

# Blackheath Village Enhancement Plan

This document sets out the long term management objectives and guidelines for Blackheath village. The plan has been developed with local involvement and it is intended that it should be the first point of reference for all those with an interest in the village.

## Background Information

For the purpose of this plan 'the village' has been defined as the verges running through Blackheath Lane; the verge to the village sign on Littleford Lane and Sample Oak Lane up to the junction with the Downs Link. The private road to Aston House and the Downs Link to Tangleway Way are also included. A margin of common land directly adjacent to the rear of the houses in the village has also been included, as has the cricket pitch (appendix I). Individual private residences are excluded.

## Site Status

The majority of the area is designated as common land (CL 179 and CL7) which is protected by various Acts of Parliament. In addition the common land is covered by the Commons Registration Scheme and bye-laws (appendix II).

The village and surrounding land lies with the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and Area of Great Landscape Value (AGLV). The central part of the village has been designated by Waverley Borough Council as a Conservation Area (Appendix III) for its historical and architectural interest and areas around the village hall and war memorial have been identified as Areas of High Archaeological Potential (appendix III).

The majority of properties back directly onto Blackheath Site of Special Scientific Interest (appendix IV). In addition to the bye-laws the SSSI designation restrict many more activities and require consent from Natural England. Activities likely to damage a SSSI include dumping of garden waste, bonfires, chemical use and storage of materials (appendix V).

## Landownership/Leases

Blackheath Common is owned by The Honourable Peter Herbert and managed by Waverley Borough Council. As land owner The Hon Peter Herbert retains the right to grant easements and wayleaves over the common, whilst Waverley Borough Council has responsibility for all other aspects of management.

There is a separate lease arrangement between the land owner with the cricket club and The Villagers car park.

Land subject to a lease or easement retains its status as common land and therefore, should remain accessible to the public for 'air and exercise' at all times.

## Landscape Character

In order to understand what makes Blackheath village special a landscape assessment was carried out by the Enhancement Project Group using a standard methodology developed by the Countryside Agency. The following areas were identified:

- 1. The village** – A linear strip of verge, mostly grass, which runs up through the village and extends to the Blackheath signs along Littleford Lane and Sample Oak Lane. Land that has been managed directly to the rear of properties has also been included.
- 2. The cricket green** – This is essentially the area leased to the cricket club which extends slightly beyond the outfield.
- 3. Village periphery** – This includes areas that are isolated from the village nucleus such as the War Memorial and tracks leading to Tangleway, Moorland House and around Aston House.

## Guiding Principles

These are the policies that have been developed to protect and enhance Blackheath village. They should be used as the guiding principles for any future management decisions.

### **Protect the common land and its historic common pattern Protect the rural character of Blackheath village**

As the area covered is common land it has many layers of protection. This has helped to make Blackheath the attractive village that it is today. Further protection is offered by some of the village being within a Conservation Area. The entire village lies within the Surrey Hills AONB.

In order to protect the long term footprint of the historic common it is important to protect against activities that are both detrimental to the integrity of the common and its status as a Site of Special Scientific Interest. Action will be taken against encroachment onto the common or use of the common in an inappropriate way.

To help retain the rural character of the village it is important to protect against creeping urbanisation and ensure residents are sensitive to the rural situation of the village. Inappropriate surfacing of access tracks over the common, planting and lighting can have a detrimental effect on the rural character of the village.

### **Conserve and enhance the distinct landscape character of Blackheath village**

The survey identified three character areas which together make up the habited part of Blackheath village. However, the shared feature of these areas is the overall ruralness, characterised by the relative naturalistic feel and openness of the verges through the village. The distinct features of these areas should be respected and enhanced whenever possible.

A 1833 rate book makes the first reference to people living in Blackheath. Many of the prominent boundary banks surrounding properties today are valuable historic features from around this time which define land being enclosed from the common. It is important that these do not become damaged.

### **Protect and enhance key views**

The distinct features and views identified in the survey should be protected and taken into account when any works or development are to be considered. Where possible views are to be protected from encroaching vegetation and enhanced where practical.

### **Protect verges**

The most problematic areas will be identified and steps taken to reinstate these eroded verges and prevent further erosion by both surface water and vehicles. However, it is important that any measures introduced to prevent the verges from being eroded are not eyesores themselves and are sympathetic to the village setting. Materials that lend themselves to both the rural character and geology of the area should be considered.

### **Prevent proliferation of access tracks**

There are numerous vehicular access tracks over the common, allowing residents to gain access to their properties. These tracks have been permitted and in most cases regularised by the landowner through an easement. An easement does not grant a right to park on the common, it only

permits access across the common to allow vehicles to be parked within the property boundary.

To retain the rural character of the area and to comply with Waverley's specification for access tracks and should be single vehicle width and of an unbound surface (see Waverley Borough Council Guidelines for Access Tracks on Common Land, appendix VI). The responsibility for maintaining access tracks lies with the owner of the property that enjoys right of access over the common. The householder also has responsibility for maintaining the pipes under the tracks and ensuring that they do not become blocked.

### **Prevent and reduce visual impact of signs and street furniture**

Highway signs and unsightly advertising signs detract from the rural character of villages. Unfortunately, SCC is not obliged to consult over the installation of new signs or obliged to remove redundant ones. However, as the village lies within the Surrey Hills AONB the use of the Surrey Hills standard design wooden signs and posts should be used, where appropriate.

Advertising is controlled by planning regulations and bye-laws. Guidelines for Signs on Common Land are available from the Countryside Ranger (appendix VII). All unauthorised signs will be removed.

### **Provide for formal and informal public recreation and community events**

The Blackheath Village Society holds an annual May Day Fair. This is a very popular event which attracts thousands of visitors to the village and raises a considerable amount of money for local causes.

In addition, the village hall holds many of its own events and hires out the hall for various activities. Visitors to the hall have no alternative but to park on the common land adjacent to the hall. Whilst it is not possible to legitimise this, unless permission is sought from the Planning Inspectorate, no action to prevent parking will be taken as there is no practical alternative.

### **Management Issues & Solutions**

The Landscape Assessment identified a number of issues. By applying the Guiding Principles above the following solutions have been identified. These will form the basis of the Blackheath Village Enhancement Plan, for which funding will be sought and will also guide the long term management actions.