

Heritage and Archaeological Statement

for

Ham Hill Visitor Centre, Lime Kiln Car Park, Ham Hill, Stoke-Sub-Hamdon,
Somerset

Prepared by: SSDC Countryside Team and Heritage & Leisure, August 2022



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Consultees

Project consultee and report reviewer – Marcus Brittain, Senior Project Officer, Cambridge Archaeological Unit, Department of Archaeology, Cambridge University

Sasha Chapman, Inspector of Ancient Monuments – Dorset, Somerset & Exmoor National Park, Historic England

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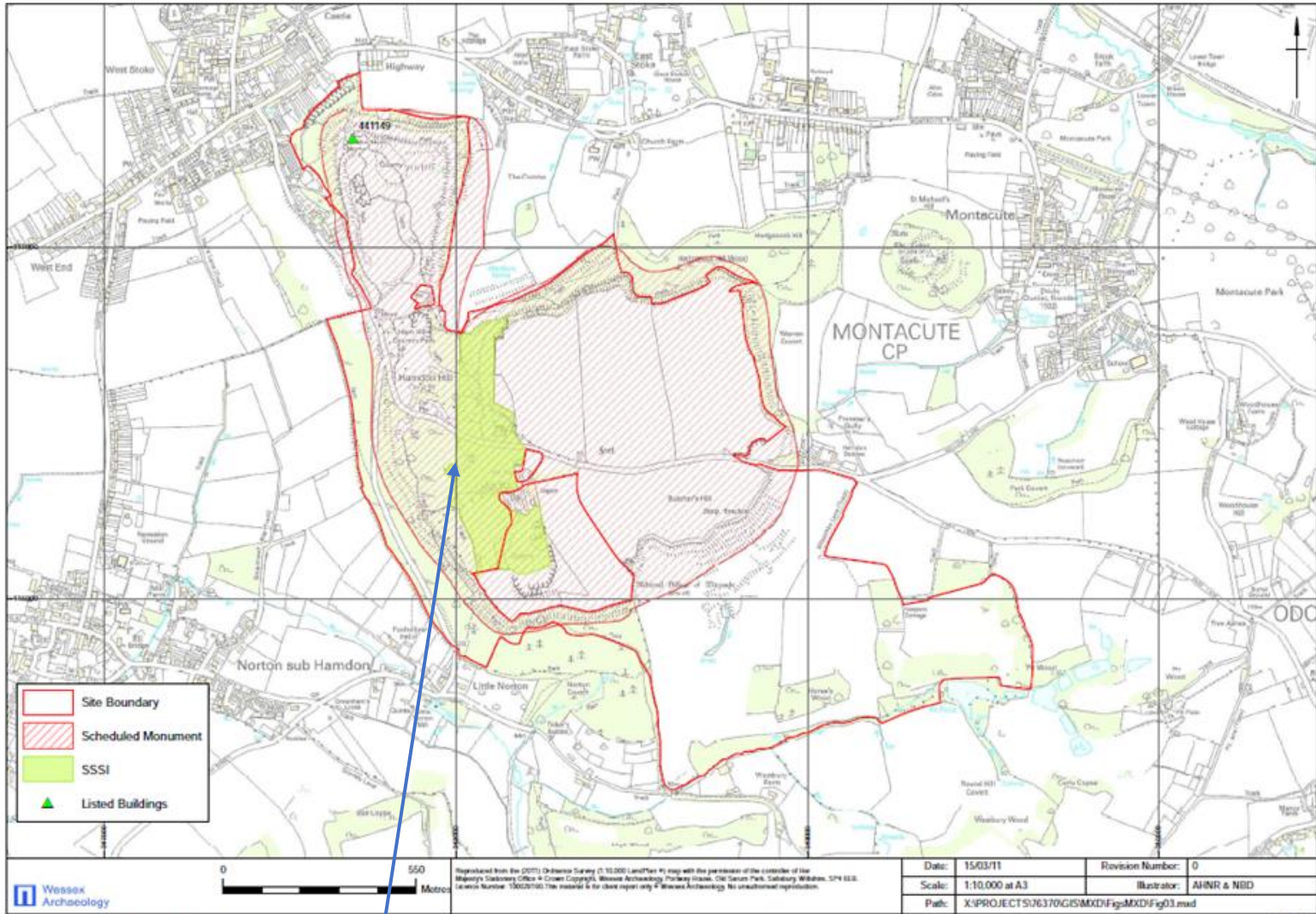
Dr David H Evans, Senior Environmental Specialist – Stratigraphy, Natural England

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1. Site Address

Proposed Development Area (PDA)
Site to the south of;
Lime Kiln Car Park
Ham Hill
Stoke-Sub-Hamdon
Somerset

NGR: ST 480 163



Statutory Designations of the Country Park

Figure 2

Proposed Development Area



Visitor Centre site images

2. Proposed development

South Somerset District Council propose the construction of a new Visitor Centre for the Ham Hill Country Park at a location to the south of Lime Kiln car park, one of a number of car parks within the country park accessed from the highway running through the Country Park.

The Visitor Centre is a key part of the 'Uncovering Ham Hill's past for its future' project developed by South Somerset Countryside Service since 2018 and supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The project aims to improve the Country Park and ensure that Ham Hill is well-managed, well-resourced and a welcoming place for visitors, creating a sustainable future for the Country Park.

The project secured initial development support from the Heritage Fund in March 2019, subsequent work has led to the submission of the final bid for significant support for an improved future of the Country Park and its heritage.

The overall project timetable is:

- Submission of Heritage Fund application – August 2022
- Submission of planning permission and Scheduled Monument consent applications – August 2022
- Heritage Fund Delivery Stage decision – December 2022
- Developing building designs – February 2023 to September 2023
- Building manufacture and construction – November 2023 to July 2024
- Opening October 2024
- Scheduled Monument repairs and clearance works – (4 winters) October to February 2023/24, 2024/25, 2025/26, 2026/27
- Staff members in post through project funding - April 2023 to March 2026
- Volunteer recruitment and training – June 2023 onwards
- Activity plan activities – August 2023 onwards
- End of project and completion of project evaluation – June 2027

3. Nature of the heritage and archaeological asset

Ham Hill Country Park, which comprises one of Britain's largest prehistoric hillforts, totalling 88.1ha, and is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM 1003678) with considerable known archaeology and significant further archaeological potential. The development site also sits within a Geological SSSI due to the Ham Hill Stone which occurs here.

The hill's solid geology consists of Liassic Ham stone (shelly limestone) overlain by compacted Yeovil Sand with a capping of bioturbated sandy soils (including palaeosols and colluvium), sandy subsoil and a thin grassed topsoil. The thickness of these layers may vary considerably, though to no more than c. 0.9m.

The hill has been quarried for its stone since Roman times, and most intensively during the Medieval period, with localised activities during the later nineteenth and early twentieth

centuries. There are voids along the perimeter of the car park and the PDA that have been entirely quarried. Remains of a limekiln are set against a bare quarried face within one of the voids on the southeast corner of the car park.

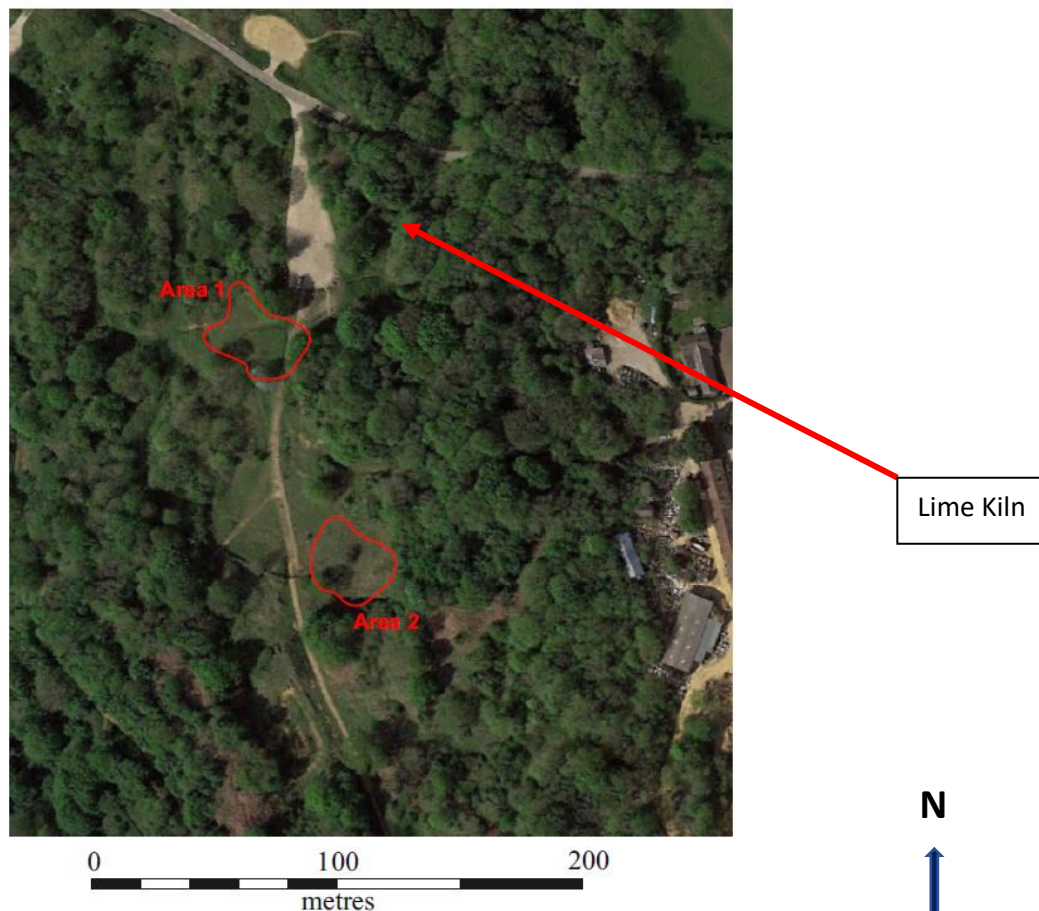
Two quarries today operate on the north and southwest portions of the hilltop; neither affect, nor are affected by, the proposed works.

Since 2019 Hamdon Hill Scheduled Monument has been designated 'at risk' by Historic England due to visitor pressures, vegetation growth, animal damage and the on-going quarrying of Ham stone.

4. The form and materials of the heritage and archaeological asset that would be affected

The site of the PDA has been chosen following extensive discussions with Historic England due to its location away from the ramparts and within an area known to have been previously quarried.

To inform the Historic England view on the PDA, Scheduled Monument Consent was secured in September 2021 for archaeological trench evaluation work to be undertaken in two locations to the south of Lime Kiln car park.



Aerial view of Lime Kiln car park with two locations to the south where fieldwork investigations were undertaken, area 1 is the PDA

The evaluation work was conducted in November 2021 and can be summarised as:

Four trenches were opened between the 15th and 18th November 2021 in two areas south of the Limekiln car park, centred ST 480 163. The hilltop was known to have been subject to quarrying since the Roman period with operations considerably expanded during the later nineteenth century. Quarrying activity was revealed in each of the trenches. Trench 1 was located within the footprint of the PDA (Area 1). Excavated to a depth of 2m, this revealed only quarry waste material that filled a quarried void, the base of which was not reached. Further evidence of quarrying was recorded in Trenches 2-4 (Area 2), about 80m south of Trench 1, as well as stone foundations of a structure shown on the 1886 Ordnance Survey map. This was part of a complex of buildings belonging to quarry workings, which were no longer present in the map's 1906 edition. Iron files and zinc sheet templates were recovered from deposits associated with the building and its demolition, as well as window glass and ceramic roof tiles. A maker's stamp on one tile fragment may be securely dated to after 1867. Probably a masonry workshop, the 'floor' within the interior of the building showed no evidence for having previously been subject to quarrying, though it may have been truncated.

No pre-nineteenth century features were identified.

Limekiln Car Park, Ham Hill, Somerset. - An Archaeological Evaluation, Cambridge Archaeological Unit, January 2022

5. Elements to be demolished or removed

The only removal of elements would be from the limited excavation for foundation piers, topsoil removal to allow min 150mm ventilation under building, drainage soakaways and entrance visibility splays. Any material excavated on site would be reused in other parts of the Scheduled Monument to build up levels i.e. to create a level area for the roadside pedestrian path.

The landscape proposals are shown in the Landscape Proposals document.

The foundation and drainage (foul and surface water) proposals are shown in the Civil and Structural Engineering Stage 3 Report.

The highways works are to improve visibility splays, create roadside path and make more efficient use of the car parks are shown in drawings provided as part of the Transport Statement.

6. The significance of the asset affected

Ham Hill retains a significant amount of its evidence of past use as an Iron Age hill fort and hidden through buried archaeology an enormous amount of known and unknown remains providing evidence of occupation and use of the site from Iron Age, to Roman, through Medieval to Modern. Ham Hill is also an extremely large Hill Fort, although its past use is not known to many.

In addition, the site includes important habitats and significant geological exposures. The Ham Stone in itself is much prized for building work, including the repair of historic buildings. e.g. nearby Montacute House.

Ham Hill has had an influence on the surrounding land for millennia, as a lookout and safe haven to more recent vital use of the site and its stone for employment. Culturally Ham Hill has influenced many writers and featured in traditions.

In summary Ham Hill is highly significant historically, recognised by its Scheduled Monument status which acknowledges that such large multivallate hillforts are rare.

The listing concludes:

‘The multi period archaeological landscape at Ham or Hamdon Hill and Butcher’s Hill is extremely important since it includes far more than the Iron Age and Romano British deposits, as this impressive plateau was clearly the source of occupation, agricultural, territorial commercial and industrial activity far beyond these periods and continued as an important trading centre into the medieval period with fairs and markets. Therefore, its archaeological potential cannot be overemphasised.’

Hamdon Hill camp, Scheduled Monument list entry 1003678, Historic England

The significance of heritage assets can be considered using Evidential, Historical, Aesthetic and Communal values.

Evidential Value

This derives from those elements of a heritage asset that can provide evidence about past human activity. The observable hill fort and its ramparts along with the known and unknown archaeological remains illustrate Very High Evidential Value.

The site also has evidence of stone working and quarrying, which has shaped the landscape and left geological exposures designated as SSSI and evidence of human working including spoil heaps and a lime kiln.

Despite the vegetation encroachment and signs of erosion Ham Hill demonstrates Very High Evidential Value.

Historical Value

This derives from how the heritage asset might illustrate a particular aspect of past life or be associated with a notable family, person, event or movement.

The site has extensive found and covered remains that provide an important resource and source of evidence of past lives. This evidence follows through millennia of use of the hill fort and its stone industries. It also has a history of gatherings for fairs and demonstrations as well as more recent use by local industry for helicopter testing.

Overall the site demonstrates Very High Historical Value.

Aesthetic Value

This derives from the way in which people draw sensory and intellectual stimulation from a heritage asset.

Ham Hill, particularly its western and northern slopes are a dramatic feature in the landscape. They have attracted people for centuries with writers inspired by the views and the Northern Spur being identified as a site for a very visible war memorial.

Ham Hill continues to attract people to enjoy its countryside variety and views. As evidenced by the visitor views recorded in Summer 2019 for many people Ham Hill has featured throughout their lives and has been the location for momentous personal events e.g. engagements and family gatherings.

There is a High Aesthetic Value of Ham Hill and its position overlooking the Somerset Levels.

Communal Value

This derives from the meanings that a heritage asset has for the people who relate to it or for whom it figures in their collective experience or memory.

For centuries people have gathered on Ham Hill be it for fayres or the protests led by George Mitchell, who championed rights and a living wage for agricultural workers. Ham Hill continues to play an important part of people's lives. Current events such as the annual bonfire continue to bring the community together.

In addition, it forms an important part of the activities of local organisations, groups and schools.

Overall is of High Communal Value.

It is for this reason that the PDA chosen is suitable for development due to the extensive quarrying in this area that has destroyed any archaeology and its setting away from the ramparts and in a site screened by trees where views of the site are limited. The impact of this project on the Evidential, Historical, Aesthetic and Communal values is low with a greater role in preserving or enhancing the heritage and archaeological asset, see section 10.

7. The proposed works

Inspired by the rich Iron Age history of the wider site, the design of the new visitors' centre is circular in form.



Concept plan

The building appears to hover above the ground, a design response which accommodates the slope of the site and minimises excavations and the need to remove spoil from the site. Sitting upon small concrete piers or steel screw foundations which can be removed in future years with minimal site impact, the whole building is designed to be both environmentally and contextually sensitive. An outer wrapping enclosing wall to the building is punctuated by focussed openings to allow views into the interior spaces, light, and natural ventilation. The inner face of the circle is open – permeable and welcoming.

The overall form has evolved in design through the consultation process. Composed of a single building which is subdivided into components (such as the café and exhibition areas) which can be operated independently. A shared external terrace and canopy element unifies the components and provides space for outdoor learning events and visitors to gather. A central congregating space within the circle provides a space for informal play, and the roof of the building slopes inwards towards the middle to lessen the mass and bulk and to help create a sense of intimacy. The circular design theme, which alludes to the Hamstone circle nearby and the form of Iron Age buildings and enclosures, is reinforced through the design including the access points, with steps and a ramp incorporated into the circular form, a curved terrace which connects all the building elements and the curved canopy/brise soleil which offers protection from solar gain in the summer months.



Concept sketch

The proposal is considerate of the surrounding landscape and integrates the natural site contours within its design minimising the need for excavation and removal of spoil. The wooded backdrop provides an important context for the building as this will be the context that it is viewed against. The café seating will extend to the west to allow enjoyment of the trees and evening sunlight and to connect with the new footpath from the Twin car parks to the north and a new roadside path.

A packaged sewage treatment plant is proposed to be installed in a formerly quarried hollow to the north of the visitor centre (preferred location) or to the south of the centre within the previously quarried area. See separate Structural Engineers report.

Surface water drainage will make use of the permeability of the ground and using existing hollows and ditches for any discharge. See separate Structural Engineers report.

The substructure of the visitor centre will be formed by series of small cylindrical concrete piers bearing into solid ground with the depth to be confirmed by site investigation (SI). These will minimise any disturbance to the ground and elevate the structure above the existing soil profile. The piers will typically be at 3.5m centres. Helical screw piles spaced apart at similar centres are also an option. The suitability of this foundation type will be dependent on the SI, as screw piles cannot be installed within rock. The proposal in any case, is to minimise excavation and the disturbance to ground on site. See separate Structural Engineers report.

Existing trees will be retained around the perimeter of the site and no works are to take place near any significant trees. See separate arboricultural survey.

Fundamentally, the aim has been to create a proposal which is respectful and responds appropriately to its natural setting whilst enhancing the visitor appreciation and understanding of Ham Hill Country Park. See separate LVIA.



Elevation

See attached architectural Stage 3 - Planning Drawing Set for the Ham Hill Visitor Centre

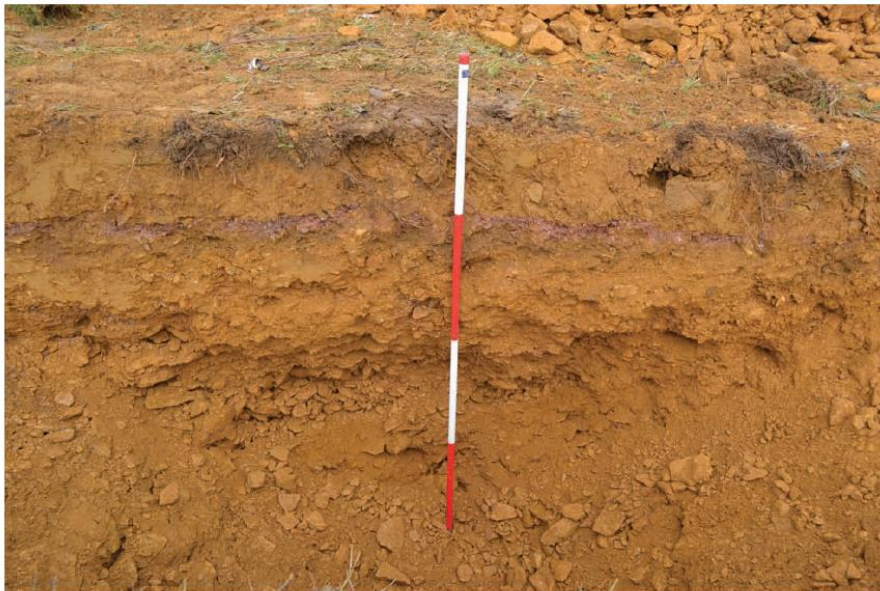
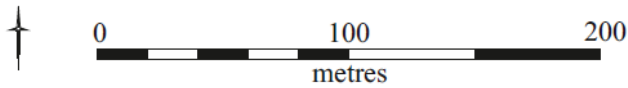
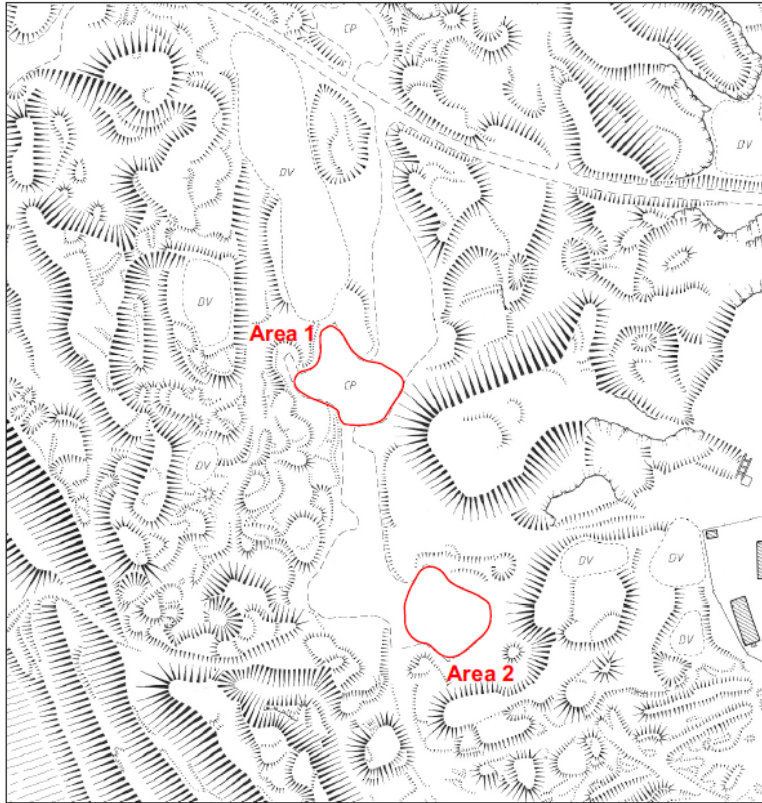
8. Relevant planning history

In 1975 a Country Park was established at Ham Hill with the support of the Countryside Commission, and the formal support of the original three landowners. The original Country Park occupied around 60ha of mainly former quarry workings at the Northern end of Ham Hill. During the late 1990's and early 2000's the District Council acquired, with substantial financial support from the Heritage Lottery Fund and English Heritage, a further 100 hectares, progressively increasing the Country Park to its current 173 ha.

Ham Hill Country Park is an area of countryside 173 hectares in size, and South Somerset District Council has responsibility for the management of this land. The land is owned by two parties, the District Council (139ha), and the Duchy of Cornwall (34ha) – 25ha, Northern Spur and 9ha, Hedgecock Hill.

In 2018 the opportunity arose to purchase the Shuldhams Estate land. With the support of a successful grant application to the National Heritage Memorial Fund and the award of £235,500 for the land purchase and legal costs. The land purchase completed in March 2019.

The PDA was previously established as a car park for the original country park, as is shown by 'CP' on the plan below and evidenced by the layer of compacted type 1 stone showing pink in the figure below – b) Trench 1, profile, just below the surface. A layer of quarried ham stone and soil was subsequently placed over the car park, probably in the 1980's when the area ceased to be used as a car park. The PDA is now covered in short grass and scrub and has low ecological value.



b) Trench 1, profile

9. The impact on the asset

The various parts of Ham Hill have been considered in terms of their Capacity for Change, taking into account significance and vulnerability. The capacity for change must also be considered in terms of potential mitigation and how any actual change is undertaken and also whether it is of minimal or reversible impact.

The relevant extract from the Capacity for Change analysis is shown below. This was produced for the Heritage Fund 2022 Conservation Plan and was informed by the 2011 Archaeological Management Plan that states for this area that

‘This area shows evidence of having been extensively quarried in the past (19th century or earlier) with quarry pits and spoil heaps well in excess of 15m high’

The report considers this area to be of low vulnerability.

Element	Significance <i>(High significance, Significant, Moderately significant, Low significance)</i>	Vulnerability <i>(Highly vulnerable, Vulnerable, Moderately robust, Robust)</i>	Capacity for Change <i>(High, Moderate, Low, Very Low)</i>	Notes / mitigation
To south of Lime Kiln car park	Low significance	Moderately robust	Moderate	Area previously a car park and site of past quarrying, Proposed Visitor Centre to have minimal ground intrusion, archaeological appraisal undertaken, and archaeological watching brief during works.

10. Role in preserving or enhancing the heritage and archaeological asset

The development of a Visitor Centre is a critical part of the wider ‘Uncovering Ham Hill’s past for its future’ Heritage Fund supported project.

Through the project development and with the support of the National Lottery Heritage Fund the project team have been undertaking extension consultation, visitor surveys, trial activities and stakeholder engagement over the last three years.

Overall satisfaction with the visitor experience is high; 96% rate the experience as excellent or good. Visitors are least satisfied with information about the history and wildlife in the park and signposting to and around the park. There are also a number of areas of the visitor experience that people are not aware of; namely the opportunities to talk to Rangers or volunteers or the activities and events programmes.

The visitor survey found that:

- Less than half of visitors (46%) have a good understanding of the history of Ham Hill
- Only 50% of visitors know more about nature and wildlife as a result of their visit
- Most visitors are more interested in wildlife and the history of Ham Hill after visiting (60% and 69% respectively) however around a third are unsure.

These results are further backed up by the fact that a third of visitors (32%) are not aware of Ham Hill’s importance as one of the largest Iron Age hill forts in Europe.

By raising awareness of the historical and archaeological importance of the site we want visitors to better look after the site, support it and become involved. The site has already seen in recent years a growth in volunteering from local communities and we expect that to grow.

These survey results reinforce the need for new opportunities to undertake visitor engagement to increase people's understanding and appreciation of the heritage value of Ham Hill.

We want the visitor centre to be central to our proposals to improve the management of the Country Park and to improve the condition of the heritage and the Scheduled Monument through more resources, increased staff levels and greater volunteering.

Through the Heritage Fund project funding will support:

- New machinery to manage the site
- Improvements to the archaeological condition of the hillfort by removal of scrub on the ramparts and erosion repairs; our aim is to play a major role in helping to remove Ham Hill from the Historic England 'at risk' register
- Specialist conservation repair works to the historic Lime Kiln
- Greater resources for the ongoing repair of the dry-stone walls across the site
- The provision of new interpretive and educational resources to help visitors better understand, respect and care for the site
- A diverse range of activities and events to provide opportunities for a wider range of people to enjoy Ham Hill
- Provide better facilities for staff, volunteers and visitors and the development of new opportunities for volunteering
- Improvements to the highway to reduce traffic speeds, make it obvious to visitors they are arriving at somewhere special through new gateway markers, new crossing points and pedestrian roadside paths

Through the visitor centre and other means we will increase income generation from the site through a café, retail, donations and sponsorship. This increased income will support sustained higher numbers of rangers on site and increase resources for heritage management work on site.

Key outcomes for Ham Hill will be:

- The Scheduled Monument and its underlying archaeology will be protected.
- Biodiversity will increase and the wildlife on site will have more space to expand their populations. The wildlife will be better protected and have more resilience in a changing climate.
- The path network will be more resilient to visitors and suffer less erosion.
- Ham Hill will be cleaner.
- Ham Hill will be respected.

11. Use of appropriate materials and design

It is proposed that the main structure of the building will be Glulam Timber beams, with locally sourced green timber cladding. The embodied carbon of the timber cladding and the structural frame is therefore incredibly low. Zinc is proposed for the roof which whilst higher in embodied carbon due to its processing, can be recycled many times once its design life on this building is complete.

Windows will be high performing, thermally broken composite windows with a low thermal transmittance and will typically be formed from timber (to the inner face) and aluminium (which is recyclable) to the outer face.

Inside the building, surfaces intend to be exposed durable birch faced plywood to ensure gypsum products are minimised and the embodied carbon is reduced. Plywood will be treated with a fire retardant to ensure there is no risk of fire spread internally. The use of a natural product will also eliminate the need for any plaster or paint finish further minimising embodied carbon. Lighting will be low voltage, low energy LED fittings and externally lighting will be minimal LED fittings at low level.

12. Conclusion

The proposed Visitor Centre development is a much needed asset for the Country Park. At present there is no visitor welcome and orientation point, particularly important for new visitors and those unaccustomed to visiting the countryside.

The visitor centre location has been chosen after extensive thought and discussion on a location previously disturbed by extensive quarrying and which has minimal visual impact. The location also draws visitors away from the 'honey-pot' northern spur area, spreading visitor impact and erosion. The expansion of the Country Park since its beginnings has spread the landholdings to the south and east, with no alteration to the location of toilets and refreshments. The re-focus of the Country Park will improve its management of visitors and impact on the heritage.

The Visitor Centre design is appropriate to the location providing a sensitive and light touch facility that is open and welcoming to visitors. Its use of local and natural materials provides an in-keeping approach that minimises environmental impacts from its construction and use.

The National Lottery Heritage Project is poised to implement a 'step-change' in the management of the Country Park developing a holistic approach to improved management of all of its heritage assets.

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