

APPENDIX B
Agenda Item No. 5

QUARRENDON SCHEDULED ANCIENT MONUMENT Head of Leisure and Cultural
Services
ACCESS MANAGEMENT & INTERPRETATION PLAN

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to allow the scrutiny committee to review the consultant's report on the interpretation of, and access to, Quarrendon Scheduled Ancient Monument (QSAM) as a result of the proposed MDA's at Berryfields & Weedon Hill

2.0 Recommendation/For decision

- 2.1 Members are asked to note the report and, in light of funding implications, recommend to Cabinet:
- Discussions are held with the Oxford Diocesan Board of Finance
 - Additional funding is sought for Phase 1 of the project
 - Work with the MDA developers to ensure coordination of funding and works

3.0 Background

- 3.1 The sub group established by the Environment Scrutiny Committee has over a number of months reviewed the opportunities for the QSAM, including visiting sites in Milton Keynes recommended by English Heritage as offering useful pointers as to how the site may be managed. They reported their recommendations to the Scrutiny Committee, who endorsed them, that the site should be developed as a resource for the Vale and beyond. They were keen to see appropriate interpretation and development of visitor facilities to highlight the historical significance, as well as linking with the environmental opportunities associated with the riverside area.
- 3.2 This would be over and above the management plan funded by the MDA developers which is in the process of being produced, to mitigate the effects of the developments on the SAM. This envisages limited works (to be funded by the developers) such as fencing improvements and no planned increase in public access and continued grazing of the site by sheep and cattle. Discussions with the local farmer has indicated that cattle grazing is generally impractical due to human intervention.
- 3.3 In March 2004 Aylesbury Vale District Council appointed Alison Farmer Associates (AFA) and PLB Consulting Ltd to undertake an Access Management and Interpretation Strategy for the QSAM. This report contains the analysis and findings of that study and recommends a future strategy for the site in the form of a conceptual Masterplan and action plan.
- 3.4 The sub group has reviewed the recommendations and their comments are included later in the report

4.0 Access Management & Interpretation Plan

- 4.1 *“The landscape of the site has been defined and moulded by the people who have lived, worked, worshipped and died here over the centuries, and will continue to be affected by those who come to live here in the future”*
- 4.2 As part of the report AFA undertook a significance/vulnerability appraisal of the archaeology, ecology and landscape of the site, the analysis is attached at Appendix 1. They also looked at facilities and access, whilst the interpretation analysis examined the scope to develop the understanding and appreciation of the site.
- 4.3 The Access Management & Interpretation Plan sets out proposals that respond to the need to protect the vulnerable elements of the site and to ensure appropriate access management and interpretation in light of the likely pressure from adjacent population growth.
- 4.4 The main features of the Plan are:
- Provision of a range of different access routes across and through the site including tarmac, hoggin and mown grass routes based on predicted desire lines.
 - Provision of disabled access to the central area.
 - Reuse of some historic routes and retention of key views
 - Provision of circular ‘rural’ mown grass routes across meadows and between key features where desire lines are predicted.
 - No access to the Tudor water gardens, St Peter’s Church and Quarrendon I.
 - Open access to Quarrendon II.
 - Provision of way makers along access routes.
 - Provision of cycle/footpath between the two MDA’s along the River Thame.
 - New bridge crossing over the River Thame to Meadowcroft/Quarrendon.
 - Reinforcement of hedgerows (gapping up and replanting) and drainage ditches (dredging) to assist in access management.
 - New broadleaf woodlands adjacent to the Western Link Road) WLR and Weedon Hill
 - New wet woodlands within the River Thame and Hardwick Brook floodplain.
 - Flower rich meadows grazed by cattle.
 - Species rich grassland and parkland.
 - Reinstated and development of the farm orchard.
 - Development of the fishponds and moated site as a central focus to the site.
 - Onsite interpretation at key entrance points, key views and focal points.
 - Off site interpretation including website, art/interpretation within the MDA’s use of adjacent community facilities for activity and information outlets.
 - Provision and development of non-permanent interpretation including special events (re-enactments and reconstruction), guided tours and workshops to areas of the site which remain inaccessible. Community involvement including the establishment of a ‘friends of’ group, newsletter, leaflet, book.
- 4.5 Attached at Appendix 2 is the map defining the areas of archaeology, at Appendix 3 is the map showing the illustrative Masterplan.

5.0 Implementation Phases

5.1 The three implementation phases, recommended by the consultants, are proposed based on activity and key stages in the development of the MDA's. In summary they comprise:

Phase 1 (2004-2006): Existing Rights of Way are maintained but access to the church is removed. Landscape structure is implemented including boundary improvements adjacent to Weedon Hill and allowed to establish. Some community engagement work with existing adjacent population. Farm access continues from west.

Phase 2 (2007-2008): Existing access/rights of way are improved. New access provision is implemented to key focal points of the site and along the northern banks of River Thame. By the end of 2008 all access management routes, on site interpretation and landscape structure is in place. New farm access is provided from WLR, together with animal husbandry area for livestock.

Phase 3 (2009-2014): Site land management continues. Monitoring of site use is critical. Local communities are engaged and long-term programme of events and activities are established.

6.0 Organisation and Management

6.1 It is recognised that management of the site will need to be reviewed and reassessed in light of the changing context to the site and the access and management recommendations contained in this report. In particular it is recommended that consideration be given to the following:

- Discussion with the landowner to agree a way forward.
- Establishment of a steering group to ensure communication/consultation between all relevant groups.
- Investigate and take up possible sources of funding.

6.2 In addition to the above, Alison Farmer Associates recommended that a project manager with expertise in archaeological landscape develops the access and management recommendations for the site. This will ensure that all works implemented within the site are appropriate and carried out to a high standard.

6.3 It is also proposed by the consultants that a community project/liaison officer be appointed to initiate early community engagement and the development of a communities event programme associated with the site. In addition they considered an education consultant should be appointed to develop a detailed education strategy and education material.

7.0 Sub Group Comments

7.1 The group raised comments on the following:

- Ownership of the site – currently owned by Oxford Diocesan Board of Finance, what is the view of the Board?
- Grazing – the viability of grazing animals so close to major development
- Security of site from future development - particularly fields 4, 5 & 9

- On site interpretation – possible seasonal facilities
- Church/graves – can these be highlighted/incorporated further?
- Fields – the old names of the fields to be incorporated, rather than numbers
- ‘Ranger’ Service – this was seen as important for the wider linear park, not just the QSAM

8.0 Resource Implications

8.1 Outline cost estimates for the above proposals are as follows:

- Establishment of the landscape and access proposals is approximately £127,650
- Community involvement and interpretation is approximately £129,000, with an ongoing cost of £13,000
- Project management over four years is approximately £100,000
- The ongoing annual maintenance is likely to be a minimum of £4,500 and
- Average annual staffing requirements (over the 10 year period) are likely to be in the region of £45,000

7.2 Over a 10 year implementation programme this would equate to approximately £864,650 (plus items to be calculated and any land purchase necessary)

7.3 The MDA developments are likely to yield, for mitigation work, Weedon Hill £90,000, Berryfields £319,000. However, the costs identified are over and above the mitigation works for the MDA’s.

7.4 There are a number of possible sources of funding for a project of this nature, most of which require some match funding for it to be secured. The scale of them varies, however, they many of them could well be interested in the project:

The Heritage Lottery Fund
 Community Fund/Big Fund
 Landfill Tax
 Herpetological Trust
 DEFRA Countryside Stewardship
 William Harding’s Charities
 Sponsorship

8.5 This does not take into account the work of volunteers through links with groups such as the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV), or the National Probation Service.

9.0 Response to Key Aims

Public areas that are well maintained and enhanced – linked to the access improvements and management changes for Aylesbury Linear Park

Ensuring high quality, sustainable development that minimises the impact on the environment - Ensure the appropriate level of protection is afforded to areas of particular visual character

A reduction in the factors that diminish the health of individuals, and an increase in those that promote it - To ensure the cultural infrastructure is developed to meet the needs of a growing district

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Background Documents: AFA Report
Reports to sub group 2002 – 2004

QSAM Access & Interpretation – greens may 2003

**ACCESS MANAGEMENT:
VULNERABILITY, CONFLICTS AND ISSUES**

Assessment of vulnerability

1. This section considers how vulnerable the archaeology, nature conservation and landscape elements of the site are to increased access and use, based on the analysis of likely recreational use and visitor pressure. In particular it examines the potential conflicts between the significant components of the site and increased access and recreation, bringing together an understanding of significance, potential pressures and ultimately vulnerability.

2. An assessment of vulnerability is based on the measure of significance of the site and its individual features in relation to the likelihood of loss or damage. For the purposes of this study the assessment is based on existing data at a broad level. It does not contain the detailed assessment which would be required for the purposes of producing a Conservation Plan for the site for example. Nonetheless it provides sufficient analysis to identify the key issues and potential conflicts relating to the future use of the site and therefore enables solutions to be formulated.

Archaeology

3. The archaeological significance of the site may be vulnerable to increased access and recreational use in the following ways:

- a) Physical erosion of prominent earthworks through potential vehicular, bike and pedestrian access.
- b) Metal detecting activity and digging of archaeological remains.
- c) Fly-tipping and dumping resulting in the infill of water channels and depressions.
- d) Conflict with sheep grazing management affecting the viability of this management approach and the subsequent invasion of weeds and scrub.
- e) Fragmentation of site by access tracks and urban furniture.
- f) Removal of church stone for domestic use.
- g) Damage to archaeology as a result of works to the water channels to control access and improve nature conservation value.
- h) Damage to archaeology as a result of planting to enhance landscape structure and control access.

4. The geographical distribution of archaeologically significant features on the site and an assessment of relative vulnerability has revealed that the remains of St Peter's Church, the Tudor water-gardens, and Quarrendon I and Rabbit Warren are the most vulnerable areas.

Nature conservation

5. The nature conservation significance of the site may be vulnerable to increased access and the recreational use in the following ways:

- a) Fragmentation of the hedgerow and ditches network by new access routes (core routes or permissive access).
- b) Disturbance to protected species and their habitats notably badgers, great crested newts and bats.
- c) Disturbance of breeding and over-wintering birds.
- d) Erosion of areas (ditches, river bank and grassland areas) as a result of increase access and site use.

- e) Fragmentation and isolation of habitats e.g. lowland grazing marsh due to grassland management regime geared towards more formal/intense recreational use.
- f) Pollution of watercourses through dumping, fly-tipping or storage of silage near to ditches/open water
- g) Fires in areas of longer meadow.
- h) Loss of arable from site and reduced long-term agricultural viability of the land as a result of increased public access and reduced field size caused by the construction of the Western Link Road.

6. The geographical distribution of ecology on the site and an assessment of relative vulnerability has revealed that it is the areas of existing badger setts and great crested newts and their habitats which are most vulnerable to the development of the site for increased access and recreation. Other ecological interest on site although sensitive to poor site and access management has the opportunity to be significantly enhanced through proposals to develop the site for increased access and recreation.

Landscape

7. The character and quality of the landscape may be vulnerable to increased access and the recreational use in the following ways:

- a) Fragmentation of the landscape structure of the site by new access routes (core routes or permissive access) and loss of hedgerows and trees.
- b) Loss of areas of tranquility through increased visitor numbers and night lighting.
- c) Erosion of rural characteristics through the proliferation of urban furniture and features, hard surfacing and signage.
- d) Loss of variety of spaces and unique rural character of the site though inappropriate and uniform management.
- e) Loss of traditional hedgerow pattern and water management pattern through the creation of new hedgerows and ditches to control access.

8. This assessment revealed that significant areas within the Lee's Mansion water gardens, Quarrendon Hill and the Thame Valley LCA's are of greatest landscape vulnerability in relation to increased access and recreation.

Key conflicts

Conflicts between animals and walkers/cyclists

9. Sheep
 Much of the site is currently managed by sheep grazing and the management of the SAM areas is restricted to this. The potential conflicts of public access in areas of sheep grazing are well known and relate to gates being left open, dog worrying, and the need to follow rights of way. These issues can and have been addressed elsewhere (Milton Keynes) through clear signage and increasing awareness of appropriate behaviour through a "Countryside Code".

10. Cattle

Although many people living in urban areas are unused to being in close proximity to grazing cattle it is known from experience in Cambridge and Milton Keynes that open access can be provided in grazing meadows and that pedestrians, cyclists and cows can mix quite happily. Issues relating to this form of land management and recreational use relate primarily to the complaints about 'cow-pats' on the cycle/footpath network.

Conflicts between archaeology and nature conservation

11. Improvements to the existing hedgerows on site, water canals and ponds, and additional planting of species such as black poplar whilst making a positive contribution to the nature conservation of the site could have adverse impact on the archaeology depending on which areas of the site they are carried out. In addition the retention of badger setts on the site will continue to cause damage to the archaeology.

Conflicts between archaeology and controlling access

12. Open access across the site would enable visitors to explore the area and have direct contact with the archaeology. However such free access, although providing opportunities for increased understanding and enjoyment, as well as dispersing people across the site, can still lead to erosion of sensitive areas or those areas of particular interest. Controlling access to specific areas of the site is an alternative approach but it requires the establishment and use of a combination of ditches, water channels, hedges and fencing to act as barriers and aid control. Existing features may require improvement if they are to be effective barriers i.e. additional planting, widening etc which may cause damage to the archaeology. The establishment of new barriers in the form of water canals and hedges would not be out of keeping with the character of the area although they may obscure the historical pattern of hedges and water systems on the site.

Conflicts between ecology and increased access

13. Certain areas of the site are important areas for protected species including badger, bat and great crested newts. Increased access to these areas may place these animals and their habitats at risk as a result of disturbance, trampling and littering.

Summary - Potential Severity of Conflicts and Mitigation

14. Analysis has demonstrated that none of these potential conflicts are insurmountable and that whilst no plan or strategy can prevent inappropriate access/use altogether, an access management strategy for the site, coupled with community involvement, can help to mitigate potential management and use issues.

Key Access Issues

Bottlenecks, Hotspots and Desire Lines

15. Particular areas of the landscape within the site are visually prominent and act as attractive destinations. An understanding of this and the arrangement of residential areas and access adjacent to the site has enabled bottlenecks, hot spots and potential desire lines on/across the site to be predicted.

16. When compared to the vulnerability map it can be seen that particular issues arise at Quarrendon II, St. Peter's Church and Tudor Water Gardens, the moated site, Quarrendon I viewing area and access across Quarrendon I. Developing access management for these areas is obviously fundamental to the future use and protection of the site. This is explored in more detail below.

Access to/across Quarrendon II

17. The earthworks at Quarrendon II are less significant as a result of silting and erosion. The existing farm track crosses this area and could be used as a future access route. It would not be desirable to fence this route to prevent open access to the earthworks as this would visually fragment and clutter the site. Evidence from Milton Keynes suggests that on areas of relatively low earthworks open access can be provided without damage and most people keep to the footpaths provided. At Milton Keynes the DMV of Wroughton is left as open access. The grass is allowed to grow long on the site and during the summer months the earthworks are not readily visible. Bikes are discouraged from entering the site due to railing/gates and the length of the grass. The alternative to providing open access to QII is to divert the footpath around the site to the north and to remove the farm access track once farm access is provided from the western link road. This option however would prevent people from understanding and appreciating an important aspect

of the site which is of less sensitivity than other areas. On balance therefore it is proposed that access across this site is retained and that the existing farm access track is improved and reused to provide disabled access to the site. The site of QII would therefore provide open access (the only area of open access to earthworks proposed) and the use of bikes on the site could be discouraged through gated access and grazing management similar to regimes used in Milton Keynes.

Access to St. Peter's Church/Tudor water gardens

18. The loose and crumbling structure of the church make it susceptible to vandalism and consolidation of the structure is desirable. Currently the church is fragmented visually from the wider Tudor gardens as a result of railings. The ruins could be appreciated from the existing public right of way without physical access necessarily being provided. This would enable the restriction of access to the most sensitive area of the site - the Tudor water gardens beyond, and provide an opportunity to remove the railings and visually reunite the church with its setting. Physical access to the church and water gardens could be prevented through the use of the existing hedge and ditch whilst visual access and low key interpretation could be provided at a key viewpoint. Special event days/guided tours could of course provide temporary access to these sensitive areas.

A viewing point at Quarrendon I

19. This part of the site is likely to be a key attraction partly because of the panoramic views it affords across open countryside and Aylesbury. It is likely to become (and currently is) a key destination with a strong sense of place. Providing access to this area opens up the possibility of a desire line developing across Quarrendon I between the viewing area and moated site.

20. Evidence from Milton Keynes again demonstrates that access across earthwork sites can be accommodated and that people generally stick to footpaths provided. However many of the footpaths provide at Milton Keynes are tarmac surfaced and such a footpath across QI is likely to have an adverse visual and archaeological impact on the integrity of the site.

21. It is proposed therefore that access is not provided across this site. Fencing and/or hedgerow planting would prevent access into QI from the viewpoint. However, this arrangement would need to be monitored and if pressure to cross the site materialises as the MDA's develop, it should be reviewed and the possibility of an informal grass waymarked route across Quarrendon I considered. This would of course have implications for grazing management.

The use of historical routes around the site

22. The historical routes through the site as indicated on drawing number 2034/01 present a number of opportunities for people to appreciate the historic significance of the site. However some of the routes also present problems regarding the management of access to the most vulnerable areas of the site. It is proposed therefore that where possible historic routes are used as access routes but where they present a conflict with sensitive and appropriate land management objectives alternative routes are developed.