occupied most recently by Glenn Foard), the main local government standard bearer for the historic environment, charged with responsibility for maintaining a high profile for archaeology in Northamptonshire and beyond.

Does loss of the County Archaeologist and much if not all of the rest of the service indicate that the County Council no longer cares about the historic environment? With Government recent reports emphasising just how important a role is played by the historic environment and at a time when Northamptonshire faces its biggest development upsurge of modern times (see item below), there has never been a more important time to strengthen not weaken local historic environment teams.

If you would like answers to these and other questions or would like to express your concern (and I really think we all should), about the proposed dismemberment of the county historic environment services, then the **County Council is accepting comments on the draft budget proposals until Friday February 7th**. The proposals then go to NCCs cabinet on 13th Feb and to full council on 24th Feb. The County Council's draft budget proposal can be viewed in full on the Council website at www.northamptonshire.gov.uk/Governing/About%20Us/Draftbudget.htm For reference, the main 'dis-investment' proposals affecting the historic environment are numbered RHB04 and DHB06. Send views and comments to the Chief Executive Peter Gould and the leader of the ruling Labour Group, Cllr Mick Young, both at Northants County Council, County Hall, Northampton NN1 1AN or email leader@northamptonshire.gov.uk Additionally, you may also wish to contact your County Councillor or MP.

State of the Historic Environment Report 2002 (SHER)

In November 2002, English Heritage published the first of what is to become a regular series of national reports on the state of the historic environment. The report includes a wide range of factual information and is viewable and downloadable from www.english-heritage.org.uk/sher/report.htm. Printed copies can be ordered from 0870 333 1181. English Heritage are seeking comments on the report. The closing date for comments is 28th February 2003.

South Midlands & Milton Keynes Study

This study featured in the local media before Christmas will have a profound impact on the archaeology and wider historic environment of Northamptonshire over the next 30 years. The study, commissioned by Government, is intended to set the parameters for future economic growth in Northamptonshire, Milton Keynes and parts of Buckinghamshire, an area identified as having the potential for considerable economic growth over the next 3 decades. In practice this may mean up to 370,000 new homes and 300,000 new jobs across the area. Major new urban expansion is proposed in Northamptonshire focused on Northampton, Wellingborough, Corby and Kettering. This could amount to the equivalent of 33 new Grange Parks in the Northampton area alone, over the next 3 decades. This is development on an unprecedented scale! The report appears to give woefully inadequate attention to the need to assess and mitigate the impact of such development on the rich archaeological, historic building, landscapes and natural environment character of the area. It will be vital to ensure that politicians and planners at all levels of government, including our local District, Borough and County Councils and MPs, recognise that if the proposals are to be advanced, they must include proper provision for sustainable care of the historic environment. The report is available from the South East England Regional Assembly site at http://www.southeast-ra.gov.uk/regional_policies/planning/area_studies/milton_midlands.html

2002 AGM

A successful 2002 AGM was held in a new venue, that of the Jeffery Room, at Northampton's Guildhall on the 4th December. This turned out to be an excellent venue and one the Society hopes to use again. After tea, coffee and biscuits and the AGM business, Dr Chris Burgess of Northamptonshire Archaeology gave a lecture on modern military archaeology entitled 'the Lock Doon Scandal'. The Society is most grateful to Dr Burgess for his fine presentation and to Northampton Borough Council for making the Jeffrey Room available.

NAS Excavation Backfilling

A small band of members turned out at Stowe Nine Churches on a Saturday in late November to backfill the trench excavated and recorded by NAS the previous summer – (interim report on the NAS website, address below). Despite occasional downpours, several hours of strenuous shovelling and barrowing had the trench backfilled, the steeper slopes being stabilised by packed with bio-degradable sandbags. The final stage involved the laying of a bio-degradable hessian matting pegged in place to help deter burrowing, counter erosion and encourage new stabilising ground cover. By the time the exercise was completed it was nigh on impossible to tell a trench had ever been present! Many thanks to all those who participated.

Northamptonshire Archaeology Fieldwork Reports Deadline - Volume 31

Volume 30 is in preparation and will be available later in the spring. Work has commenced on compiling Volume 31; please forward *Notes* and *Fieldwork reports for 2002* for inclusion in the latter by the end of March 2003. Those whose subscriptions are not up to date will not receive a Journal.

This NASNEWS edited by

Martin Tingle, The Dial House, High Street, Creaton, Northants NN6 8NA Tel: 01604 505476
email: mtingle@compuserve.com NAS Website at: www.northants-archaeology.org.uk