

Outline for summary character assessment



Berry Hill, Christchurch and Edge End

Character and Site Assessments

Introduction:

Our character and site assessments serve to celebrate a unique area, rich in opportunities for well-being and essential for wildlife conservation. The assessments reference the documents produced by the Forest of Dean District Council.

The Forest of Dean lies in West Gloucestershire in the angle formed by the rivers Wye and Severn. It began as a large area of woodland and wasteland, reserved for Royal hunting before 1066. It was the most significant producer of oak timber used for ship building and the geology of the area supported many local industries including: mining of coal and ores, charcoal burning, tanneries and other crafts. It is one of England's most valuable and ancient woodlands covering 27,000 acres. This ancient mixed woodland was the first designated national forest park – designated in 1938 and called 'The Queen of the Forests'. The Wye Valley, at the edge of our area, is a designated area of outstanding natural beauty (AONB).

The Forest of Dean was an extra-parochial area in the historical area of the St Briavels' Hundred. In 1974 West Dean Parish Council became one of the 41 civil Parishes in the Forest of Dean. West Dean is the largest civil parish in the Forest of Dean District in terms of geographical size.

'Our Plan' - the Christchurch, Berry Hill and Edge End Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) covers a cohesive northern part of the parish of West Dean serving a population of 2,477 (latest figures supplied by Gloucestershire County Council).

Location summary notes:

This NDP area is essentially rural, close to the Wye Valley (AONB). It is comprised of three villages and their surroundings: Berry Hill, Christchurch and Edge End (Representative Photos of each), the highest point is above 600 feet above sea level, with steep gradients around the perimeter of settlements.

- Berry Hill is located 1.5 miles north of the town of Coleford and includes the areas of Five Acres to the east. There have been scattered building on Berry Hill since the 16th Century. The 1836 extra-parochial part was called Upper Berry Hill, to distinguish it from Lower Berry Hill in Coleford. The 18th century residents of Berry Hill are recorded as working as stone cutters, and in the 19th

century there were working coal mines. New cottages and houses were built from the 1840s to the current density. Berry Hill was the location of one of the first day schools in the Forest of Dean.

- Christchurch, Shortstanding and Hillersland lie to the north of the NDP area and Joyford to the north east. All these areas are part of the Christchurch electoral ward with many well established families over generations.
- Edge End is similarly 1.5 miles North West of Coleford. The village surrounds a village green which is co-owned by the residents and forms the hub of their community. Split into two by the village green, this community houses many traditional Foresters who can trace their lineage back through the village's history. Here is a true community spirit.

Topography and land form:

The main residential areas are flat or undulating, especially to the western side of Park Road. Christchurch residential buildings are built on flat or on a shallow hilly terrain. At the periphery of the east side of Park Road there are steep sided valleys including Nine Wells, The Lonk, Coopers Road, Joyford and Edge End.

Layout, land cover and use:

- Directly off the main A4136, Gloucester to Monmouth Road, at the Berry Hill cross-roads, Park Road is the main artery for Berry Hill and dissects the village. The west of the village is mainly residential; the east merges rural farm land and forestry, with some houses and community facilities.
- Christchurch is a linear development along two forks of road: the B4432 Christchurch to Symonds Yat, in Herefordshire, via Hillersland; a rural road from Christchurch to Ross-on-Wye, in Herefordshire, via English Bicknor and Lydbrook which is currently closed due to a landslip.
- Shortstanding is a scattered settlement of larger plots that border the Forest of Dean Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- Joyford/Coopers Road is a very scattered community on a steep slope toward the River Wye. It is served by a single-track road which dips down toward Ross on Wye near English Bicknor.
- Edge End is a relatively isolated island development apparently well served by the A4136, although the narrow lanes and gradient makes winter travel difficult and the size of turning spaces is a challenge.

- Settlements have developed into main residential areas at: Grove Road, Hillcrest Road, Park Road and Edge End with houses close to the road. These are comprised of mainly relatively large plots in linear layout with front and back gardens. At the periphery of the NDP areas there are more detached properties within large plots. Nine Wells Road, The Lonk/Coopers Road and Joyford are comprised of more winding, narrow and often single track roads with larger plots approaching the size of small holdings.
- A mixture of residential, farmland, mixed forestry and grazing, some areas have old mine works, providing a diverse picture.
- There is a private recreational ground in Edge End.

Spaces:

- Relatively speaking open and green spaces are within easy reach of most residents.
- Fields, forest land and an orchard within a private garden for example on Joyford Hill, can be found toward the edges of the NDP area.

Green and natural features:

- Extensive green and natural features pervade all the villages, all linked to open spaces, field, forest and public rights of way. Trees with preservation orders are found in the Nine Wells and Five Acres site areas.
- There is a green backdrop for many residential areas, along with substantial gardens.
- The seasonal variations, e.g. the beautiful leaf colours along Beech Road (A4136) and exquisite views across the valleys in winter are very special

Forestry:

The HOOF campaign of July 2012 underlined how much local residents value our Forest. The Bishop of Liverpool's summarized as Chair of the Independent Panel Report on Forestry as follows:

Public Forests should remain in public ownership and be defined in statute as land held in trust for the nation

The main points raised in the report by the HOOF committee:

1. Public forest must be kept in public ownership
2. The Forest must be expanded and safeguarded by charter
3. Long-term planning and financial freedom is essential
4. Involvement of local groups must be assured
5. Access to woods is to be increased across England

Field boundaries and size:

- There are no fields within the main residential areas of Berry Hill.
- Boundaries are varied, including hedgerows, fences, trees and walls.
- Small, medium and large acreage of farm land, with small mowed grassy areas, many of which are Forestry Commission owned, offer crucial small breathing spaces are to be found in all our NDP areas. These add significantly to the rural ambience of the area.

Wildlife and ecology:

- Essential wildlife area including wildlife corridors through all settlements.
- Evidence of many wild mammals, birds, insects, trees, plants, wild flowers and fungi.
- The prevalence of large, expansive gardens provide for diversity of garden plants, hedges and trees.
- The richness and ecological diversity of our area includes for example: wild boar, deer, badgers, foxes, and a wide variety of birds including red legged partridges, peregrine falcons, sparrow hawks, wood peckers, pheasants, and a range of smaller wild and garden birds (Ref. RSPB area annual bird survey).

Roads, streets and route ways:

- We have one main road which connects Berry Hill and Edge End – the A4136, which is the northern arterial road through the Forest.
- Roads wide enough to enable a ready two way flow of traffic include the main roads and those serving the largest residential areas.
- All other roads are narrow, winding and many are cul-de-sacs of varying lengths, very steep where they enter the peripheral valleys surrounding all three areas, often with no pavements of kerbs, limited passing or turning places, consistent with the countryside.
- For Berry Hill and Edge End in particular the main Park Road is the focus for all the current retail, community and educational facilities.
- Christchurch has some facilities of its own, namely the Church, a pub at Shortstanding and a tearoom and pottery/gallery at the House of Bread, was previously the bakery and the village shop.
- The Forestry Commission is working with partners to improve the links between communities, both for local residents and visitors. There are plans for a cycle path from Christchurch campsite (Forest Holidays) through the Forestry Commission managed woodland and then across privately owned land to Coleford. The planned route is being confirmed and planning sort, with a deadline of November 2014. The Parkrun in Coverham woods, opposite Lakers School and the College site, this is a 5km run that uses forest tracks. At present the run is squeezed into one small part of the woodland, the aspiration is to improve the track and create a 5km run throughout the whole area. This would then allow a multi use path from Edge End to Five Acres to link the two residential areas, create a route to the school and link the whole area to the mountain biking area of Sallow Vallets.
- Bus Services link this NDP area with: Coleford, Gloucester, Monmouth, Ross-on-Wye, Lydney and villages along the routes as follows: 23 - Coleford, Lydney and Gloucester on week days only; 24 - school bus route from the Five Acres Campus to Gloucester, via many small villages along the route, which runs just once in the morning and the evening; 30 and 31 – Gloucester, Cinderford and Coleford via Five Acres, available 7 days per week. There is a bus route that services the campsite on its way to and from Ross-on-Wye. The bus services however are limited at night, at weekends and on Bank Holidays and present difficulties for some potential users because bus stops are at too great a distance from some elderly and disabled residents' homes. This problem may be ameliorated through the community transport system i.e. dial a ride service and Lydcare.

- Evidence of traffic management is currently limited to the traffic lights at the Berry Hill cross-roads and the pelican crossing outside Laker School.
- The nearest rail links reach Lydney and Gloucester.
- The Forestry Commission are working with local and national organisations to improve the links between cycling areas and communities. Forest Holidays and the Forestry Commission are working with local landowners to provide a route from Christchurch campsite to Coleford, this should be completed by November 2014. The multi use path proposed for Coverham woods would provide access to the top of the downhill and cross country trails in Sallow Vallets and join Edge End to the Berry Hill community without the need to walking/cycling along the A40.
- Walking Routes and rights of way some of which are overgrown. These include: from Christchurch to Symonds Yat Rock and to the River Wye.
- Wildlife Corridors to farmland and forest abound.

Landmarks:

- The Church in Christchurch, with derelict school buildings adjacent, which has just been sold so will be developed and retaining the current character will be crucial to maintain the aesthetics of the area.
- Salem Chapel still in use in Berry Hill.
- Old or converted chapels in Berry Hill and Edge End.
- Former tanyards, a one-time open air tannery, represents the oldest building in Berry Hill.
- The House of Bread, now privately owned, was previously the bakery and village shop.
- Forest Water sewerage works in Edge End and Joyford Hill.
- The whole NDP area is scattered with residual mine workings including gales, slag heaps and part of old mines buildings. Many of which have been made safe. The Deputy Gaveler based at Bank House, Coleford oversees all mines and minerals in the Forest of Dean and Wye Valley.

Views out:

- Some residents of Berry Hill, The Lonk, Joyford and Coopers Road, as well as Christchurch and Edge End enjoy extensive views of farmland, forest, valleys and views as far as the Malvern Hills, the Brecon Beacons, Monmouthshire and Herefordshire.

Views in:

- There are generally limited or enclosed views into the centre of the areas because the land is in effect a hill top plateau.

Buildings and predominant building materials:

- Even in the most heavily populated residential area of Berry Hill there are mainly large detached or semi-detached properties.
- Two storey bungalows and cottages pervade the area; there are only a few terraces of houses within the Berry Hill area of this NDP.
- Generally of an interesting and varied shape, construction and size, which promotes diversity across our unique environment.
- Most buildings are from the 20th Century or older, however there are some older buildings as well, notably including ex-foresters' cottages, and most are constructed from stone, brick and many rendered, with pitched roofs of tiles or slate.
- Still some council housing (most has become privately owned) as well as some sheltered accommodation.
- There are concerns voiced by local residents that Park Homes and developments do not fit in with the character of the area.
- There are no listed buildings within the NDP area but many old stone properties across all three locations.

Infrastructure:

- Physical
 - Services: water from Severn Trent and Welsh Water companies, sewage (sewerage plant in Edge End and Joyford Hill), we believe that the majority of effluent is dealt with through the Coleford sewerage works., and many outlying properties have their own waste disposal systems i.e. septic tanks; gas is piped into the main villages, outlying areas rely on cylinders if they have any gas at all; electricity is supplied through a system of poles and cables; a commercial company deals with waste management and recycling providing: a weekly food waste collection, a fortnightly land fill collection and, for the alternate week, bottles, cans and paper waste and green waste (annual charge for garden waste and bulky items) is collected. The NDP area lacks: cardboard and plastic waste collection, however there is an excellent council run recycling, drive to, facility nearby.
 - Communications: telecommunications, broadband fibre optic cabling is currently only supplied to the Five Acres site, however, the local exchange in Coleford has been recently upgraded to accept fibre optic cables across the area; as yet none have been provided. Current broadband speeds for virtually all of the NDP area operate at a basic minimum required for connectivity. **The community and business infrastructure needs high speed broadband as a priority.**
 - Natural springs, at least one stream and ponds, in the Lonk area and Edge End, are located in and around the Joyford Valley. Some of these are privately owned.

Social infrastructure:

- Education, the area is currently served by:
 - Berry Hill Under Fives – 48 two to five year olds.
 - Berry Hill Primary School (159 January 2014 Census) five to eleven year olds.
 - Lakers School – 635 (May 2014) eleven to sixteen year olds.
 - GlosCol Royal Forest of Dean Campus – current sixth-form provision is in jeopardy re the planned move to the northern quarter
 - Little Stars Nursery on the GlosCol site.
- Sports and Leisure

- Currently the area is served by a Leisure Centre on the GlosCol Royal Forest of Dean site. This includes: a swimming pool, squash courts, sports hall, tennis courts and gymnasium.
- Lakers School has: a redgra running track which is shares with the local Athletics Club, playing fields and a sports hall which is hires out to local groups e.g. the Rugby Club, Broadwell Football Youth Teams (weekly pitch use, spring/autumn for training and weekend games throughout the year).
- Berry Hill Rugby Club is thriving as a local community hub.
- The Royal Forest of Dean Gymnastics Club is an Olympic standard facility run by a trust, on peppercorn rent within Lakers.
- A recreation area at Edge End owned by the residents.
- There is one small recreational area adjacent to Hillcrest and Crow Ash Roads.
- Unofficially, the green at Christchurch is used for casual football activities.
- Public spaces/buildings
 - A theatre on the GlosCol Royal Forest of Dean site is the only theatre in the Forest.
 - Dennis Potter, writer, journalist and TV playwright was born in Berry Hill. His fusion of fantasy and fact celebrated our area and remoulded expectations of creative writing. Three of his great-grandfathers were Forest miners. His influence on the Forest leads to an enthusiasm to retain and develop theatre facilities under his name with national support from Lord Melvyn Bragg, Dame Joan Bakewell and colleagues within the arts establishment.
 - Four public houses offering a range of activities between them: popular pub quizzes, free pool, live music.
 - Christchurch Church offers a community multi-use facility including: children's play, coffee mornings, and fundraising activities.
- Shops
 - A limited number focused on Park Road in Berry Hill: newsagent/post office/general stores, general stores, fish and chip/ Chinese take away, pharmacy, hairdressers.
 - There is a café and shop at Forest Holidays, a site on the edge of Christchurch.

- The nearest full range of more specialist shops, including super markets, is located outside the NDP area in Coleford.

- Community spaces
 - Berry Hill Memorial Institute is a registered charity and war memorial providing sports, cultural and leisure activities for the local residents and surrounding communities.
 - Berry Hill Social Club, which is a licensed facility for the community.
 - Berry Hill Rugby Club is hired for private use and community events.
 - There is a community room for the elderly in George's Place.
 - There is a suggestion for the development of allotments in the Joyford area on District Council owned land.
 - There is potential for a community orchard situation on the end of Nine Wells Road on land currently owned by the Forestry Commission.

- Spirituality and religion
 - There are two operational religious buildings: Christchurch Church and Salem Chapel in Park Road

- Health
 - **Health facilities are limited** to: a pharmacy on Park Road, and the Leisure Centre at Five Acres is used for GP referrals for health and fitness
 - The nearest GP run health facilities are two surgeries in Coleford
 - **This is a key deficiency within our NDP area**

Economy:

- Businesses, Tourism and Employment
 - Our main businesses are: Lakers School (105 staff), GlosCol RFDC site (?? Staff), Berry Hill School (?? staff), Five Acres Garage (c 40 staff), shops and tourism.
 - Across the whole Forest relatively more people are employed in the manufacturing sector compared with national and south west averages, however, our NDP is not a prime manufacturing zone.
 - Across the Forest, Forest of Dean District Council information from 2009 cites tourism as a significant sector, accounting for 7.5% of employment.
 - There is a low proportion of long-term unemployment.
 - Many people work in low paid jobs which are part-time, which, to make a living, allows for little family time.
 - The trend is to travel out of the area for better paid and wider access to more diverse and highly skilled work.
 - **The employment and education carbon foot print, due to travel out of the area, is a significant concern.**
 - The nearest large employers, neighbouring our NDP area are Suntory, formerly Glaxo Smith Kline and SPP Pumps.
 - There are two major tourist facilities in our NDP area: Forest Holidays and Forest Leisure Coleford (Five Acres).
 - Local Bed and Breakfast business along with the two caravan sites: Forest Holidays and on Joyford Hill, service tourists.
 - The Caravan Club hire Lakers playing fields and the Rugby Club on an annual basis.
 - Tourism is brought in to access the numerous attractions which are within easy reach of the NDP area (loosely within ten miles): Symonds Yat Rock (RSPB), The Nags Head Reserve (RSPB), Kingfisher Cruises on the River Wye, Dean Forest Railway, Beechenhurst: sculpture trail and climbing facility, Go Ape Treetop Adventure, Dene Heritage Centre, Clearwell Caves, Puzzlewood, Littledean Jail, The Cathedral of the Forest at Newland, Goodrich Castle, Tintern Abbey, Forestry trails through 35 square miles of beautiful woodland for walking, cycling and horse riding.
 - The arts are highly significant within our communities, the inspirational environment and the relatively inexpensive housing attract artists who improve the presentation of their properties and the area as a whole and maximising their impact offers the potential for further businesses to gravitate into the area, so boosting our economy.

- Arts venues include: The Hot Pot Pottery within our NDP, Marianna Art in St Briavels, Taurus Crafts in Lydney, Missfire - blacksmith in Clearwell.
- Other commercial facilities neighbouring our NDP include: Forest Adventure – rock climbing, canoeing, kayaking, caving, archery and mountain biking; Forest Bush Craft; Pedal a Bike Away.

Conclusions:

The ambience of our NDP area is very special and significant in offering a high quality living environment and a 'pull' for visitors.

We need:

- To further develop a resilient and economically stable framework that enables our NDP community to set the standard for all our local spaces and facilities
- To hold our local authority to account and to ensure they support the community in taking over responsibility for facilities and spaces where provision falls short of the community's need

- To work with designers, developers and land owners from the outset in shaping developments that are in keeping with the ambience of the area and help improve the emotional, spiritual and economic well-being of residents, as well as promoting tourism
- To insist that developments allocate long-term funding provision to maintain and support the community infrastructure
- To ensure creative people have space to express their skills; culture is important to everyone
- To maximise the potential of local people who are best placed to enrich their space

We will use these ideals to inform our NDP objectives.