



**WESTERN ESCARPMENT CONSERVATION AREA
ACTION PLAN
2018 – 2023**



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Conservation Area**

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 A Conservation Area is defined by the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas Act 1990 as, “...an area of architectural and historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.” There are currently 20 conservation areas within the New Forest National Park, including the Western Escarpment which was designated in March 2008 in recognition of its special architectural and historic interest.
- 1.2 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.

2. Profile of the Western Escarpment Conservation Area

- 2.1 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 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.
- 2.2 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.
- 2.3 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.

- 2.4 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 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.
- 2.5 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.

3. What is the Conservation Area Action Plan?

- 3.1 The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 places a duty on planning authorities to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of its Conservation Areas. The original Western Escarpment Conservation Area Action Plan was produced in 2012 with the overall aim of guiding the work of all those with an interest in the area to ensure that the character of the Conservation Area is preserved or enhanced.
- 3.2 The production of the Action Plan has been overseen by a Steering Group consisting of representatives from parish and town councils within the Conservation Area, with the support of officers from the National Park Authority. The original Action Plan 2012 – 2017 helped guide a number of projects aimed at enhancing the character of the Conservation Area, including its buildings and landscape. This updated Action Plan looks forward to the 2018 – 2023 period.

4. Vision for the Western Escarpment Conservation Area

- 4.1 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 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.

5. Working together - taking the Action Plan forward

5.1 In order for the Action Plan to succeed there must be close working between the many organisations responsible for works within the Conservation Area. 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.

5.2 There are a number of organisations responsible for works which can have an impact on the Conservation Area. These include statutory agencies with responsibility for highway works (Hampshire County Council and New Forest District Council), statutory undertakers (responsible for utilities such as water, telecommunications, electricity and gas) and organisations such as Natural England, the Forestry Commission and the Environment Agency. Set out below is a summary of the main roles and responsibilities of the key organisations:

- The **National Park Authority** has a statutory role in conserving and enhancing the special qualities of the area, improving understanding and enjoyment and in supporting the social and economic well-being of local communities. It is the sole 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 directly managing several parts of the Conservation Area (such as Hyde, Gorley and Ibsley Commons).
- **New Forest District Council** is responsible for a wide range of services including refuse collection, street lighting 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.
- **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.
- **Forestry Commission** is responsible for the management of Crown Lands which extend into the parishes including Hyde, Woodgreen and Godshill.
- **Natural England** is responsible for protecting and enhancing the natural environment. Work includes protecting 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 (e.g. Hale Purlieu) and has an interest in conserving natural habitats and landscapes within the area.

6. Taking Action

- 6.1 The updated Action Plan identifies a number of priority actions to be addressed in the 2018 – 2023 period. These actions are based around a series of objectives which show what the overall aim of the work is. The tables below also outline the areas of work (usually led by other organisations) where the Steering Group will continue to offer support and keep a watching brief on.

Built Environment

- 6.2 The Western Escarpment Conservation Area was designated primarily to protect the built environment and the spaces around it. Buildings are therefore one of the most significant features contributing to the character of the Western Escarpment and it is therefore appropriate for the Action Plan to include a series of actions focusing on the built environment.

Objective 1: Work with property owners, architects, designers & builders to ensure that those buildings which contribute to the character of the Conservation Area are retained & that any new development is designed to preserve or enhance the special character of the Conservation Area.

Priority Actions:

- 1.1 Promote the use of builders with experience of traditional building techniques and advertise the Traditional Building Skills training and development opportunities for builders and agents.
- 1.2 Explore sources of funding to assist towards the costs of traditional repairs to buildings of architectural or historic merit within the Conservation Area.
- 1.3 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.
- 1.4 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 Character Appraisal.
- 1.5 Consider the use of special measures in the form of Article 4 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 only be at Parish Council instigation). Article 4 Directions can also be used to preserve landscape character.

The Steering Group will also support (rather than lead) the following actions:

- The preparation of Village Design Statements (VDS) and their adoption as Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs). VDSs are initiated and prepared by individual town and parish councils.
- Promote existing leaflets and guidance produced by the National Park Authority on building conservation and the Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document to encourage good practice for new development and works to existing buildings.
- Promote the availability of specialist advice from staff within the National Park Authority with regard to design, building conservation, archaeology, trees, landscape and ecology.
- Action to secure the future of buildings considered to be at risk. This is led by the work of the National Park Authority.

Landscape

- 6.3 The landscape of the Western Escarpment is a delicate balance of open spaces, trees, hedgerows and the buildings within. This balance can be affected by the loss of trees and hedgerows; 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; and the creation of new access drives to individual properties on land that was previously undeveloped. The Action Plan therefore includes an action focused on monitoring the impacts of these changes and considering the planning tools available to address them.

Objective 2: 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.

Priority Action:

- 2.1 Work with parish councils to consider the use of Article 4 Directions to remove permitted development rights such as those relating to the fencing of properties, the creation of new accesses and the use of the land for other than agricultural purposes where the exercise of such rights would undermine the landscape character and amenity of the area or damage the historic environment, or lead to inappropriate subdivision, or loss of agricultural land.

The Steering Group will also support (rather than lead) the following actions:

- Maintain and promote current guidance material and best practice on trees and hedges which is available from the NPA and elsewhere, and consider preparation of further guidance on trees in the Conservation Area.

- Provide better information about the management of the Crown Lands including tree felling in association with the National Park Authority, the Forestry Commission and Natural England.
- Where they do not already exist develop the Tree Warden initiative to include training for wardens.
- Work with other campaigns (such as the Police) in respect of lighting in rural areas.

Views

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

Objective 3: 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.

Priority Action:

3.1 Promote the importance of views into and out of the Conservation Area.

The Steering Group will also support (rather than lead) the following actions:

- Promote best practice and work with partners for the maintenance and management of existing trees and for new planting, advising on the type and location of new trees to prevent important views from being obscured or lost.
- Work with neighbouring authorities to ensure that consideration is given to the potential impact of development outside the National Park on important views from the Western Escarpment Conservation Area.

Roads, Verges and Ditches

- 6.5 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 largely with Hampshire County Council as the Highway Authority. 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. Signage, traffic calming measures, parking issues and highway maintenance can all have an impact on the character of the Conservation Area.

Objective 4: 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 character of the Conservation Area.

Priority Actions:

- 4.1 Promote the special character of the Western Escarpment Conservation Area in relation to the design of new highway works.
- 4.2 Identify obsolete or damaged signs and report back to the Highway Authority so they can be removed or replaced.
- 4.3 Work with parish councils to identify specific problems of parking on verges within the Western Escarpment Conservation Area and notify the necessary authorities and agree the most appropriate solutions. This action can be broken down into:
 - a) continue to raise public awareness of the need to protect the verges of the Conservation Area (e.g. leafletting);
 - b) work with the statutory bodies in the New Forest to address the problem through physical measures and enforcement.

The Steering Group will also support (rather than lead) the following actions:

- Support the work of parish councils in identifying specific problems in relation to roadside advertisements and for them to notify the Highway Authority and the National Park Authority.

Utilities and other issues

- 6.6 Works carried out by utility suppliers (such as electricity, water ,gas, telecommunications etc.) can have an impact on the character of the Western Escarpment 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. 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 litter and fly-tipping.

Objective 5: To work with utility suppliers to encourage the provision of well-designed new equipment and the maintenance of existing equipment.

Priority Action:

- 5.1 Work with supplier companies to identify opportunities for burying power and service lines and associated equipment underground.

The Steering Group will also support (rather than lead) the following action:

- Encourage reporting of fly tipping for early removal and encourage local residents to report incidents.

7. Monitoring and Review

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