

Shorncliffe Rationalisation Project

Seabrook Valley



Shorncliffe Rationalisation Project 2011

1.Introduction

The White Cliffs/Romney Marsh Countryside Partnership has been asked by GVA (acting on behalf of the MOD) to produce a short scoping report with possible options for 38 hectares of what is labelled the Backdoor Training Area. This block of land which is in the bottom half of the Seabrook Valley is part of an on-going consultation and possible development of the Shorncliffe Barracks, Folkestone.

The White Cliffs/ Romney Marsh Countryside Partnership are experienced in working in urban fringe sites across Shepway and Dover District for the last 23 years. The White Cliffs manage urban sites like Folkestone Warren, Folkestone Downs, Samphire Hoe, Western Heights, Whinless Down, Hospital Hill and South Foreland Valley and are sites managed on behalf of the land-owner for the public, as well as for the wildlife.

2.Designations

The Open Space (Backdoor Training Area) has no wildlife designations.

The Seabrook Stream Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is further upstream from Horn Street and is around 550 metres away from the nearest point. This SSSI has two units. Unit 1 is 7 hectares (TR182364) and is classed as unfavourable recovering, due to the spread of the alien plant Himalayan Balsam which the MOD is trying to reduce. Unit 2 is 16 hectares (TR177367) and is in favourable condition.

The Seabrook and Shorncliffe Local Wildlife Site (LWS) covers the west side of the valley, which includes Paraker Wood which is owned by the MOD and Shepway District Council. The Romney Marsh Countryside Partnership will be carrying out step repairs in Paraker Wood in late March 2011 and we have volunteer wardens which help keep an eye on the wood.

Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) boundary finishes on the west side of the valley as well, and includes Paraker Wood and Sene Golf Course.

The Seabrook Valley would not fall under the Countryside Rights of Way (CROW) Act as an area where the public have the Right to Roam. However, open access would be encouraged for all the valley, although would be challenging in places due to the terrain.

3. Access

The Open Space (Backdoor Training Area) has three Public Rights of Way footpaths which cross the area from the Shorncliffe Barracks down the valley side to the Seabrook Stream and houses of Horn Street.

The steps are in a varying degree of condition, from OK to dangerous.

Sandy Lane is a bridleway which connects the route from behind the Fountain Pub in Seabrook up the slope bordering the woodland to the Shorncliffe Cemetery at the top of the valley slope. This route is very important as a link from the Shorncliffe Barracks/ Folkestone West Station down to the sea and the Royal Military Canal.

4. Biodiversity

From our experience and from the citations we are aware of a good number of grass snakes in the valley. I would expect slow worms and viviparous lizards to be found in the valley as well.

The Seabrook Stream SSSI is very important for crane-flies (Daddy Long Legs) within the Local Wildlife Site citation, due to the wet boggy conditions. Several uncommon species are found.

There might be some newt populations in some of the wet flashes on the Seabrook Valley sides, but there are no established ponds to my knowledge.

The pockets of woodland do hold healthy populations of bluebells. The woodland adjacent to Sandy Lane, also holds bluebells, but all the woodland does not appear to be ancient woodland, with a spring survey clarifying this. Typical woodland birds include tawny owl, greater spotted woodpecker, nuthatch, tree creeper and jay. Woodcock was seen in the valley on the visits.

White Clawed Crayfish are in the Seabrook Stream although are only found further upstream of the M20 motorway, which is over a couple of kilometres away. There has been historical crayfish records further downstream in the valley in the past.

Two biodiversity concerns for the general area are two alien plants the Himalayan Balsam and the Giant Hogweed which are both present in the river corridor. There is potential for these two plants to spread further up into the valley, which would need to be monitored or managed.

5. Management

The proposed Open Space (Backdoor Training Area) would need management to increase and improve the biodiversity and also the access. All this detail or possible proposals could be put into a 5 year management plan which is proposed.

6. Historical

Within the proposed Open Space there is a privately owned Martello Tower within a wooded area, accessed by a track. There is on-going discussions with Kent County Council (Public Rights of Way Team) over an adjoining footpath and the owner wishing to fence off sections of the woodland which is owned by the MOD to prevent the public walking too close to the property.

Time Team (Channel 4 TV programme) did an excavation within the Shorncliffe Redoubt, Sandgate in 2007. The Historical Society wish to preserve and enhance the area for the public. I am unable to find out any more of the plans or ideas.

There are two pillboxes on a north section of the Backdoor Training Area, which have had the windows blocked up with concrete, although one pillbox has been knocked through and vandalised. On-going maintenance of such structures to keep the public out is an issue. Bats could be using some of the structures.

The White Cliffs Countryside Partnership work closely with the Western Heights Preservation Society in Dover on management, enhancement, access and interpretation around the Napoleonic defences. A similar arrangement could be possible with a local history society.

7. Ownership

The White Cliffs and Romney Marsh Countryside Partnership are non profit organisations with Dover District Council being the employing authority. Our sponsors and partners include Shepway District Council, along with a range of businesses, authorities and conservation bodies.

For our organisations to manage this site, we would look towards Shepway District Council owning the site through some agreement with the MOD and then the WCCP/RMCP signing a Memorandum of Agreement with Shepway District Council to manage the site.

The WCCP/RMCP have a number of sites across Shepway which we do this already in partnership with the authority, namely Folkestone Warren, New Romney Warren and Greatstone Dunes.

8. Liability

The liability of the area would be with the landowner, but the WCCP/RMCP would carry out all management of the site, the risk assessment for the site and monitoring checks under Health and Safety for all fencing, stiles, paths and structures.

9. Options

Below are options to be discussed.

Option A

Leave as it is. This would require no new fencing, no habitat management and no input from any organisation. The area would decline and deteriorate on biodiversity, access and landscape.

This option is probably not viable as part of a planning process.

Option B

This option is to add fencing to part of the site, but to manage the grassland and woodland for biodiversity and improve access. However, for this to happen it is proposed that the valley is grazed in four sectors. The first sector involves dry grassland on a steepish slope, but one which has had a history of cattle grazing in the past. Three of the sectors would involve rough grazing in a wet environment – which would favour Konik Ponies.

This would involve some new sections of fencing being created and retaining some OK fencing. It is not ideal, but would be possible to graze.

Capital elements

Water Troughs – possible 4 - £1,500-£2,000 each. It is proposed that all 4 troughs would be next to the road to keep costs down and for ease. A reduced cost is possible with water installations for adjacent residential development.

Fencing – From my quick estimates and measurements looking at 450m of fencing - £10 per metre (can go up to £16 on difficult terrain) - £4,500.

A consideration is the MOD Acrise team could do the fencing cheaper (in house) as an option.

The other section of fencing in the south end would be looking at 1,400metres equivalent to £14,000.

Kissing Gates – 10 at £150 each (ex. installation)

Field Gates – 6 Field Gates at £300 each (ex. installation)

Footpaths – 27 out of 89 steps need replacing. These are on Public Rights of Way and are the responsibility of the landowner. Capital costs - £1,000. Does not include installation.

Capital Costs - £30,800 (ex VAT).

Option C

This option would be to replace much larger sections of fencing around the Backdoor Training Area.

The extra cost would be a large amount of new fencing.

I would estimate an extra 2,500 metres of fencing £25,000 on top of the £30,800 (ex VAT).

This would include fencing the complete site off, to allow grazing and would allow all the infrastructure to be in place.

Capital Costs of around £55,000 (ex VAT)

Others

The White Cliffs Countryside Partnership are more than happy to explore the possibility of any unused building which is unable to be demolished at Shorncliffe to use as a base/office/community point for the Seabrook Valley.

The WCCP have offices in Dover, Folkestone (Veolia buildings) and New Romney.

Other Grant Streams

The Seabrook Valley is not in a priority area for environmental grants (ie Higher Level Scheme) and therefore it is very unlikely that any income is possible from other sources.

10. Annual Management of the Backdoor Training Area (Seabrook Valley)

For this size of land and animal grazing, footpaths and public pressure the WCCP/RMCP would be looking for **£15,000 per annum as an annual payment to manage the site**. This equates slightly below a level of grant which could have been possible if the site had a greater biodiversity value (i.e like Dungeness, Dover and Folkestone).

This annual payment would be for 2 days a week for a member of staff which would be managing the site (including the grazing) and then maintaining the Public Rights of Way, lead events on the land for families, walkers, lead community events and volunteer tasks and encourage a sense of pride in the valley for the residents.

The Seabrook Valley was one of the priority sites when the White Cliffs Countryside Partnership set up in the 1980's. We would strive to improve the site for wildlife and for the enjoyment of the residents and visitors.

This annual payment could be on a five or ten year tenure, usually the length of the management plan (which is 5 years).

11. Preferred Option

The White Cliffs and Romney Marsh Countryside Partnership preferred option is Option B with the annual payment.

This would set up the area for grazing, by installing some of the infrastructure prior to signing the land over and then allowing an input to maintain the site. The cost would equate to roughly 2-3 days a week, which is sufficient to control the problems. Greater investment would improve the management and reduce the problems further.

Romney Marsh Countryside Partnership

March 2011

Seabrook Valley

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Photographs of the site



Clockwise from top: View of Seabrook Valley, angle irons remaining from steps, and a stile on one of the public footpaths present on site.

Map of Seabrook Valley

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Proposed fencing on site

