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WESTERN ESCARPMENT CONSERVATION AREA ACTION PLAN: 2011-2016

1 Introduction to the Western Escarpment Conservation Area Action Plan

- 1.1 The National Park Authority as planning authority has a duty under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to consider the designation of conservation areas. A conservation area is defined in the Act as *“an area of architectural and historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.”*
- 1.2 The Western Escarpment Conservation Area was designated on 26 March 2008 in recognition of its special architectural and historic interest.
- 1.3 As part of the process of designating or reviewing conservation areas, planning authorities are encouraged to prepare Character Appraisals and the Western Escarpment Conservation Area Character Appraisal was published in March 2009. The appraisal provides a detailed assessment identifying the special qualities which give the area its unique character. These elements include historic development, topography, current uses and features, buildings, trees, woodland and hedges as well as paths and lanes. Understanding and appreciating the area’s character is important as not only does it provide a framework within which individual planning applications can be assessed, but also the starting point for both its management and future.

What is the Conservation Area Action Plan?

- 1.4 Section 71 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 places a duty on local planning authorities to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of its conservation areas. In order to do this a number of core principles relevant to all conservation areas were adopted by the National Park Authority in 2008.
- 1.5 Having designated the Western Escarpment the next stage is to prepare an Action Plan for the area. The main function of the Plan is to guide and co-ordinate the work of all those with an interest in the conservation area to ensure that the character of the conservation area is preserved or enhanced.
- 1.6 As with other Conservation Area Action Plans, this is a strategic document which sets out the overall vision for the conservation area and looks at ways of tackling the major issues affecting the area (which are outlined in paragraph 1.25). It focuses attention on maintaining the conservation area as a special, distinctive place for future generations to enjoy.
- 1.7 The Conservation Area Action Plan will be supported by a number of other documents produced by the National Park Authority including the adopted Core Strategy, the emerging Landscape Plan and Supplementary Planning

Documents in the form of the Design Guide and Recreational Horse Keeping. It will also be supported by other documents including the Hampshire Minerals and Waste Plan as well as locally produced documents such as Village Design Statements.

- 1.8 It is a plan for the Western Escarpment Conservation Area, and can only be taken forward through the support, commitment and action of all those who live, manage or carry out work within the area.

What the Plan contains

- 1.9 The *Introduction* explains the statutory background to the Western Escarpment Conservation Area and explains the purpose of the Plan. It includes a summary of the special qualities of the conservation area.
- 1.10 *Working together* emphasises the importance of developing close working relationships with organisations and local communities within the area and working together in order to implement the Plan.
- 1.11 The *objectives* are intended to address the key issues over time, which in the long term will help to achieve the vision for the conservation area (see paragraph 2.1). They will be assessed as part of a review of the Plan and will be revised and updated.
- 1.12 The *actions* are a range of suggestions designed to meet the objectives and will be developed and updated as necessary.

How the Plan has been prepared

- 1.13 The Western Escarpment Steering Group consisting of representatives from Parish Councils within the conservation area was set up to guide and assist production of the Action Plan.
- 1.14 In order to find out which features residents considered contributed to, and detracted from the character of the conservation area, the Authority worked closely with the Steering Group to draw up a questionnaire (see Annex 1). Respondents were also asked for ideas on how the conservation area could be enhanced.
- 1.15 Public drop-in sessions were held at three different venues (within the conservation area) in September 2010 to introduce the idea of a Conservation Area Action Plan and to invite local residents to complete a questionnaire. The drop-in sessions provided a good opportunity for an exchange of ideas and information and for staff from the Authority to meet local residents. People who were unable to attend the drop-in sessions had the opportunity to complete the questionnaire by downloading a copy from the Authority's website.

- 1.16 A number of issues relevant to the Western Escarpment Conservation Area have also been raised through other channels - for example consultation on the emerging New Forest National Park's Landscape Strategy.
- 1.17 A number of objectives have been identified as a result of consultation which have been summarised in the Taking Action section. A set of actions have been identified in order to meet these objectives .

Special qualities of the Western Escarpment conservation area

- 1.18 The Western Escarpment Conservation Area is the largest of the conservation areas within the National Park extending from Hangersley in the south to Hatchet Green in the north. It lies on the western boundary of the National Park and is approximately 14 kilometres in length and 2.5 kilometres at the widest point. It is a living working community with a sense of continuity, tradition and history.
- 1.19 The Western Escarpment is an area of historic landscape and settlement which has developed its unique character over more than a thousand years. It covers the parishes of Hale, Woodgreen, Godshill, Hyde and parts of Ellingham, Harbridge & Ibsley, Fordingbridge and Ringwood. The conservation area typifies the Forest landscape and includes a variety of buildings of architectural and historic interest.
- 1.20 Development has been influenced by the natural land formation of the escarpment, with the richer agricultural lands in the Avon Valley and the poorer heathland soils at the top of the escarpment. The escarpment is punctuated by a number of small deep valleys containing side tributaries of the River Avon. On the Forest edge, land usage was influenced by the historic controls and traditions practised in the Royal Forest. Later a number of encroachments were made into the Forest and heathlands and onto the commons and manorial wastes. This allowed cultivation to establish, the creation of managed woodlands, and small paddocks with associated squatter development. This is particularly evident on the edges of the Gorley and Hyde commons and later enclosures such as Ogdens, Frogham Hill and the Shobley and Linford areas.
- 1.21 The area is bounded by open heathland to the east, the valley and floodplains of the River Avon to the west, the A31 and town of Ringwood to the south and farmland and settlements of Downton, Redlynch and Lover to the north.
- 1.22 Historically the settlement pattern of the area was one of dispersed farmsteads at the base of, and on the slopes of the escarpment with a number of smaller holdings belonging to larger manors. Small settlements gradually developed on the edges of the greens and in the 18th and 19th centuries encroachment intensified on the edge of the commons and Forest. In the 17th and 18th centuries two country houses were constructed with their associated

parklands and supporting estate farms and ancillary buildings. The small medieval fields were combined to create larger agricultural units. During the late 18th and early 19th centuries there was a lot of squatter development with the construction of cob cottages and hovels on the edge of the heaths and commons. During this period settlements such as Woodgreen and Hatchet Green expanded.

- 1.23 The area consists of a mixture of buildings of varying ages and styles, including timber framed thatched roofed cottages of the 16th and 17th centuries, cob cottages and hovels from the early 19th century and a number of brick cottages from the 18th and 19th centuries. More significant development includes Hale House and Moyles Court with their associated parkland, gardens and estate buildings.
- 1.24 The conservation area is served by a series of narrow roads and lanes. The main route runs north to south through the area at the base of the escarpment, linking the isolated farms and small settlements, with more recent development occurring along the edge of this through route.

Why do we need a Conservation Area Action Plan?

- 1.25 A number of issues have emerged which could be addressed through the development and implementation of a Conservation Area Action Plan bringing together all those with an interest in the area. These relate to:
- Built environment
 - Boundaries
 - Woodland, trees and hedges
 - Landscape
 - Views
 - Roads and verges
 - Signs and clutter.

2. Vision for the Western Escarpment Conservation Area

- 2.1 The vision for the Western Escarpment Conservation Area for the next 20 years is that the qualities and features which contribute to the unique character of the area continue to be immediately recognisable by both residents and visitors, and an area where:
- People who visit, live or work locally recognise the special character of and contribute to the care of the conservation area.
 - There is a good understanding of the value of the built heritage and recognition of the need for high standards of maintenance and traditional repairs.
 - Local, regional and national organisations recognise the value of the conservation area and any works carried out by such organisations preserve and enhance its character.
 - Everyone with an interest in the area contributes to keeping the conservation area a special place for future generations to enjoy.

3 Working together

Taking the Conservation Area Action Plan forward

- 3.1 The National Park Authority cannot take the objectives and actions of the Western Escarpment Conservation Area Action Plan forward on its own. In order for the Plan to succeed there must be close working between the many organisations responsible for works within the conservation area; as well as landowners and others who live and work in the area.

Working with people who live and work in the area

- 3.2 The National Park Authority set up the Western Escarpment Steering Group to guide the development of the Conservation Area Plan and represents the interests of those who live and work in the area. The group consists mainly of representatives from Parish and Town Councils within the conservation area including Ellingham, Harbridge & Ibsley, Woodgreen, Godshill, Hale, Hyde, Fordingbridge and Ringwood.
- 3.3 Private land and home owners cumulatively have the greatest influence over what happens in the conservation area and are key to ensuring that future plans and actions maintain its special character.

Working with key organisations in the conservation area.

- 3.5 There are a number of organisations responsible for works which can have an impact on the character of the conservation area. These include statutory agencies with specific responsibility for: highway works (Hampshire County Council and New Forest District Council), statutory undertakers (responsible for the provision of utilities such as telecommunications, water, electricity and gas) as well as organisations such as Natural England, the Forestry Commission and the Environment Agency.
- 3.6 Regular liaison is needed between the National Park Authority and all the key organisations responsible for carrying out works in the conservation area, to ensure effective co-ordination. Working relationships can be strengthened through partnership projects.

Roles and responsibilities of the key organisations:

- **The National Park Authority** has a particular interest in conserving and enhancing the special qualities of the area, improving their understanding and enjoyment and in supporting the social and economic well-being of local

communities. It also has statutory responsibility as planning authority for the area.

- **Hampshire County Council** is responsible for a wide range of public services. It is the highway authority and has responsibility for public rights of way as well as responsibility for countryside management of several parts of the conservation area (such as Ibsley Common).
- **New Forest District Council** is responsible for a wide range of services including refuse disposal, street lighting, surface water drainage and some street signs.
- **Parish and Town Councils** provide a wide range of services at the local level, and are responsible for community facilities and some open space. They comment on planning applications and are instrumental in raising awareness about the character of their areas and developing local projects. Parish and Town Councils have an essential role to play in representing the interest of their local community, not only providing local knowledge but also developing local community based initiatives such as the production of Village Design Statements and Parish Plans.
- **Verderers of the New Forest** are responsible for protecting and administering commoning, including the welfare of commoners' animals. The agreement of the Verderers' is required in order for some forms of development to take place on Crown Lands. They have a strong interest in conserving the traditional landscape.

- **Forestry Commission** is responsible for the management of Crown Lands.
- **Natural England** is responsible for protecting and enhancing the natural environment. Work includes reversing the decline of biodiversity, conserving and enhancing the landscape and promoting access to the countryside.
- **Environment Agency** is responsible for protecting and improving the environment for people and wildlife and reducing the risk of flooding.
- **National Trust** manages several important sites within the conservation area and has an interest in conserving natural habitats and landscapes within the area.

4 TAKING ACTION

- 4.1 The aim of the Conservation Area Plan is to identify opportunities and ways of working with anyone with an interest in or likely to carry out works within the area to ensure that the character of the conservation area is preserved or enhanced for future generations to enjoy.

The Built Environment

- 4.2 It is important to recognise that conservation areas were set up primarily to protect the built environment and the spaces around them. Buildings are therefore one of the most significant features contributing to the character of the Western Escarpment conservation area.

Objective One

To work with property owners, architects, designers and builders to ensure
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that buildings (which contribute to the character of the conservation area) are retained and that any new development is carefully designed to preserve or enhance the special character of the conservation area.

Actions:

- 1.1 Prepare general guidance on conservation areas to give building owners advice and guidance on what a conservation area is, why they are designated, what works require consent and where to obtain further advice.
- 1.2 Develop Village Design Statements (VDS) and their adoption as Special Planning Documents (SPD's).
- 1.3 Promote existing leaflets and guidance produced by the National Park Authority on building conservation and the Design Guide to encourage good practice for new development and works to existing buildings.
- 1.4 Promote the use of builders with experience of traditional building techniques and advertise the Traditional Building Skills Project training and development opportunities for builders and agents.
- 1.5 Explore sources of funding to assist towards the costs of traditional repairs to buildings of architectural or historic merit within the conservation area.
- 1.6 Promote the availability of specialist advice from existing staff within the National Park Authority with regard to design, building conservation, archaeology, trees landscape and ecology.
- 1.7 Action to secure the future of buildings considered to be at risk.
- 1.8 Identify buildings of interest which may have been overlooked for statutory listing with a view to investigating the possibility of nominating them for formal listing with English Heritage.
- 1.9 Consider the use of special measures in the form of Article 4(2) Directions for **selected** unlisted buildings of quality within the conservation area. This would mean that planning permission would be required for a range of works to selected dwellings (such as altering doors, windows, roofing materials etc) which formerly did not require consent.(This would be Parish Council led).
- 1.10 Reinforce the importance of buildings of local historic interest within the conservation area. These are unlisted buildings of interest (sometimes known as local listing) which do not have the same protection as listed buildings but are important for the contribution they make to the character and appearance of the conservation area. These have been identified in the Conservation Area Character Appraisal and can be

viewed on the 'My Property' facility on the New Forest National Park website.

- 1.11 Give 'Welcome Packs' (already produced by Parish Councils) to new residents as soon as they move into the conservation area to explain what information is available from the New Forest National Park and to identify where additional material would be helpful.

Boundaries

- 4.3 Another feature which contributes to the character of the conservation area is the boundary to properties. These can be in the form of traditional hedges, simple picket fences, low brick walls or estate fencing. Boundaries are important as they provide the setting for the buildings and help to link the built environment with the surrounding landscape. Several of these traditional boundaries have been replaced recently with unsympathetic treatments such as high close boarded fencing which look out of place and have introduced a suburbanised appearance to parts of the conservation area.

Objective Two

To work with property owners to reinforce the significance of and contribution made by traditional boundary treatments to the character of the conservation area; and to identify ways of promoting their importance.

Actions:

- 2.1 Guidance on boundary treatments including drives and gates.
- 2.2 Promotional event inviting householders, landowners, tree surgeons and tree planters as well as local fencing contractors to promote good practice.

Woodland Trees and hedges

- 4.4 Woodland, trees and hedges are also very important features contributing not only to the character of the New Forest but also the conservation area. Clearance of trees, loss of native species, maintenance and care of trees are all concerns. Conservation area designation introduces additional controls in respect of work to trees.

Objective Three

To continue to offer high quality advice, guidance and information and work with property owners, the National Trust and the Forestry Commission in the management of woodland trees and hedges which are important to the character of the conservation area.

Actions:

- 3.1 Maintain and promote current guidance material and best practice on trees and hedges which is available from the National Park and elsewhere, and consider preparation of further guidance on trees in the conservation area as necessary.
- 3.2 Encourage better public understanding through appropriate information in association with the National Park Authority, the Forestry Commission and Natural England to provide better public information about the management of the Crown Lands including tree felling within the New Forest.
- 3.3 Where they do not already exist develop the Tree Warden initiative to include training for wardens.

Landscape

- 4.5 The landscape of the Western Escarpment is a delicate balance of open spaces, trees, hedgerows and the buildings within. This balance can be distorted for example through:
 - Loss of trees and hedgerows.
 - Planting of non-native species
 - The subdivision of fields with inappropriate fencing.
 - The impact of large buildings which are out of scale with the landscape.
 - The replacement of traditional boundaries.
 - Light pollution and use of external lighting.
 - The creation of new routes or drives over land which was previously undeveloped.
 - Parking on road verges which are often Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI's).

Objective Four

To work with landowners, to retain the historic landscape character by reinforcing the importance of maintaining and enhancing the traditional appearance of the landscape, and to identify ways of promoting good practice for its retention.

Actions:

- 4.1 Liaise with major landowners and others who use or have an interest in the land to ensure that any works carried out preserve or enhance the character of the conservation area.
- 4.2 Work with other campaigns (such as the Police in respect of lighting in rural areas)

Views

- 4.6 Views into and out of the conservation area are important as they contribute to the character of the conservation area and care needs to be taken to ensure that these are not lost or compromised.

Objective Five

To work with land owners and those responsible for land management to ensure that important existing views into and out of the conservation area are retained as far as possible and to identify ways of protecting such views in order to preserve or enhance the character of the conservation area.

Actions:

- 5.1 Promote best practice and work with partners for the maintenance and management of existing trees and for new planting and advise on the type and location of new trees to prevent important views from being obscured or lost.
- 5.2 Promote the importance of views into and out of the conservation area.
- 5.3 Work with neighbouring authorities to ensure that consideration is given to the potential impact of development outside the Park on important views from the Western Escarpment Conservation Area.

Roads and verges

- 4.7 The conservation area is served by a network of roads and lanes. Responsibility for the maintenance of public highways and the provision of road signs within the conservation area rests with Hampshire County Council as Highway Authority and in part by New Forest District Council. While it is acknowledged that road safety is regulated by legislation, highway works and the location and number of signs can have a significant impact on the character of the conservation area.
- 4.8 Signage, traffic calming measures, parking issues and highway maintenance can all have an impact on the character of the conservation area.

Objective Six

To work with the Highway Authority and others to ensure that future highway works are carried out sympathetically, (where practicable) and in keeping with the overall character of the conservation area.

Actions:

- 6.1 Promote the special character of the Western Escarpment Conservation Area in relation to the design of new highway works.

- 6.2 Identify obsolete or damaged signs and report back to the Highway Authority so they can be removed or replaced.
- 6.3 Help to prevent damage due to parking on verges, particularly Sites of Special Scientific Interest.

Other Utilities

- 4.9 Works carried out by utility suppliers (such as electricity, water ,gas, telecommunications etc) can have an impact on the character of the conservation area e.g. the siting of electricity sub-stations, overhead wires, the use of non-traditional fencing, maintenance including tree cutting, digging of trenches near to trees and hedges etc

Objective Seven
To work with utility suppliers to encourage the provision of well designed new equipment and the maintenance of existing equipment.

Actions:

- 7.1 Look at opportunities to improve communication between utility suppliers and Parish Councils.
- 7.2 Prepare an audit of any existing fixtures within the area and contact the statutory undertakers where there is an opportunity for improvement.

Other Issues

- 4.10 Other issues which are outside the scope of the Conservation Area Action Plan but nonetheless can have an impact on the character of the conservation area include:
 - Dog fouling
 - Litter
 - Dumping/fly tipping.

Objective Eight
To ensure wide awareness of existing campaigns and actions to deal with problems of this type within the conservation area.

Actions:

- 8.1 Promote the NFD OG leaflet which encourages responsible dog ownership.
- 8.2 Encourage reporting of fly tipping for early removal and encourage local residents to report incidents.

5 MONITORING AND REVIEW

- 5.1 The Steering Group and/or representatives from Parish Councils in the Western Escarpment in conjunction with the National Park will monitor progress on an annual basis to assess how far the objectives of the Western Escarpment Conservation Area Action Plan have been met.
- 5.2 The Western Escarpment Conservation Area Conservation Area Action Plan will be reviewed within a period of five years of publication.