

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Winchester is a historic city and has been a wealthy centre for trade and administration for centuries. Its importance is etched in the surrounding landscape which still has evidence of the ancient trading routes which radiate out across the countryside. Iron and Bronze Age settlements, the historic patterns of agriculture and the use of the landscape for fuel, water and spiritual meaning over millennia have all left their mark and influence on the landscape we see today.

However, over the past century a range of human pressures have contributed to the east of Winchester Open Downland area becoming fragmented with its character, biodiversity and natural functions being continuously eroded.

This study was commissioned in 2019 to look at how to restore the East Winchester landscape, not to a historical condition but to restore the health, vitality and abundance of the landscape and nature. At the heart of this study lies the aim to prepare a forward plan which is conceived with local stakeholders as the decision makers. This is their plan which the study helped to coalesce and take shape.

It is hoped that the process which is described here will be the start of a continuing conversation between many groups, organisations and individual stakeholders who have an interest in the area. There is further work needed to develop the recommendations and project ideas which are suggested in the stakeholders' Forward Plan and develop the feasibility and delivery of these initiatives.

- The project explored and sought evidence on the following four topic areas through desk and field study and detailed engagement with stakeholders;
- Natural functions of the landscape and ways to achieve multiple benefits for people, the economy and nature;
- Innovative ways to reveal restore and interpret the inherent historic and cultural features of this landscape;
- Improve the management of access to the landscape taking all viewpoints and needs into account;
- Understand the range of impacts on the landscape from the local perspective.

The engagement process gathered experiences of people on the ground, who know the landscape well and included wider consultation with the public whose engagement with the landscape is less clearly defined. For each type of stakeholder group an engagement process was devised and consisted of the following activities:

- SDNPA Citizens Panel survey
- Winchester City centre pop up consultation stalls with the public
- Young Persons consultation event at Winchester Science Centre
- Three sequential workshops for 40-50 targeted stakeholders titled 'Scoping, Shaping and Sharing'

During the workshops stakeholders worked together to co-create a vision for the landscape and a series of initiatives that will help deliver that shared vision. In the space of three workshops it was not possible to create consensus around everything, but rather aim to achieve broad support for the 'direction of travel' and a shared understanding of how the varied stakeholders experienced and viewed issues with the landscape in different ways. This then helped with developing the emerging Forward Plan.

Early on in the workshop series, the stakeholders agreed the five key principles for all projects in the Forward Plan – these are;

- Joined up decision making;
- Environmental net gain;
- Collective enjoyment, responsibility, and guardianship in the landscape;
- Climate change mitigation and adaptation for the future;
- Celebrating sense of place and natural beauty.

Seven broad topics emerged from discussions in the workshops which in turn formed the structure for the Forward Plan;

- Infrastructure and development;
- Information and communication.
- Access and recreation.
- Land management.
- Landscape ecology and Heritage assets.
- Social issues; and

■ Climate change and pollution

The issues and opportunities in the study vary from west to east from the urban edge towards the increasingly rural areas of the South Downs National Park in the eastern part of the study area. The Forward Plan by stakeholders covers an equally wide range of opportunities, ideas and projects around the seven strategic issues – these are some examples

- **Infrastructure:** Green Bridge, Natural Capital account for the area, sustainable transport options
- **Information:** Coordinate over communications, signage, information, gateway hub, visitor destination, more facilities and interest
- **Access:** Targeted access improvements, embrace new technologies, new nature space, upgrade & enliven over and underpasses
- **Land management:** Support for mixed farming, local abattoirs, natural flood management, high nature value farming
- **Landscape ecology:** Restore chalk downland for multiple benefits, reconnect habitats, reveal and inform about history; develop a joint planning approach
- **Social:** digital tools for information sharing, making rural lanes safer for NMUs, Health impact research for the study area, fund synergised transport options between drop offs and walk backs, pickups & service integration
- **Climate change:** Coordinate around land management options to maximise carbon 'returns' look at green financing for nature based solutions, spatially target water quality measures,

These are some high level examples. However, the Forward Plan is more than a 'starter for ten'. It has been prepared to set out important and ambitious actions that are required to overcome and reverse landscape degradation and improve accessibility to the South Downs National Park

All of the possible work set out in the Forward Plan relies on strong partnership and the stakeholders working together to achieve on a range of fronts. Confidence building will be an important early step in the development and implementation of the Forward Plan for the study area if the support of the stakeholders is to be maintained.

This project has designed and utilised a collaborative process of engagement with stakeholders in the study area to hold a 'Landscape Conversation'.

Landscape quality is not just about its appearance, it is also about how the landscape is functioning; is it healthy or in decline? Are the habitats and species improving in number and quality? Are the waters clean „ is the air good to breathe and „ is the soil naturally regenerating? „ Are people able to enjoy and benefit from its natural beauty?

These are big questions which the Landscape Conversation – this study – has opened up. It has identified an ambitious vision, key principles and seven strategic issues to prioritise actions that will drive forward delivery for reversing landscape fragmentation and improving accessibility for all.

In addition to looking at ways to enhance the **natural capital** of the area the study has also integrated with **human capital** defined as the increase of knowledge and skills required to contribute effectively to society. In the Landscape Conversation participants learnt more about the landscape, the views of other participants and different ways of working. **Social Capital**; defined as connections and relationships that can potentially lead to greater co-operation and collaboration. Dialogue brings diverse interests together and helps people explore both differences and common ground. **Solution Development**; during the consultation events a wide range of potential solutions were discussed, some of which will be taken forward in the study area's Forward Plan. Of importance here is that there will be a greater sense of ownership of the solutions because the people who might well be impacted by them have had a role in their development.

The Forward Plan has recorded ideas and recommendations made during the workshops and in discussions with stakeholders. These are in outline and the development of these ideas into delivery processes will require more work by the stakeholders and statutory bodies

Stakeholders in the study area were positive about the engagement process and were pleased to be involved, however there was some doubt about the ability and resources for the National Park Authority to continue the work after the project finished.

The National Park Authority believes that the work undertaken so far provides a good fit for current thinking on nature based solutions for a range of environmental issues, climate change and wider stakeholder engagement and that this will enable successful partnerships and funding to flow into the East Winchester Open Downland area.