

GSIA PROPOSALS FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF THE INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGY OF LECKHAMPTON HILL

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Introduction

In 2001 Cheltenham Borough Council commissioned a firm of environmental consultants, Nortoft Partnerships Ltd, to produce a Management Plan for Leckhampton Hill Charlton Kings Common and Daisybank Fields. It therefore covers an area of approximately 165 acres (67 hectares). The plan considers the future management of the biological, geological and historic environment aspects of the area. In addition, it addresses matters such as access and recreation and landscape and visual considerations. A large number of organisations, including the Gloucestershire Society for Industrial Archaeology, made representations during the production of the Plan during the first eight months of 2002.

The resulting Management Plan is a large document running to nearly 300 pages with an additional 31 page summary. It is intended that it will be a rolling plan which will guide management over five year periods to a cumulative total of 20 years. Issue 1 of the document (August 2002) was adopted by the Friends of Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common (FOLK) in October 2002 and by Cheltenham Borough Council in November 2002 following widespread consultation. The objectives and recommendations in Issue 1 of the Management Plan were unchanged in Issue 2 (April 2003) but a number of typographical and other errors in the document have been corrected. The most significant change in Issue 2 is that the objectives and recommendations were numbered to facilitate referencing them during the lifetime of the plan. At the time of writing (August 2003) copies of the Management Plan were available for consultation at Cheltenham Library or at the Cheltenham Borough Council offices. It was also available on the Cheltenham Borough Council web site (www.cheltenham.gov.uk).

The representations made by GSIA in June 2002 included a set of proposals which were very similar to those set out below. In February 2002 a GSIA working party successfully carried out scrub clearance on Top (or Number 4) Incline and consequently that incline was not included in the 2002 proposals. However, it is clear just eighteen months later that the scrub was already starting to return and therefore it has been included in these updated proposals. Similarly, the original proposals did not mention the remains of the lime kilns at the Focal Point of the Railways as these were covered elsewhere and we wished to focus on the tramroads and inclines. However, for completeness these structures have now also been included.

GSIA Proposals for Conservation Work to be Included in the Management Plan (as updated July 2003)

GSIA would like to make a number of proposals for conservation work to be included in the forthcoming management plan. These proposals relate to the tramroads and inclines on Leckhampton Hill.

Previous submissions to the consultants from the Society and a former Chairman, Mr David Bick, have highlighted the importance of the industrial archaeology and industrial history of Leckhampton Hill. These topics have been well documented in the book *Old Leckhampton* written by David Bick (3) and a copy has been presented to the consultants by him.

The present document makes a number of proposals for specific conservation work following a re-evaluation of the remains of the former tramroads and inclines which has been carried out by members of GSIA during the first six months of 2002.

The underlying theme for most of the proposals is to safeguard the line of the tramroads and inclines by means of scrub clearance and limited tree removal as appropriate. In addition to affording protection to the sites from further damage, the clearance work will make it much easier for future users of the hill to understand the ingenious and complex railway network that was created by the 19th century workers to transport the stone from the quarries down to Cheltenham.

In some locations stone tramroad 'sleeper' blocks are known to lie just below the present ground levels. It is therefore proposed that some of these blocks are re-exposed so that the public will be aware of their existence. Again this will greatly assist the public in their understanding of the nature of these very early 'railways'.

The Society considers that it is very important to propose projects that are achievable with relatively limited resources. Some of the projects could be carried out by GSIA in a similar manner to the scrub clearance carried out on the Top Incline in February 2002. In some instances small trees have grown up on the line of the tramroads and inclines and the initial felling may need to be carried out by professional contractors, but voluntary groups could be used to complete the task. Since scrub clearance will be restricted to the line of the tramroads the actual area affected is relatively small.

The proposals will now be listed according to location on Leckhampton Hill.

1 Line of Tramroad to Brownstone Quarry

- 1.1 Removal of small trees and scrub from the line of the tramroad where it runs from the top of the Top Incline (SO95001848) to the point (SO95081848) where the tramroad turns south-east to enter the former Brownstone Quarry. This is a distance of approximately 80 metres in an easterly direction.
- 1.2 Stone sleeper blocks are known to exist on this stretch of tramroad from the GSIA excavation carried out in 1973. However, the blocks are now fully covered by soil and turf. This is considered one of the key areas where the double line of blocks should be re-exposed for the benefit of the public. It is proposed that the tops of sleeper blocks should simply be exposed such that the tops of the blocks lie flush with the surrounding ground.
- 1.3 Extend the scrub clearance eastwards from (SO95081848) for a distance of about 70 metres. This would cover the branch line and sidings shown on the 1880 O.S. map. The cuttings for these sidings are clearly visible today. (SO95151848)

2 Middle Incline

- 2.1 Removal of trees and scrub growing on the line of Middle Incline from its foot at Tramway Cottage (SO94931885) to the top at the Focal Point of the Railways (SO94921859). This is a distance of approximately 260 metres.

- 2.2 A resistivity survey could then be carried out to determine if any of the sleeper blocks remain in-situ on Middle Incline. If blocks were found then it would be desirable to excavate back the soil to expose the tops of the blocks as in Proposal 1.2

3 Focal Point of the Railways

- 3.1 Remove the small number of trees that lie at the very foot of Top Incline which are exactly in line with the incline (SO94931856). This will allow walkers on the hill to look directly up to see the 1 in 2.1 incline. At present these trees block the view up the incline.
- 3.2 Clear away the scree and debris from the most westerly of the 1924 lime kilns. (SO94871853)
- 3.3 Carry out basic consolidation of the concrete bases of the lime kiln (SO94881854).
- 3.4 Carry out basic consolidation of the ruins of the former Electrical Plant House. (SO94921855).
- 3.5 Rails from the 2 foot gauge railway that supplied limestone to the top of the 1924 lime kilns may be seen currently, lying around on the gable end of the former Electrical Plant House. (SO94921855). An appropriate re-use of these rails would be as posts for signage.

4. Daisybank Road

- 4.1 Carry out an investigation to determine whether any of the stone sleeper blocks remain in-situ in the shallow cutting along the south side of Daisybank Road between the corner of the tramroad at Tramway Cottage (SO94931885) and the main road (B4070: Leckhampton Hill). This is a distance of about 100 metres.
- 4.2 If it can be established that there are still stone sleeper blocks in-situ then a length of blocks should have their tops exposed so that the tops of the sleeper blocks lie flush with the surrounding ground. This should create a useful point of interest as this is the entry point to the hill for many visitors.

5 Top Incline

- 5.1 Removal of trees and scrub growing on the line of Top Incline from its foot at (SO94931885) to the top at (SO94921859). This is a distance of approximately 260 metres.

References

- (1) Cheltenham Borough Council, Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common Management Plan, Issue 2, April 2003.
- (2) R. Wilson The Industrial Archaeology of Leckhampton Hill, GSIA Journal for 2001, pp 35-46.
- (3) David Bick, *Old Leckhampton (Quarries-Railways-Riots-Devils Chimney)*, 2nd Edition, Runpast Publishing, Cheltenham, 1994.