Ridgeway Surface Repair Meeting

Site visit to the Ridgeway National Trail within the WHS to assess condition and consider appropriate repair and maintenance techniques

North Farm, West Overton 26 August 2015

Present: Gill Swanton, Colin Shell, Stephen Leonard (Rights of Way and Countryside, Wiltshire Council), Sarah Wright (National Trails), Sarah Simmonds (WHS Coordination Unit), Nick Snashall (National Trust), Stephanie Payne (Natural England),

Apologies: Rachel Foster (Archaeology Service, Wiltshire Council), Steven Tabbitt (National Trails)

Notes from the meeting

The group discussed the background to the issue of maintenance of the Ridgeway within the WHS and considered the challenges and opportunities related to future surface management with reference to the Stonehenge and Avebury WHS Management Plan, Natural England's New Deal and the summary interim report on archaeology on the Ridgeway prepared by members of the Avebury and Stonehenge Archaeological and Historical Research Group (ASAHRG) including Colin Shell and Gill Swanton.

The pertinent sections of partners' plans, strategy documents and reports were discussed. The key elements are included at Appendix A.

Generally a fundamental commonality of purpose was identified. This enabled the group to arrive at recommendations for appropriate materials, methodology and management approach to achieve this. The overarching aims and approach are set out below.

Agreed overarching aims

- A best practice approach is required for management of a National Trail within an internationally protected World Heritage Site landscape and nationally significant AONB
- The group agreed the need to identify a methodology that would provide access across a good surface for users, protect archaeological features and maintain and enhance the landscape character of the WHS
- Further aims included working with biodiversity interests by maintaining and creating natural refuges and corridors where possible. Engaging local people through involvement in maintenance/management that protects the archaeology, landscape character and biodiversity

Notes from the site visit

During a site visit in the afternoon a series of recommendations were drawn up to meet the aims set out above. They are based on an overview of the whole Trail within the WHS. Individual plots will require further review to finalise the necessary materials and appropriate methodology as set out below. At the end of the visit next steps for developing the methodology and working up the project were outlined. Further opportunities and considerations were highlighted.

Approach to repair and maintenance

Overarching aim: to re-establish sward, allow safe access and protect and present archaeology. Create a project with benefits for users, archaeology and nature with community and volunteer involvement.

1. **Targeted repair and maintenance**

- Much of the length can be left without intervention. Where deep ruts occur that would impede safe access these need to be filled.
- Where undulations indicate historic features such as Bronze Age field boundaries their profile will be retained.
- Leave where regeneration will happen naturally but seed where needed to bind any repair and establish sward as quickly as possible. Seeds should be gathered locally. The NIA may be able to assist with this.

2. **Materials**
    - Materials need to protect the landscape character. The National Trails own standards require the materials to be appropriate to the landscape.
    - Use of road planings on this very sensitive National Trail in a protected landscape with surviving recorded archaeology would be inappropriate. Even a more landscape sensitive rut filling forming two hard routs would lose the archaeological profile. In addition the Ridgeway is wide and people would move off into the softer ground and verges and continue to damage the route and archaeology.
    - The correct materials would need to be sourced for each part of the Ridgeway requiring infilling. The appropriate soil type will need to be stockpiled for repair and maintenance.
    - Materials once sourced could be stored with landowners adjacent to the areas to be filled. WHS landowners/farmers can be contacted to assist in the project. Those active in the Marlborough Downs NIA would be obvious partners for storage and assistance with transporting the materials
    - Harder more robust materials such as limestone are unsuitable:
        - they would damage the upstanding earthworks as well as buried archaeology through their scouring action
        - they would require the use of a permeable membrane that could result in a failure to coalesce and bind. It might also require levelling and loss of earthworks as a permeable membrane is normally used over larger areas
        - the landscape character and setting of the monuments would be altered with intrusive white limestone that would not develop the intended calcareous grass sward
        - the expense would be greater
        - the 1995 use of limestone on length outside the WHS to east was unsuccessful.

Action: SS/GS to contact relevant landowners regarding storage/transport once details of methodology agreed and finalised

3. **Methodology**
    - Once the weather and ground surface is suitable and no damage will be done by vehicles transporting the soil the work can be undertaken.

- The deepest areas will require the correct soil type to be shovelled in
- Mini-diggers and a contractor could be used for less delicate work. This would be a practical, faster solution.
- Volunteers could assist with more sensitive in-filling requiring less heavy interventions. They could also undertake much of the maintenance work once the sward is established.
- An archaeologist should be asked to supervise repair and maintenance works. They will be needed to monitor and advise on maintaining the profile of ridge and furrow.
- This approach to managing the Ridgeway will be more sustainable in the long run following initial investment in establishing the sward. It would require only minimal ongoing maintenance rather than major repair

4. Appropriate management

- The approach set out above is the only one able to meet the needs of the sensitive WHS context. It likely to need an extension to the TRO to allow the fill to settle and the sward to develop
- On the basis of evidence regarding current damage from vehicle access it is unlikely that maintenance of the recommended sward surface would be possible. The need for a permanent TRO should be reviewed
- A gate which can be opened presents a deterrent which has been largely successful on the Ridgeway in the WHS during the current 6 month autumn/winter closure regime

5. Holistic approach to managing by-ways in the WHS

- A wider holistic approach to managing access including vehicle access to the wider landscape could be considered. This should include a review of feeder byways to the Ridgeway.
- It would is best to focus on the Ridgeway first which is a high profile National Trail with evidence of archaeological damage. If a TRO is considered necessary to protect the Ridgeway, this should be considered for Green Street as a feeder to the National Trail.

Action: Discuss the feasibility of a holistic approach to managing byways across the Avebury half of the WHS with Richard Broadhead

6. Monitoring

- Monitoring should take place to record vehicle use.

Action: SW to identify what monitoring data has been collected up to this point

Next steps required to implement the proposed approach

- The easiest most time efficient way to identify the areas that require soil infill is by drone flyover after rain. The flyover should also provide GPS data. CS has colleagues at Cambridge who may be able to undertake this work. If a drone is not available, a further visit will be needed to identify the areas requiring infill.

- Once areas for infill are identified this will need to be mapped and a visit undertaken to identify which soil and methodology (hand or mechanical) is required. Soil sampling will be required to identify the appropriate type. A photo needs to be taken and

sketches where relevant of any undulations should be retained. The visit should be undertaken by a RoW and/or National Trail office and an archaeologist.

Action: CS to contact Cambridge colleagues regarding possible drone survey

- A decision regarding management needs to be taken and then a programme of works planned for repair to coincide with appropriate weather conditions
- A plan for stockpiling and transporting the soil needs to be put in place with WHS partners
- Funding needs to be identified for the materials and works

Further opportunities and considerations

Benefits to the natural environment

There would be a range of benefits to biodiversity of extending the natural grassland by allowing sward to become established. The sward will provide a green corridor as well as an archaeo-reserve. This will be advantageous for a number of species including ground nesting birds, small mammals and grasshoppers particularly with vehicle access is regulated. This should be communicated to the public as a key benefit of the approach.

The former Countryside Commission undertook a species survey on the Ridgeway and there might be resources to repeat this available from NE. This might be another opportunity to involve volunteers.

Grazing and or rotational cutting could form part of the maintenance.

Hedges along the Ridgeway need to be kept to a height to retain views across the landscape and into and out of the WHS.

Action: SP to look for Countryside Commission Survey of Ridgeway and identify any possibilities for funding re-survey by NE

Benefits to the historic environment

The archaeology will be protected from continued damage
The setting of the monument will be enhanced as well as the landscape character of the WHS.

Visitors will better understand the historic environment through joint working with partners to develop leaflets/apps that identified the archaeological remain within the Ridgeway and its corridor

Volunteer and community involvement

The above project will offer a range of opportunities for involvement as well as funding.

Managing charitable events

Commercial companies organising charitable events should be encouraged to contribute. They are required to send risk assessments to the RoW team who could advise on surface protection possible rescheduling and donations. The integrated management plan for the Salisbury Plain Training Area actively requires the military to avoid areas sensitive to impacts at certain periods. Adequate lead-time and planning should be required from organisers.

Appendix A: Key elements of partners' plans, strategies, reports

Stonehenge and Avebury WHS Management Plan 2015:
Policy 3a – Manage the WHS to protect the physical remains which contribute to its attributes of OUV and improve their condition
Action 25 - Design and implement management system on the Ridgeway National Trail to prevent damage to both surface and buried archaeology. Produce case study/standards guidance applicable to other archeologically sensitive locations.

Policy 6b – Manage vehicular access to byways within the World Heritage Site to avoid damage to archaeology, improve safety and encourage exploration of the landscape on foot whilst maintaining access for emergency, operational and farm vehicles and landowners.

Action 143 - Monitor the use of byways open to all traffic (BOATS) and seek appropriate traffic management interventions where vehicular access damages archaeology, diminishes safety, impedes or discourages movement and/or impacts adversely on the setting including Byway 12 at *Stonehenge and the Ridgeway National Trail at Avebury*

Action 144 - Agree appropriate protocols for surface maintenance and repair on public rights of way within the WHS

The meeting focussed conservation of the archaeological features and their landscape setting and implications for surface repair and maintenance. Other relevant policies relate to: visitor management and sustainable tourism; interpretation, education and community involvement. These can be dealt with as part of subsequent joint working and partnership projects.

New Deal: National Trail quality standards most relevant to the meeting include:
Experience – enable as many people as possible to enjoy a wide variety of walking and riding experiences along National Trails and through the English landscape;

Enhancement – make a constant improvement to the Trial and its associated routes. Contribute to the enhancement of the landscape, nature and historic feature within the trial corridor. This includes providing: Surfaces in good condition and appropriate to the geology and soils over which the trail passes.

Engagement is also relevant in relation to involving the community and volunteers in the proposed approach.

Economy is most relevant in relationship to sustainable tourism which may be the focus of another meeting.

Interim summary report on Archaeology on the Ridgeway:

- The Ridgeway contains the very fragile relict historic landscape which has been ploughed away on either side. It is an important resource and should be managed as such

- Any works involving grading or excavation would destroy these features

- The Ridgeway is haven for wildlife particularly ground nesting and farm birds

North Wessex Downs AONB
The area is within the NWDAONB; a landscape protected at a national level for its aesthetic qualities related to its particular chalk downland landscape character.

Appendix B: Examples of initial individual plot analysis

Plot 2A
Leave much of this area. Fill vehicle ruts with chalk and cover with topsoil.
Small scale targeted infill. Not appropriate for use of permeable cover which would be used over larger areas.

This will sustain light usage.

Plot 4
This is mostly small ruts that will soften and even out following rain.

Deeper rutting should be filled with appropriate soil but the profile of the field boundary maintained.

The area is quite free draining so should grass up well following this.

Plot 6
Chalky soil. Ruts need to be filled in with appropriate material (chalk in this case). Calcareous topsoil should be used to cover this.