



ORE COMMUNITY LAND TRUST

Seeking to acquire land in the Upper Ore Valley to save and enhance urban woodland and green space for community use and to protect animal habitat



Submission to Hastings Development Management Plan Examination

Nov. 2014

Upper Ore Valley (Speckled Wood)

Green Space Designation

&

Developments Sites CV03 & CV04

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Ore Community Land Trust

Submission to Hastings Development Management Plan - Examination - Nov. 2014

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- Ore Village Green Survey
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- Speckled Wood Group - Description & Aims
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- Ore CLT - Newsletter, Posters for Events & Ore Village Fair

Notes: [1] - Not included in electronic copy



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Mr Tim Cookson
Strategic Planning Manager
Planning Policy Team
Hastings Borough Council
Aquila House, Breeds Place
Hastings, TN34 3UY

21 April 2014

Dear Mr Cookson

Re: Development Management Plan - Submission Version 2014 and Proposal to Designate an Area of Urban Green Space in the Upper Ore Valley ('Speckled Wood')

I am writing on behalf of the Ore Community Land Trust to confirm our intention to make a detailed submission to the Public Enquiry into the Development Management Plan in support of the land protection proposals included in the draft Local Plan - DMP.

Although our community group opposes any development in Speckled Wood we are very much in support of the Borough Council proposals which will, at least, ensure that a large part of the woodland valley is saved from development and can be used for public access and the provision of community amenities.

As you know, our group, which is a community membership organisation, has been campaigning since it was set up by Ore Valley Action in 2009, to save Speckled Wood and to make it accessible to local residents. We have done this by continuing the work of previous groups that were set up to ensure that Speckled Wood remained a valuable natural green space and by clearing rubbish, overgrown footpaths and the stream. We have engaged with local residents and consulted on our proposals for Speckled Wood to become a community woodland and have generated very considerable support in the area and across the Borough from individuals, groups, organisations and councillors.

We and our predecessor groups have also engaged with the Shaping Hastings - Local Plan development process from the start and have made numerous submissions and encouraged other residents and local groups to do the same.

Ore Community Land Trust was established with the support of Hastings Trust and local councillors in order to be able to acquire land in the Ore Valley for community use and we will be registering as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation in the near future to enable this to happen, when the land is given the necessary protection.

We have over the years involved teams of local volunteers and other groups to undertake footpath, stream and rubbish clearance, with the effect that many people of all ages now use the footpaths for leisure and to travel between home, the shops in Ore and the local schools.

Continued over

We are now working on a number of initiatives and projects to enhance Speckled Wood and provide much needed amenities for residents such as **children's play space, disability access**, an off-road path for cycling and walking (the **Ore Valley Greenway** project) and a small **village green** close to the centre of Ore Village.

We will be developing a **land acquisition plan** and a **plan for woodland management and enhancement** and all of these projects and initiatives will be subject to full community consultation.

We will produce a report to illustrate the history of the campaign and the importance of the Upper Ore Valley as a protected green space in a densely built area with no other access to local open space of any size and how it can be utilised to retain the attractive woodland ghyll and animal habitat while allowing other amenities to be provided.

We would want to be represented at the Public Enquiry into the DMP so that we can demonstrate the level of support for the proposal to designate the woodland valley as urban green space and for our plans.

We will also want to show that the development proposals that have appeared have not resulted in any building due to the entirely unsuitable nature of the terrain and other constraints and that land acquisition seems to be based on speculation over rising land values and little else.

Our proposals for the Upper Ore Valley will be of great value to the local community and can be achieved quickly and with relatively little cost. This will be a far better use of this area of urban land as much more suitable and designated development sites for housing lie empty in the Lower Ore Valley.

I am attaching a project outline for the Ore Valley Greenway and an information sheet for the Ore Village Green project.

Please keep me informed of the progress towards the DMP Public Enquiry.

Yours sincerely

Ian Sier
Chair of Ore Community Land Trust



ORE COMMUNITY LAND TRUST

Organisation Description

In March 2009 Ore Community Land Trust was launched with the principal aims of campaigning for the woodland valley (Speckled Wood) to be protected and acquiring land for community use, creating accessible amenity areas and saving wildlife habitat. It was set up by Ore Valley Action, which was preceded by the Speckled Wood Group and SADOWLS, all with the aim of protecting Speckled Wood as an urban green space. Its heritage, therefore, dates back to 2005.

The Trust adopted the following mission statement at the launch meeting.

Seeking to acquire land in the Upper Ore Valley to save and enhance urban woodland and green space for community use and to protect animal habitat

The objects of Ore Community Land Trust are attached.

Ore Community Land Trust is a charitable membership organisation, involving residents and supportive organisations and recruits volunteers to help with clearance and conservation work.

In 2013 the Trust adopted a new model constitution to allow it to register as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation and has applied to the Charity Commission for CIO status.

Ore Community Land Trust is a member of the Hastings Voluntary Action umbrella group of voluntary organisations and of Hastings Community Network, which represents the voluntary sector on the Local Strategic Partnership.

The Trust organises members meetings and public meetings and events to report on its plans and consult the local community. It publishes newsletters, information sheets and reports and has a web site and Face book page. The Trust and, previously, Ore Valley Action have organised the annual Ore Village Fair since 2009 as means of bringing the community together and seeking support for its aims.

The Trust has worked with a number of local and town wide organisations and continues to maintain good working relations with nearly all local groups, organisations and forums. These include:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ore Valley Forum• Ore Centre• Salvation Army (Ore)• Hastings Academy• Hastings Borough Council• Hastings Environmental network• Hastings & Rother Disability Forum• Hastings Greenway Group• Local History Groups• Hastings Urban Bikes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ore in Bloom• Ore Together community forum• Sussex Wildlife Trust• Ramblers• Amicus Horizon Housing Association• Orbit Housing Association• Sussex Coast College
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Contact: Ore Community Land Trust, Ore Centre, 455 Old London Road, Hastings, TN35 5BH

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www.orecommunitylandtrust.org.uk

Ore Community Land Trust

Objects and Structure

OBJECTS:

1. To acquire land to protect and enhance available urban green space, animal habitat and accessible open space for community use.
2. To acquire and manage community land, buildings and associated assets for environmental benefit and sustainable development of community amenities
3. To advance the education of the public in conservation, protection and improvement of the physical and natural environment.
4. To provide and assist in the provision of recreational facilities and activities for the public as a whole including those who, by reason of their youth, age, infirmity, disablement, ethnicity, financial hardship or social or economic circumstances, have need of such facilities.
5. To organise and assist in organising community events and activities associated with the work of the Trust and to promote community development and social cohesion
6. To help in the provision, improvement and maintenance of footpaths and cycle ways for travel to work and education and for leisure and exercise
7. To contribute to the advancement of education, training, work experience and volunteering.
8. To involve the community in the development of the Trust and its work and in planning new projects and initiatives.

STRUCTURE:

Area of benefit: Ore Valley and Surrounding Area

Membership:

1. Individuals living in the beneficial area
2. Other individuals who support the Aims of the Trust
3. Organisations who support the Aims of the Trust

- Annual membership subscriptions are paid
- Members meetings and information events are held in addition to the AGM

Management Committee:

- Up to 10 members plus ex officio ward councillor
- Elected by members at the AGM for three year term but can fill casual vacancies between AGMs
- Meetings are held monthly
- Delegation to sub committees is allowed for

Status:

- Charitable community based membership organisation
- Application made to register as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation

History of 'Specked Wood', the Campaign to Preserve it and the Formation of Ore Community Land Trust

The Upper Ore Valley, which is now known as 'Speckled Wood', was originally an open valley rather than woodland. It has been through many changes since the late 1800s. It has become a very attractive wooded ghyll with a stream running through it over the years and represents the only significant area of accessible green space for the densely built housing area at the top of Ore Valley and Ore Village itself. As such it is an extremely valuable community asset.

At the top of the valley the land rises very sharply up to Frederick Road and it is believed that this road was built on spoil dug out of the Ore Tunnel when it was built for the railway in the 1800s. This has in effect filled in the top of the valley and created a ravine alongside this part of Frederick Road.

Church Street was developed around 1870 on the northern side of the valley and appears for the first time in the Ordinance Survey Map of 1873. In fact the houses were built over a period of years and in three clusters all on the Southern side of the road.

The first cluster was at the Arrow Road (now Clifton Road) end just behind the Hastings Union Workhouse and numbered about 20. It is quite possible these houses were built for workhouse staff as there were, at that time, very few houses in the area that was built up later in the Victorian era. This cluster of properties also included a number of shops including a grocers, bakers, general shop and laundry. The second smaller cluster of 6 was built in the middle of Church Street at later date and the third, of 8 houses, was built at the end next to Queens Road (now Victoria Avenue)

Church Street was regarded as housing for the very poor, which is why these homes later came to be demolished.

The 1909 OS Map does not show any other changes or evidence of land use in the valley.

After the First World War the Southern side of the valley was utilised for allotments (two rows behind Old London Road) for use by 'invalids' from the Great War. Larger plots were used as piggeries and small holdings.

The land would have been largely open with few trees.

By 1929 the OS Map shows that most of the surrounding area had been developed as terraced housing and also shows a patchwork of allotments and smallholdings in the valley. The Green next to the Salvation Army Hall is shown along with a small area of woodland below it.

In 1959 the Council declared Church Street a slum clearance area due to the poor condition of the housing stock and over the next 6 years the residents were rehoused.

In 1966, the street register shows only two properties still occupied. The 1967 OS Map still shows the Church Street housing but the whole of Church Street would have been demolished.

At some point during the 1950s and 1960s the allotments and small holding were gradually abandoned. It was subsequent to this that much of the more recent woodland developed and it is easy to identify the original allotments as the boundary hedging has now grown up into tree lines and other trees have self seeded in the plots and across the valley.

The valley was called the 'Oller' by local people and contains a number of long established footpaths running along by the stream and the very old (at least 100 years) cross valley footpath from School Road to Church Street that was used by school children to get to school from the homes to the North of the Valley. On the higher ground behind Old London Road there is a network of access paths for the allotments of which Graystone Lane was the principal track. The top section is a tarmaced road up to Old London Road. All of these access tracks are unregistered land and how been used as footpaths for very many years.

The Work House at the bottom of the valley was closed and the building used for the St Helens hospital facility, which was built on the other side of Frederick Road, from 1930.

The hospital was closed in 1994 and the old Work House was renovated and converted into housing in early 2000. Some additional new housing was also built in 2006 beside the old buildings in Frederick Road and in the new road called Speckled Wood.

Over the years after the allotments and small holdings had been abandoned, the valley became overgrown and some of the footpaths became impassable. The path from Frederick Road along the valley floor and up to Church Street remained in use as did Church Street in the form of a rough track although some of the original kerb stones and gutters are still visible. The path from Graystone Lane up to the Green also remained in use but the rest of the valley was used as a wild play area by local children.

However, in 2005 a new group was set up by local people who were determined to save the woodland valley from development and open it up for community use. They had realised that a large part of the valley had been designated for housing development in the Local Plan, a fact that many local residents were clearly not aware of as no activity at all had taken place in the larger part of the valley since it ceased to be used for small holdings and allotments 50 years before.

This group decide to call the Upper Ore Valley 'Speckled Wood' and the group was called the **Speckled Wood Group**. It joined another group called **SADOWLS** which had been formed to try to stop development of the land next to Victoria Avenue at the top of the valley.

In 2006 these two groups joined to launch the **Ore Valley Action** group, which as well as adopting an overall aim of trying to stop overdevelopment of the whole of the Ore Valley, retained a core aim of seeking to save 'Speckled Wood' from development and making the valley available for community use. A **Community Plan** was drawn up and launched for public comments showing a number of options for new amenities such as reinstated allotments, children's play area, seating, footpaths and a section of the proposed Hastings Greenway running through the valley.

During 2008 and 2009 a major drive was initiated to clear and open up all of the footpaths and to clear the stream and the rest of the valley of decades of accumulated rubbish utilising teams of volunteers and the help of other organisations such as the Princes Trust. The bridge over the stream was constructed from railway sleepers and the cross valley path up the School Road from the valley floor was discovered and opened up as it was so overgrown that it was only found when a long term local resident showed the point where it started from by the stream.

In March 2009 **Ore Community Land Trust** was launched by Ore Valley Action in order to create a membership organisation, accountable to local people, that could seek to acquire land in the Ore Valley for community use and ensure it would remain as public open green space.

A formal opening of the footpath network was held in April 2010 and was attended by a number of councillors who had supported the campaign to save and open up Speckled Wood and by the leader of the Council.

In 2011 volunteers constructed a series of steps to allow local people to get to Church Street and the Old London Road from the centre of the valley . In the years after the decision was taken to open up the footpaths through Speckled Wood, it has been increasingly used by local people for getting to work, school and the shops in Ore Village and for leisure by all ages.

From July 2012 when a new group - **Friends of Speckled Wood** - was formed, volunteers from this group have also undertaken a good deal of clearance work including removal of a large amount of old metal from the abandoned allotments and smallholdings and have created some footpaths and a bridge at the top of the valley.

The result of the 9 year campaign by several community groups to save Speckled Wood and the work to open up the woodland valley has been a very high level of interest and support from local people and organisations and ward councillors. The woodland footpaths are so well used it is rarely necessary to do any clearance work. Speckled Wood is well known across the Borough and attracted by far the highest level of public support for protecting a green area in the Local Plan consultation process.

Although the ownership of land in Speckled Wood is a complex patchwork of private plots, areas bought by two developers and some Council owned plots, the land has been left to grow wild and no action to manage or fence off the plots has been taken for many decades. Only the small Green next to the salvation Army Hall and owned by Hastings Borough Council is being managed. It is very clear that the developers are only holding the land for land speculation purposes as no effort was made to start any work even in the area with planning permission and during the period of high and rising land prices. The physical and local authority constraints, such as road access restrictions, make any major development highly unlikely.

However, Ore Community Land Trust has drawn up an number of practical and realisable projects to make use of Speckled Wood for community benefit and has long term plans to buy as much of the valley as possible as a community asset and to protect and enhance the woodland and animal habitat.

Speckled Wood has attracted support from all sides and is now seen as a very valuable area of urban woodland and green space in a densely built up area of the Borough with no other accessible green space. It is right next to Ore Village and the local shopping centre. It also has the potential to provide much needed public amenities such as children's play areas, an area for food growing, seating and recreation space.

Any significant development on either side of the valley would destroy the integrity of woodland setting and the quiet tranquillity that is available on the valley floor. Speckled Wood is an abandoned woodland valley that is entirely unsuitable for development and can play an even greater role as a valuable community asset if the woodland is enhanced and properly managed and as a location for much needed amenities .

It is a green lung in a densely built up area with no nearby access to public green space and enjoys very considerable community support to preserve it as urban green space. Ore Community Land Trust would want to take on the role of acquiring land and managing and enhancing Speckled Wood for community benefits once its future has been secured.

Ore Community Land Trust (& Ore Valley Action)

**Engagement with the Hastings Borough Council
and Shaping Hastings - Local Plan Consultations**

Date	Activity
Nov. 2006	OVA response to Shaping Hastings consultation
Jan. 2007	OVA Letter to Leader of Hastings BC and Chief Executive to call for redesignation of Speckled Wood as protected green space
May 2008 July 2008	Local Development Framework consultation letter sent to OVA Three OVA submissions to LDF consultation
Feb. 2009	LDF consultation over development sites Jan. to March 2009 OVA publicised the consultation to members, supporters and Ore residents, arranged for the document and response forms to be left at the branch Library, submitted a formal response and encouraged other organisations to do the same.
Feb. to April 2010	Shaping Hastings LDF consultation - OCLT members attended consultation event at the Bridge and submitted a formal response.
June to Aug. 2011	Shaping Hastings - Planning Strategy consultation - OCLT made a submission about protecting green spaces.
Feb. to April 2012	Shaping Hastings consultation - OCLT organised a public meeting in Ore attended by the lead planning officer and Planning Aid. OCLT circulated information letters and consultation forms to members, supporters and local organisations and made a formal submission. <i>The strongest public response to his consultation in Hastings was in support of protecting Speckled Wood.</i>

<p>July - Aug. 2012</p>	<p>Development Management Plan consultation - <i>as a result of the support shown for Speckled Wood in the Feb. consultation</i>, a further site specific consultation presented 3 options for areas of green space land protection in Speckled Wood. OCLT publicised this process and circulated letters and forms to members and supporters and made a formal submission.</p> <p>Friends of Speckled Wood was formed in July 2012 and launched a petition that was signed by over 1,000 people to call for the whole of Speckled Wood to be protected.</p> <p>As a result the option for protecting the largest area, but not all, of Speckled Wood was adopted for the DMP.</p>
<p>Jan. to April 2013</p>	<p>A revised Development Management Plan consultation was arranged and OCLT publicised this and made a formal submission.</p>
<p>March to April 2014</p>	<p>A final DMP consultation was arranged and OCLT confirmed its previous consultation submission</p>

-The Case For Speckled Wood as Community Woodland & Green Space

- The Case Against Development

The Importance of Urban Green Spaces

In recent years there has been a marked change in the value attached to urban green spaces in recognition of their importance to communities who often live in heavily developed towns and cities. It can quite readily be argued that they are more important than woodland in the countryside as they directly affect the lives of many more people than the number of people who live in or are able to travel out of town to enjoy the natural environment of the countryside.

Urban green spaces provide attractive leisure settings and act as important buffers to traffic noise and the many pressures in built up areas.

In Ore Valley a great deal of green space has been lost to development but Speckled Wood remains as a woodland valley of sufficient size to provide a valuable community asset which is already very well used and has the potential to be very much enhanced and to provide a whole range of additional amenities for local people.

Hastings Borough Council has accepted the case for all residents having reasonable access to public open space for informal recreation. A target was adopted of 90% of households having access to open space within 300 metres of their home by 2013. English Nature recommend a maximum distance of 280 metres from accessible open space.

The residential area around Speckled Wood (Clive Vale and Ore) would be well outside this target if it were not for the potential for public open space that this woodland could provide if it were protected and opened up for public use.

Visual and Practical Value as a 'Green Lung' in a Densely Built Up Area

Speckled Wood provides visually attractive woodland views and exceptional far reaching vistas to Beachy Head and the South Downs from Victoria Avenue. Much more could be made of these views by creating view points at suitable locations around the valley.

In fact the population density in Ore and Tressell wards is between 90 and 100 people per hectare compared to the Hastings average of 30.4 people per hectare and, according to East Sussex County Council, these wards have the highest urban density in the County.

The positive environmental impact that Speckled Wood has on this densely built up area is recognised by many local people who were horrified to find out that much of the woodland had been designated for housing development. Even if they did not make use the woodland themselves they benefited from its existence and the visual effect and they could fully appreciate its value for local children and as a recreational area.

Meeting Community Needs

But for the work of Ore Community Land Trust and volunteers from other organisations, over the last 6 years, many of the footpaths and unregistered land would have remained inaccessible to all but the children who were prepared to find a way through the undergrowth. Now Speckled Wood is regularly used as a way of getting to Ore Village, the shops and local schools on foot and for a quiet leisure walks for recreation and health. Hastings residents from further afield come to

Speckled Wood to enjoy the scenery and quiet tranquillity of the woodland ghyll setting.

Guided walks have been arranged to respond to requests from many local people and the potential for the woodland and green spaces to be improved and made more accessible is now widely recognised by the local community and by local organisations and schools. This accounts for the unprecedented level of support for protecting as much of Speckled Wood as possible as urban green space for community use.

A representative from the local Disability Forum has visited Speckled Wood and is very enthusiastic about the realistic potential to create accessible paths for wheelchair users and mobility scooters into the centre of the valley and for access from other points. The Ore Community Land Trust - Village Green and Ore Valley Greenway projects will address this important 'access for all' aim, provided that Speckled Wood is given urban green space protection.

Another much need amenity is a children's play area and an adventure play facility. There is no children's play area near to the shops and the centre of Ore Village. One again the Village Green project will begin to address this deficit, while providing an attractive place for parents and child carers to sit.

The Village Green project has also been designed to create an exciting outdoor performance space, within easy reach of the centre of Ore Village and to start the process of installing public art in Speckled Wood.

Equally the planned development of a community food growing project on the site of the old allotments would provide yet another community amenity and resource.

The above projects illustrate just how much Speckled Wood has to offer the local community if it is protected, enhanced and managed. A wide range of amenities can also be provided, while still safeguarding wildlife habitat and the wild areas of the woodland. Speckled Wood is large enough in its current form to meet all of these aims and that is why Ore Community Land Trust supports the maximum possible area of urban green space protection.

Community Involvement

The operation and campaign work of Ore Community Land Trust and the forerunner organisations from which it was formed have adopted full community involvement as a core principle. Teams of local volunteers have carried out all of the rubbish clearance, cut back undergrowth, cleared the stream, opened up the footpath network and created steps to climb the valley sides. Fallen trees have been removed and a program of treating Japanese Knotweed was successful in clearing this invasive plant from an area of unregistered land next to Frederick Road.

This form of community action will enable Speckled Wood to be well managed and maintained, as the realisation of community ownership has been shown in many other community land projects to galvanise even more local residents to get involved to benefit the whole community and themselves.

Funding

There are many specific sources of funding for community land projects and other grants focused on environmental activities, food growing, children's play and other projects that Ore Community Land Trust would like to develop. Funding from local organisations and grant giving bodies will also be tapped.

Funding for capital projects and land acquisition as well as woodland management and enhancement can be sought once the urban green space protection for Speckled Wood has been confirmed.

The recent successful grant applications to the Big Local fund for the Village Green and the Ore Valley Greenway design projects, even at this stage in the process of securing the future of speckled Wood, is an encouraging indication of the availability of funding.

Land Unsuitable For Development

Following the positive case, above, for protecting Speckled Wood as a community asset, there is also a strong case to be made against development for housing.

It is important to point out that the decision to allocate significant areas of land for development in Speckled Wood was taken many years ago and probably well before the 2004 Local Plan was prepared.

We understand that a recent short study by local authority planners concluded that most of the land allocation for development in Speckled Wood would not have been made under current planning guidance and good practice. This is based on topographical and access constraints and other land characteristics and infrastructure difficulties, in addition to the considerations about protecting urban green space.

Some of the reasons for not developing housing in Speckled Wood include:

- Sloping sites and serious doubt about land stability, particularly at the Victoria Road end of the valley. There have been a number of development sites in the Borough that have been abandoned or disrupted by unstable ground and land slips.
- Damage to the local animal habitat and the extensive badger population
- The widespread growth of Japanese Knotweed particularly on the Northern side of the valley, which will damage foundations and roadways and is very difficult and costly to destroy (taking up to three years of treatment)
- Severe constraints on development on the Old London Road side of Speckled Wood due to Highway Authority opposition to vehicular access onto a very busy narrow and dangerous trunk road (A259). In fact this constraint was the reason that development was only seen as viable if vehicular access could be found from the Northern side of the valley. This would be vigorously opposed as it would destroy the whole of the woodland and would, in any case be prohibitively expensive and require a bridge across the valley.
- Inadequate drainage infrastructure and risk of flooding in the valley as the stream often gets blocked at the entrance to the culvert under Frederick Road
- A poor sewerage system on both sides of the valley that may well not have the capacity for any significant increase in usage.

Perhaps the most telling argument for redesignation of Speckled Wood, or at least the greater part of it, as protected urban green space is the fact that, in spite of the allocation of land for development for well over 10 years, no development has taken place. The only planning permission that has been given is for the area next to Victoria Avenue and that was renewed once and then another application made when the renewal expired.

There are a number of areas, some quite large, of unregistered land and a network of long established footpaths running across and along the valley, which would also make land acquisition for development more difficult.

Given the high cost of developing land in Speckled Wood, due to difficulties such as those outlined above, and the low housing stock values in Hastings it is difficult to imagine that land in Speckled Wood is economically viable for development and easy to reach the conclusion that it is being held for land speculation purposes. This should not be allowed to effectively freeze any positive regeneration opportunities for Speckled Wood in the form of community woodland and green space and for provision of community amenities.

There are numerous flat and accessible sites available for development in the Lower Ore Valley that show no signs of being taken up and could surely be made available to the development land owners in Speckled Wood as an alternative option.

Although not supported by Ore Community Land Trust, the Borough Council proposals for small development sites at the edges of Speckled Wood would be far less destructive to the woodland and its potential than the extensive areas in the 2004 Local Plan.

Absolutely no work has been undertaken to manage or fence off any areas of land by any of the small or large landowners in Speckled Wood in well over 10 years and quite probably over several decades since the allotments and smallholding were abandoned. The valley was full of rubbish, overgrown, choked and inaccessible prior to the community clear up work.

Speckled Wood was a wasted community asset, which has been brought back into limited use by local organisations and has huge potential provided that it is redesignated for use as urban green space. It is far too valuable an asset to be left sterile for years to come.

Ore Community Land Trust

Future Plans for Speckled Wood

Land Acquisition, Woodland Management & Enhancement, and Projects for Community Amenities

Ore Community Land Trust, and the community organisations that preceded and created it, have been engaging local residents and organisations over the last 9 years to seek community views and ideas.

There have been numerous public meetings, events and publicity to establish the level of local, and indeed Borough wide, support for retaining Speckled Wood as woodland and green space.

In addition, the removal of large amounts of rubbish, the clearance of footpaths and the stream, the construction of a bridge and many steps to improve accessibility, woodland management of the unregistered land and other work has opened up Speckled Wood to the extent that is well used by the local community for walking to work, education and shops and for leisure.

During the campaign to save Speckled Wood many ideas for utilising the valley for community amenities, in addition to preserving and improving the woodland and maintaining animal habitat, have been developed and presented to residents to seek their views.

Ore Valley Action launched a **Community Plan** exercise to present a range of possible improvements and new amenities such as seating, view points, child and adventure play areas, reinstatement of the abandoned allotments and the construction of a section for the proposed Hastings Greenway. This was well received and generated new ideas such as the concept of creating a Village Green for Ore.

It was recognised that the opportunity to realise these community assets would depend, to a large degree, on securing the core aim of the campaign, which is and has always been to have as much of the woodland valley redesignated as protected urban green space.

This would allow Ore Community Land Trust to seek funding to acquire land in Speckled Wood, which was why it was launched by the previous campaign groups.

Over the last 12 months Ore Community Land Trust has developed a number of its ideas for community amenities in Speckled Wood, in collaboration with other organisations, and has sought support and funding to obtain more detailed design for some of the projects.

The primary projects are:

- **Ore Village Green**
- **Children's and Adventure Play Areas**
- **Community Food Growing**
- **Enhancement of the Valley floor**
- **Woodland Management** to tackle Japanese Knotweed, open up the dense sycamore canopy and improve bio diversity
- **Disabled Access Paths**
- **The Ore Valley Greenway** (including greenway routes in the Lower Ore valley as well as Speckled Wood)

Of these projects, two have obtained local funding in the form of grants from the North East Hastings **Big Local fund**, which is administered by a resident led partnership utilising a £1M Government grant.

These are:

The Ore Village Green project has attracted a great deal of local interest and a research survey organised by Ore Community Land Trust demonstrated the level of public support at 95%. The area of land chosen for this project is on the South side of Speckled Wood behind Old London Road on land that is relatively flat and easily accessible from Ore Village centre.

The detailed design work has been carried out by a landscape architect based the concept plan for a children's adventure play area, performance space and other amenities including a disabled access path. His report, which was drawn up after a land survey, - Community Village Green 'Speckled Wood' Ore - includes many additional ideas including public art installations, a forest school, and barbeque fire pit. The design work was part funded by the Big Local North East Hastings.

This project would involve a partnership with Hastings Borough Council, which owns the small existing Green above the proposed new 'Village Green', to create the disabled access path and other landscaping work.

Land acquisition, which falls within the urban green space protection area included in the DMP, would be taken on by Ore Community Land Trust.

The Ore Valley Greenway Project is more far reaching project that has been created by Ore Community Land Trust working with the Hastings Greenway Group and is based on the walking & cycling routes set out in the new Hastings Local Plan and in the County Council's - Walking & Cycling Strategy. It aims to secure the route network within the Lower and Upper Ore Valleys and one of the more important sections runs through Speckled Wood, within the Development Management Plan proposed urban green space protection area.

A Project Group was established to involve the two largest housing associations (Amicus Horizon and Orbit), the Sussex Coast College, Hastings Academy and the Disability Forum (the paths are intended to be fully accessible to people, with disabilities).

The Big Local fund has agreed to cover the cost of the route design work, construction costings and necessary reports to apply for planning permission. This grant will also cover a program of wide community consultation that Ore Community Land Trust and its partners will run alongside the design work.

The design work will be carried out by Sustrans, the national organisation that promotes and designs walking & cycling routes across the UK.

A number of viable funding sources have been identified for the construction of the Greenway paths and so this project, which will bring much needed connectivity across the Ore Valleys and particular benefits for Speckled Wood and local residents, is very likely to be realised.

Land acquisition for the section of the Greenway in Speckled Wood would be reasonably straightforward as the first section from the Frederick Road end is in fact unregistered and could easily be the subject of a Compulsory Purchase Order by Hastings Borough Council. This idea has been discussed with the lead member for Regeneration. The route then runs through two areas of privately owned land before reaching Church Street - believed to be a 'white' road, which the highway authority could adopt.

The next project to develop is the **Community Food Growing** initiative, which is very much in line with the recognition of the community value of producing locally grown food and involving residents in the process. It would enhance social inclusion and provide a valuable educational opportunity for local schools and volunteer work for people of all ages.

There is only one area of level and accessible land in Speckled Wood suitable for this project, which unsurprisingly is the area of abandoned allotments behind Old London Road and next to the site identified for the Ore Village Green project.

Once again this land is within the DMP urban green space protection area.

It is anticipated that a range of grant funding opportunities will be available for the land acquisition and development of the community food growing project and a partnership of local organisations and schools will be formed to manage the project.

Woodland Below the Village Green and Community Food Growing Area

The area of land for both the Community Food Growing project and the Village Green lies behind Old London Road and benefits for a vehicular access track from Graystone Lane. The land below Graystone Lane slopes away before dropping steeply to the Valley floor. This area is recently grown broad leaved woodland and, although it would benefit from woodland management, some clearance and replanting with indigenous trees, it should be left as woodland to provide the very important buffer zone that provides the quiet and tranquil setting of the centre of Speckled Wood.

Future Projects

Future projects would include a systematic removal of the invasive Japanese Knotweed, enhancement of the Valley floor by selective clearance to open out a clearing with some indigenous tree replanting, seating, the creation of a pond to improve bio diversity and a disabled accessible path running beside the stream and linking to the Greenway.

Further improvements to footpaths and the flight of steps and the creation of a number of viewpoints would be included in later stages of the work in Speckled Wood.

Ore Community Land Trust

Interim Woodland Management and Enhancement Plan for Speckled Wood (V2)

Introduction

Speckled Wood is a wooded ghyll with steep sides at the northern end. A stream runs through the woodland from north to south. The river valley running south from Ore is the last remnant of an ancient system of river valleys that run north to south towards the town of Hastings. The primary habitat is secondary woodland covering an area of approximately 5.1 hectares, which is, in parts, densely overgrown in parts and suffering from a lack of woodland management. Speckled Wood was formerly open land and then subsequently used as allotments until the 1970's. Since that time the valley has been allowed to self-seed primarily with a crown of *Acer pseudoplatanus* (sycamore), an under-storey of *Ilex aquifolium* (English Holly), *Rubus fruticosus* (Bramble), *Hedera helix* (Ivy), ornamental garden escapes and an increasing spread of *Fallopia japonica* (Japanese Knotweed). These species are dominant and exclude the typical bio-diverse species of the area identified in the Hastings Local Biodiversity Action Plan. The native woodland type for Speckled Wood is likely to be NVC W10 (*Quercus robur* – *Pteridium aquilinum* – *Rubus fruticosus*) woodland with some local variation. See 'NVC for woodlands' for the definition of this type of woodland.

Long Term Vision

There is a community aspiration for Speckled Wood, to protect and enhance the wood as a local community asset and public urban green space. This includes a greenway link for connectivity. There will be a range of amenity spaces that act as buffers and an inner ecology zone with a pond habitat managed as a local nature reserve. For a meadow area to be established to encourage and nurture species of flora and fauna, that are becoming scarce in the woodland. Speckled Wood becomes a pivotal social amenity and defining feature for Ore village.

Management Objectives

- 1) To ecologically restore the woodland to its native woodland type. This would be done by thinning out a minimum of 25% of the tree cover, felling predominately non-native sycamores. This would open up the canopy, letting light in to create glade areas and improve the biodiversity of the woodland floor. Removal of some of the denser stands of bramble/ bindweed to enable the field layer to establish. To enhance the woodland. The future bio-diverse planting will be introduced in stages throughout the river valley. The felling of some of the sycamore trees and removal of invasive species will clear much space which can be replanted with native trees, shrubs and field layer plants. Retention of fallen and standing deadwood where it does not cause a hazard to the public.
- 2) To carry out a program of control and removal of Japanese Knotweed. To be co-ordinated with land owners, the Environment Agency and developers. This must be done as a joint strategy to prevent recurrence. The preferred method which is most effective and has the least impact on the environment would be by injection. A more detailed management plan for Japanese Knotweed will be created following discussions with the other affected parties and advice from the Environment Agency.
- 3) To create and maintain new meadow/ grassland areas. These will be created following removal of the Japanese Knotweed and the thinning of the canopy. A meadow area to be created on the north-western bank of the wood below Church Street, establishing a habitat for insects and reptiles. The area around it to be planted with low growing native tree and

scrub species. Grassy areas in other parts of the wood to be kept mown and clear from potentially encroaching scrub. Connectivity between these areas ensured for access for mowing.

- 4) To restore, enhance and maintain the riparian corridor. Landscaping to slow the passage of water and prevent flooding lower down in the valley. Shaded areas kept to encourage mosses, hornworts and liverworts. Creating sections of still and running water, suitable for different species of flora and fauna. Keeping the watercourse free of debris and rubbish. Planting native riparian vegetation.
- 5) To remove waste materials and keep the woodland clear of rubbish. Remove old footings, waste materials and other undesirable debris. To have a weekly routine of litter removal and bin emptying.
- 6) To maintain foraging areas for badgers and other small mammals. Protect known badger routes and ensure connectivity to adjacent gardens. Installing badger gates and corridors to enable badgers to roam. To create wood piles and dry hedging as shelter and nesting sites for small mammals. To keep grass clear for foraging opportunities.
- 7) To create and maintain reptile habitats. This would be enabled through the creation of grassland and meadow areas. To create log piles for cover and install basking rocks.
- 8) To create and maintain a pond on the valley floor. This would create a habitat for amphibians and a diverse range of insect species, as well as aquatic plants. The latter creating a micro habitat for many animals.
- 9) Ensure and maintain good working relations with land owners, the local authorities and other organisations and local companies. This will enable us to continue our program of maintenance and ensure ongoing support.
- 10) To maintain the footpaths, steps and bridges throughout the wood. To highlight any potential safety problems and carry out repairs where necessary. To ensure ease of access to the wood for all of the public. Creating and maintaining paths suitable for use by wheelchairs and pushchairs.
- 11) To provide and maintain public areas for community use such as the Village Green. There is a separate document for the Village Green and facilities planned within. Other areas within the woodland, and the valley floor to be maintained and enhanced for public use. Installation of seating and litter bins.
- 12) To support Hastings Greenway Group with the part of the route that will run through Speckled Wood. To enable the greenway to be installed and help and advise the Greenway Group to plan the route and problem solve.
- 13) To consult with the public before any major development or necessary works to improve the woodland are carried out. This will take the form of public notices, surveys, open meetings, consultations, drop-in sessions.
- 14) To restore the allotments for public and local school use. Encourage schools to 'adopt' an allotment for use by their pupils to grow edible plants and learn about gardening.
- 15) To educate children about nature and ecology. Creating a Woodland Classroom area. Promoting the wood and open days through local media and schools.

Management and Maintenance

Management and maintenance of the ecological planting will be specified by ecologists and the landscape architect as part of a 10 year management and maintenance programme, there will be reviews carried out at intervals to assess how the biodiversity is developing and schedule adjustments to the plan as required.

The materials forming the structure of the site will be designed for extended use and applications for revenue funding will enable a future management programme. It is intended that the OCLT with assistance from local volunteers will adopt a regular management programme to ensure the future of the valley.

Staged Restoration

The proposed village green has been identified by OCLT as the first stage in the restoration of Speckled Wood river valley. OCLT intend to deliver the initial project with the support of the Ore community, Hastings Borough Council, Big Local North East Hastings and other bodies.

OCLT hope that subsequent stages of restoration will involve a partnership with HBC to provide a disabled route and terraced space on the land adjacent to Old London Road, to restore the allotments for local public use, to provide in accordance with the Hastings Local Biodiversity Action Plan (HBAP) a staged programme of ecological restoration, development of footpaths, riparian treatment of Ore stream and public open space following local consultation.

Sources and reference material used

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