

Section 3:

Risks and Opportunities

3.1 Introduction

The White Cliffs are readily recognised for the drama of the chalk cliffs and the rolling downland above. However, very few people realise that this is a landscape under threat: often poorly managed and not understood in an area of significant social and economic decline. This lack of understanding, changes in agriculture, the legacy of deprivation and the pressure of development are all threats to this landscape.

The previous sections have outlined the different types of heritage found within the UOTD area and its significance. With such a wide and varied range of important heritage there are inevitably numerous risks and threats to it. Some of the risks affect a number of different types of heritage, whereas others are more specific. This section will identify these risks and threats but also highlight opportunities to address them. It will also consider some of the risks to the delivery of the Landscape Partnership Scheme.

3.2 Loss of Chalk Grassland Habitats, Species and Landscape Character

The chalk grasslands of the UOTD area were created by a continual interaction between man, livestock and the landscape, with sporadic clearance of trees and scrub for use as firewood and materials.

Chalk downland can only flourish where succession to scrub and eventually woodland is kept in check. The most important mechanism in this process is grazing and browsing by herbivores. However, as the economic rationale for grazing marginal areas has declined, the encroachment of scrub, woodland and ranker grasses has increased. This has led to the loss of the area's historic landscape character together with the loss of a protected and priority habitat and the species that depend upon it, including many protected and rare species. This in turn fragments the remaining habitat, isolating species.

Increased scrub and tree cover also has a negative impact on built and buried archaeology, such as WW1 and WW2 structures and Bronze Age barrows, in some cases causing significant damage.

The problem is particularly acute on the urban fringe of Dover and Folkestone - on the edge of Dover alone an estimated 130ha of unimproved chalk grassland have been lost since the 1980s. On the urban fringe the recreational use of sites – a number of which are Open Access – and the need for grazing management are often in conflict. Despite many of these sites being managed by nature conservation organisations, it has become much harder to attract external graziers to provide the level of grazing required to manage the habitat and there is a reliance on an ever decreasing pool of individuals.

There are a number of reasons why this may be:

- difficulty of access to and on sites
- the challenges of managing grazing and public access
- a fear of anti-social behaviour such as the cutting of fences and abuse of livestock
- the process is time intensive for too little gain, especially on smaller sites
- assumed differences in the objectives and methods of conservation grazing and traditional farming practice

Where grazing levels are not sufficient or where land is not managed for its nature conservation value or for livestock farming, it does not take long for scrub to take hold.

The threat to chalk grassland habitats and species is not restricted to the problems of a lack of management or under-grazing; there is also a significant risk of over-grazing.



Photo: White Cliffs Countryside Partnership

View over Coombe Valley in the 1960s, left, and today, right, showing the increase in scrub

This can be caused by a lack of knowledge, stocking densities which are too high or limited control over grazing animals. This can pose a real risk to populations that depend on longer grass and vegetation as part of their ecology.

Opportunities

- develop new relationships between partner organisations, farmers and local communities to increase the viability and sustainability of managing the chalk downland landscape
- bring new areas into management to increase sustainability and connectivity and to retain the historic landscape character
- work with landowners to provide resources to assist with the sensitive management of their holdings
- raise awareness of the importance of the landscape heritage and the need to conserve it
- provide training on the management of chalk grassland and include organisations such as Kent Reptile and Amphibian Group, Kent Mammal Group, Butterfly Conservation and Buglife to invigorate the debate and share knowledge more widely

3.3 Lack of Understanding

Chalk grassland is a much valued component of the landscape by local people; it is also of significant value for the recreational space it provides. However, the management required to conserve and enhance its biodiversity is not necessarily well understood. This can lead to conflict, which can make appropriate management difficult. For instance, there can be genuine resistance to the removal of scrub and trees as they are seen as an essential component of the local environment.

The fencing of, and re-introduction of grazing to, local sites is particularly problematic as it directly affects the way local people use their sites. Conflicts of use resulting from this can lead to behaviour, deliberate and accidental, which makes the grazing of sites with public access less viable and less attractive to graziers. This problem is compounded by a lack of awareness of the importance of grazing in creating the open landscape of the Downs, and its importance to the area's cultural heritage.

Despite the work of partner organisations in raising the awareness of the local heritage to communities, there is a sense that this work has plateaued, with a regular audience of a relatively small demographic being reached. Thus, there is a large proportion of the local community using the heritage that is not being engaged about its importance. Consultation carried out as part of the development stage highlighted young people (aged 13 – 19), immigrant communities and people from deprived areas in particular as being unengaged.



Citadel Battery

Photo: Richard Haynes

This lack of awareness leads to a greater propensity to abuse or inappropriately use the heritage, but also a greater detachment from it, meaning an awareness of its importance and a desire to conserve it are gradually being eroded through time. Interestingly, young people do not necessarily learn about their local heritage at school. Learning about biodiversity and landscape is more likely to take place away from the area as a field trip than on the ecologically rich downland of the scheme area. What message does this send out to young people about the relative value of their heritage?

However, lack of awareness rubs both ways and it is important that those engaged in managing the heritage make an effort to understand how local communities use and value it. It is through this mutual understanding of differing values and uses that the key to sustainable management of the landscape and heritage lies.

Opportunities

- raise awareness of the importance of grazing and increase community involvement in this aspect of site management. Celebrate the importance of grazing and livestock as part of the area's cultural heritage
- undertake outreach work to engage with traditionally hard-to-reach groups and communicate the importance of the landscape. Make an effort to understand how they use and value the heritage
- communicate the many ways the heritage is important to people
- work with schools to increase the role of local landscape heritage in learning programmes
- provide new ways to interpret the landscape heritage and engage people with it

3.4 Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour

Perhaps a symptom of a general lack of awareness of the importance and value of heritage, crime and anti-social behaviour pose a serious threat to local heritage assets. Activities such as arson, graffiti and the illegal use of off-road vehicles cause damage to the fabric of the heritage, others, such as the cutting of fences and aggravation of livestock (by people and uncontrolled dogs), make management more difficult.



Photo: Paul Sampson

Burnt-out car on the Western Heights

Criminal and anti-social activities can be a deterrent to people accessing the landscape and its heritage. The threat, perceived or real, of anti-social behaviour and crime is often cited as a reason for people not accessing the countryside. Indeed, certain parts of the scheme area are seen as no-go areas, particularly after dark, because of illegal activity. This threat makes sites vulnerable to other forms of crime as there are few visitors likely to discourage damage and defacement. The risk of damage to newly installed fences, furniture and interpretation panels is a key risk to the delivery of the UOTD.

Opportunities

The opportunities outlined in Section 3.3 are all relevant to addressing the issues surrounding crime and anti-social behaviour. There are also the following opportunities:

- work in partnership with Kent Police, local authorities, farmers, landowners, businesses and heritage conservation organisations in a joined-up approach to address the issues of crime and anti-social behaviour in the countryside
- participate in English Heritage's Heritage Crime Initiative to implement measures to prevent, reduce and tackle heritage-related crime

3.5 Recreational Pressure and Visitor Numbers

Important heritage sites on the urban fringes of Dover and Folkestone, such as Folkestone Warren and Western Heights, have very high visitor numbers and intense recreational pressures, which are created by the volume of visitors and the variety of uses. These range from dog walking to camping and from keeping fit to enjoying the heritage itself. The location and multi-use nature of these sites pose a risk to the heritage that is there, through both footfall and misuse. Sites more geared up for high visitor numbers, such as Samphire Hoe and Langdon Cliffs, are that little bit further away from the urban centres and are better placed to deal with the high visitor numbers they receive.

In promoting the heritage and access to sites throughout the scheme area, there is a risk that there will be an increased impact on these sites caused by greater visitor numbers. This is of particular concern with heritage that is nationally and internationally protected.

Opportunities

- positively manage public access to ensure that sites' integrity is not compromised
- provide signed or guided routes to minimise the impact of visitors on sites
- promote responsible use of sites and raise awareness of the impact people have on heritage as visitors
- use key visitor attractions such as Samphire Hoe, Langdon Cliffs and Dover Museum and other popular sites to promote the responsible use of sites and their heritage



Photo: Josie Newman

Abandoned illegal camp at Folkestone Warren

3.6 Development

A large part of the scheme area lies within the Kent Downs AONB and statutorily designated nature conservation sites and is therefore afforded a level of protection from inappropriate development. This being said there are a number of large developments that have had a significant negative impact on the landscape and heritage of the scheme area, counter to the policies in place for protected landscapes – the Channel Tunnel terminal and associated road and rail infrastructure, and the expansion of Hawkinge to name a few.



Photo: Paul Holt

Development at Sugarloaf Hill, Cheriton

For the areas that are not part of the protected landscape the risk from development is greater. It has in the past, led to the destruction and fragmentation of heritage and has had a negative effect on character and setting. Although today archaeology and habitats have significantly higher protection, the sheer quantity of demand to develop requires ever closer scrutiny by ever less-resourced planning authorities.

Large-scale regeneration, particularly the sizeable expansion of housing in villages, such as at Hawkinge and that proposed for Whitfield, which is just outside of the scheme area, carry a risk of increasing recreational pressure on internationally important sites, such as the Folkestone to Etchinghill Escarpment SAC at Hawkinge, and the Lydden and Temple Ewell Downs SAC at Whitfield. There is a legal requirement to ensure such risks are rendered insignificant by the provision of additional green infrastructure; however, risks to habitats of local and county interest, together with damage to archaeology and local landscape character are more significant with large developments such as these.

Opportunities

- work with partners and local planning authorities to ensure landscape and heritage is conserved and enhanced through development
- the delivery of a Landscape Partnership Scheme will help to mitigate some of the pressures and impacts of development, raising awareness of local heritage at all levels
- input to local strategies, such as the Dover Heritage Strategy, to ensure conservation of the landscape is a priority
- promote AONB design guides as good practice even in areas outside the AONB

3.7 Changes in Land Management and Loss of Traditional Skills

Section 3.2 highlights the impact a shift away from grazing marginal areas is having on chalk grassland but there are other impacts on landscape character and heritage caused by changes in land management and agricultural practice. The desire for larger fields for cropping has led to a reduction in hedgerows and a lack of connectivity for species; the widespread use of herbicides and pesticides has a negative impact on flora and fauna, whereas the application of fertilisers to improve pastures for livestock leads to a reduction in unimproved chalk grassland; deeper and more regular cultivation is having a deleterious effect on buried archaeological remains, with some ancient sites suffering from plough erosion.



Photo: Terry Salter

Collecting the harvest in the Swingfield Arable LCA

The requirements of modern farming and the trend towards farm diversification presents a further risk to landscape character as new buildings and barns are being built to accommodate larger machinery and new enterprise, this in turn can lead to the neglect of traditional farm buildings. Elsewhere, traditional farmsteads are being split up as farming enterprises agglomerate. The gradual increase in equine management in the countryside, with the sub-division of fields by white electric fencing into numerous paddocks for horse grazing and the associated buildings, is a risk to landscape character as well as to biodiversity, as there is a tendency towards overgrazing and to improve the grass artificially.

The gradual move away from an agrarian-based economy has led to a loss of traditional skills, which are the bedrock of practical heritage management. Not only is this loss of skills a risk to the heritage itself but we are also losing the practitioners of the skills whose link to the landscape and its heritage is inextricable and their enthusiasm for its conservation infectious.

Opportunities

- undertake a historic landscape survey to identify and record heritage assets
- work with Natural England, farmers, landowners and other partners to target and protect local heritage and biodiversity
- work with partners to promote the *Kent Downs AONB Landscape Design Handbook*, *Farm Diversification Toolkit* and *Managing Land for Horses*
- provide employment opportunities for those practicing traditional skills
- provide training opportunities for local people to learn traditional heritage skills

3.8 Climate Change

Climate change is widely regarded as the greatest challenge facing the world today. That it poses a number of risks to the heritage of the UOTD area is therefore no surprise. Part of the risk of climate change is its inherent unpredictability: a warmer climate will benefit a number of species who are currently at the northern end of their range, such as the Adonis blue; however, wetter summers will have a negative impact on this species, as it will other invertebrates on the wing. A lack of high quality habitats and connectivity between them will make it harder for species to adapt to changes and avoid disappearing entirely.

Climate change research raises issues of summer fire being a real risk, reducing access, being dangerous and harming wildlife. The risk is greater on unmanaged or undergrazed grasslands where there is a build up of thatch in the sward, which can be particularly flammable.

On the coast, the predicted rise in sea levels will change the extent and location of coastal habitats and species assemblages, with wildlife being constrained between the rising sea levels and sea defences. Increased sea levels and a greater severity of



Cliff fall, March 2012

Photo: National Trust

storm events will increase coastal erosion and continue to squeeze the coastal grasslands and truncate the Iron Age and Roman remains at East Wear Bay, as well as threatening the preservation of other archaeological remains on the coast.

Climate change will also have impacts on the built and man-made heritage of the scheme area. More extreme weather conditions, fluctuating temperatures, drought and heavy rain create risks: greater shrinkage threatens foundations and earthworks, such as round barrows; the expansion and contraction caused by freeze/thaw weathering can destabilise built structures. This is anticipated to become more frequent and severe; and extreme weather events, such as flash flooding, will have a greater erosive capacity, threatening a whole range of heritage.

Opportunities

- improve the quality of habitats and increase habitat connectivity across the scheme area
- work with conservation organisations to ensure that the effects of climate change are considered as part of the Conservation Management Planning process
- work with local planning authorities to ensure spatial planning takes into account the threats posed by climate change
- raise awareness amongst local communities of the potential threats climate change poses to the local heritage and landscapes
- ensure land management takes a vigorous approach to limiting carbon and greenhouse gases; for example, composting rather than burning cleared scrub
- adopt low carbon methods of working, challenging the Partnership to meet annual targets

3.9 Forgetting the Past

As noted earlier, the military heritage in the scheme area from WW2 is of exceptional significance, both physically and culturally. We are currently at a watershed, where the last of those who were part of the area's defences are coming towards the end of their lives; an important human aspect of the military heritage will soon be lost. This is also true for a largely permanent population who remember the evolution of the landscape and its communities through the last century into this one.

Opportunities

- record memories and oral histories of those involved in the military heritage but also from the urban and hinterland communities to provide a record of how the landscape and traditions have changed through modern times
- involve the local community in collecting and recording these histories

3.10 Lack of Resources

The process of identifying risks to the heritage and opportunities to conserve and improve it has brought to light a further risk: a lack of resources to address these risks. Given the current economic climate and the cuts to public bodies and local authorities there is increasingly less money to spend on heritage conservation and awareness raising and education. Management mechanisms such as Environmental Stewardship cannot address the risks to heritage alone, and increasingly they require match funding from landowners and conservation organisations to deliver agreements, which is getting harder to find.

Opportunities

- directly address risks to the heritage and resources to conserve and protect it with the establishment of the Landscape Partnership
- strengthen existing partnerships and create new ones to facilitate the sharing of resources and skills to address the risks to the heritage
- provide a small grants scheme to allow communities and organisations to address the risks to their heritage

3.11 Audience Barriers

Public consultation carried out as part of the development phase showed a variety of barriers preventing people from accessing local heritage.

The local centre face-to-face survey showed that the main reason that prevented people accessing heritage was a lack of time, closely followed by difficult access and poor transport links. People also felt that a lack of information about sites prevented them from visiting as well as a lack of money. Furthermore, a number of people cited a lack of facilities for disabled people as a significant barrier.

People responding to the online survey also cited financial reasons for why they don't access the heritage; however, the main barrier to respondents was a lack of car parking provision. Other key barriers included the overgrown/unmanaged condition of sites, dogs' mess and anti-social behaviour and vandalism.

The consultation with young people showed that the main barrier to them accessing their heritage was a lack of information. A number of respondents said they were keen to volunteer to conserve the heritage but they were unaware of opportunities. There are many opportunities for volunteering and other activities in the scheme area but they are not targeted at young people: they are not advertised in the places they go or by peers and adults they know and trust; the current marketing material does not appeal to young people nor does it use language or media they relate to.



Flint wall

Photo: Nick Delaney

Similarly, the Gurkha community felt that a lack of information on signage and interpretation in Nepali was a barrier to their access to, and understanding of, the landscape and its heritage.

Opportunities

- improve access to popular sites
- work in partnership with Kent Police, local authorities, farmers, landowners, businesses and heritage conservation organisations in a joined-up approach to address the issues of crime and anti-social behaviour in the countryside
- provide information on sites' facilities and how to get there; and promote routes from local centres
- provide information that is accessible to target groups using the heritage
- improve access for people with disabilities

3.12 Partnership Based Risks

3.12.1 Lack of Skills and Knowledge

Within the Partnership there is a considerable amount and variety of experience, knowledge and skills; indeed, many of the partners have been undertaking good work in the area for a number of years. However, there is a concern that the current skill set will struggle to address some of the risks facing the heritage, in particular positive engagement and outreach with some of the hard-to-reach groups – teenagers from deprived communities for example. Although every effort has been made to address this during the development stage, it is essential that the Partnership continues to develop to bring in new skills and experience.

Opportunities

- recruit delivery staff for the UOTD to bring new skills and experience to the Partnership
- continue to expand the Partnership to bring in new partners with differing experience and perspectives
- provide training for partners to develop their skills and knowledge

3.12.2 Change of Context

The changing context in which a Landscape Partnership operates can adversely affect a scheme, and has done with other LPs. A change in context could be caused by changes in the economic or political climate, for example, or by changes in land ownership or new development schemes. It is important that the LP is made as resilient as possible to these changes and the risks they will bring.

Opportunities

- ensure a wide range of skills within the Partnership to make it more resilient to changes in context
- embed the LP as a major delivery agent for local authority strategies and plans
- help to shape the strategic framework for the scheme area

3.12.3 Lack of Funding

At the time of writing 89% of the total cash match funding requirement for the scheme has been secured. Failure to secure the remaining 11% will result in a reduction in the scheme's activity.

Opportunities

- the current picture is that realistically available funding will greatly exceed the gap
- match funding for Years 1 and 2 is fully in place
- two bids have been submitted that will make up the shortfall, but the outcome will not be known until after the development stage
- in addition, further funding requests have been made to organisations who will benefit from the scheme; the outcomes are still to be decided
- there are considerable fund raising skills within the Partnership
- new partnerships will be encouraged with potential donors



Photo: Richard Haynes

Former oast house, Acrise