

Hastings Green & White Rock Project:

Exploring a future for the town-centre Greenspace

Project summary November 2016





HASTINGS GREEN & WHITE ROCK PROJECT

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HASTINGS GREEN & WHITE ROCK PROJECT

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1.0 THE PROJECT

This project was commissioned in 2015 by the University of Brighton (UoB), and funded by the University's Community University Partnership Programme (CUPP). As a partnership project the study was undertaken by the University of Brighton, the Hastings Greenway Group (HGG) and Hastings Voluntary Action (HVA) in association with the White Rock Trust. The study was researched and written by Frank Rallings (UoB) and Timothy Jemison (HGG) with support from Nick Wates Associates (Community Planning Consultant).

1.1 Aims & objectives

- To research and prepare a draft Green Infrastructure vision for the White Rock area working with the local community, interested parties and university students.
- To research and prepare a draft White Rock Access and Connectivity Plan using the Hastings Greenway Project as a catalyst and framework.
- To work with Hastings Borough Council (HBC) to provide community regeneration input into the Hastings Town Centre and White Rock Area Action Plan (AAP).
- The work and learning from the Green & White Rock Project (G&WRP) to provide a draft template for community involvement in Greenspace design in other identified Green Action Areas within the Hastings Greenway Project.

1.2 The scope of the Project

- To analyse the distribution, connectivity and quality of Greenspace assets within the White Rock area.
- To identify the “good, the bad and the ugly”.
- To work with the local community to identify opportunities for improving the environment, to achieve regeneration, health and wellbeing, and tourism objectives.
- To liaise with Hastings Borough Council (HBC) to input the Project and Community Workshop findings into the Hastings Town Centre and White Rock Area Action Plan (AAP).
- To use the findings from the G&WRP to inform methodologies and design work for other specific Green Action Areas within the Hastings Greenway.

1.3 The Project programme

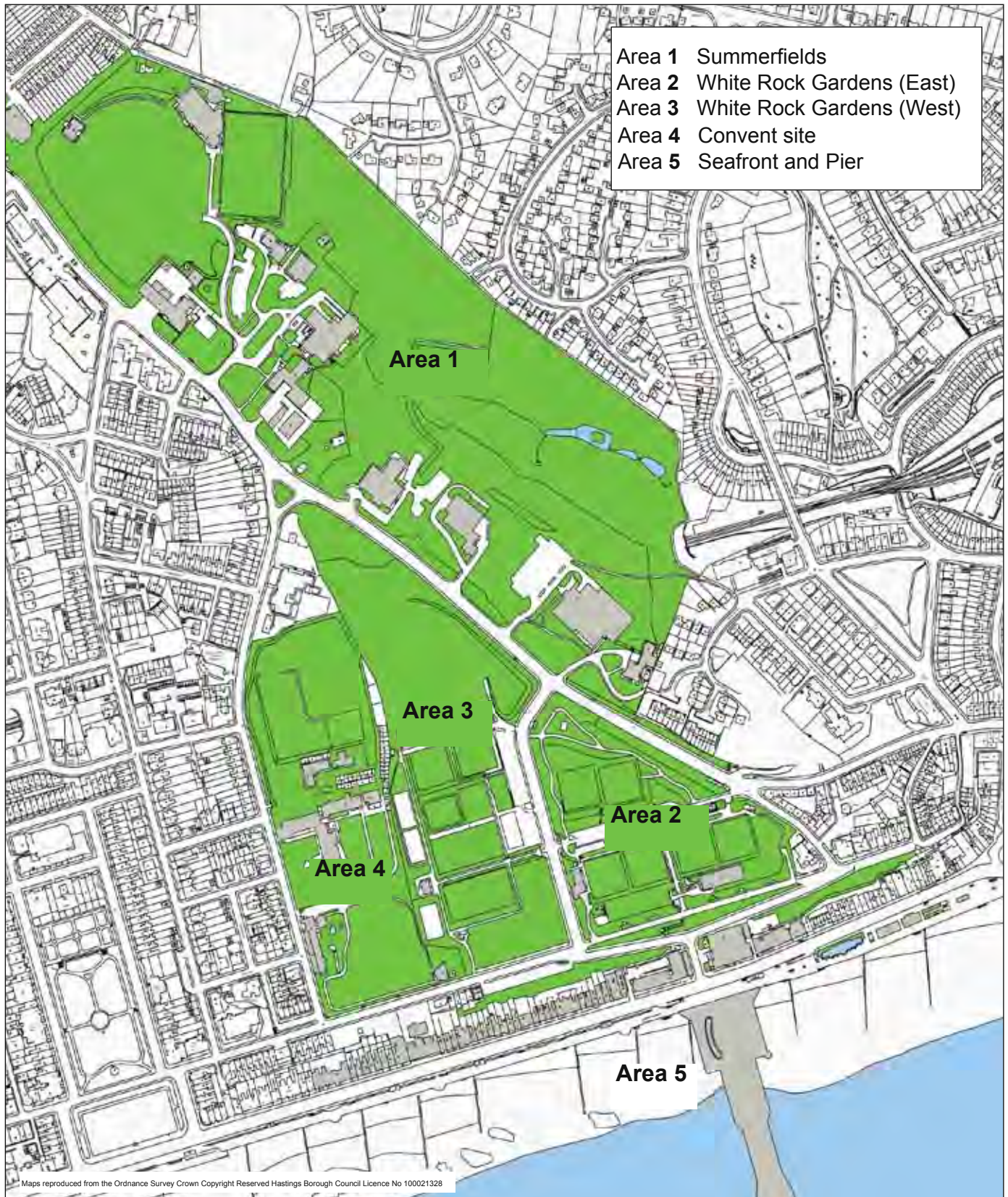
The project was led by the Hastings Greenway Group and the University of Brighton during 2015/16 and involved working with Hastings Borough Council, Hastings Voluntary Action (HVA), Nick Wates Associates, The Academy of Urbanism, White Rock Trust, Queens University Belfast students, Brighton University students, local stakeholders and the local community.

In addition to survey and research work the Project programme included the following key activities and interventions:

- Summer 2015: Prelim survey work by Science without Borders students (UoB)
- Nov 24 2015: Bilfinger/GVA/HBC Town Centre/White Rock Workshop.
- Feb 19 2016: White Rock Workshop Belfast Queens University (Planning Students)
- Feb 29 2016: Hastings Exchange Green Week
- April 13 2016: G&WR Community Workshop hosted at UoB Campus Hastings
- May 11/12 2016: Academy of Urbanism visit to White Rock (HBC)
- Jan/Feb 2016: Production of final report

2.0 THE G&WR STUDY AREAS.

The White Rock study, looks at approx. 43.60 hectares of existing urban greenspace and seaside frontage. Containing a wide spectrum of landscape settings, the study area looks at each of five adjacent areas as regenerational assets. Base-line studies look at the existing Greenspace offer as current issues, identifies existing assets, and the potential enhancement opportunities that would help support a holistic Greenspace vision.



2.1 The G&WR Study Areas: Area 1 – Summerfields



This 22.25 hectare site is the setting for a Museum and Art Gallery, Civic Centre, grassy glades, wooded valley and two sports centres. The site has a strong sense of identity and place, with important architectural and historical links. Because of the busy Cambridge Rd the site is cut off from the rest of White Rock.

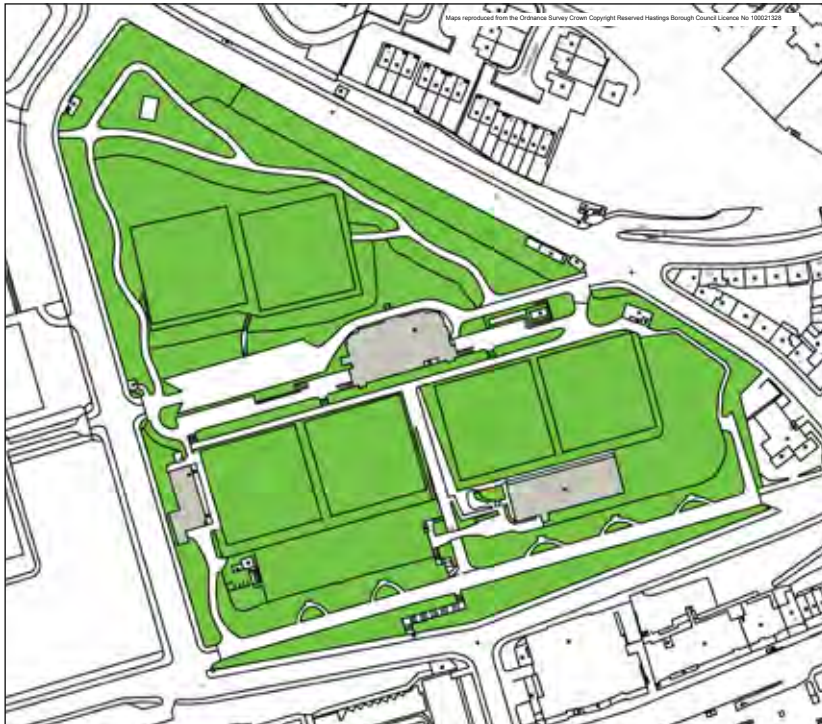
Current issues:

- Busy road traffic
- Poor access and connectivity for walking and cycling
- Hastings Museum a hidden asset with poor pedestrian access
- Summerfields Local Nature Reserve a hidden asset with poor pedestrian access

Existing assets and enhancement opportunities:

- Hastings Greenway (Brisco's Walk)
- Woodland habitat
- Freshwater ponds and stream
- Local Nature Reserve with
- Grade II Listed Artefacts
- Bohemia walled garden
- Hastings Museum
- Civic buildings
- Sports centres
- Travelodge Hotel
- Excellent vehicle access
- Expansive Greenspace setting
- Integral Greenway Link for walkers and cyclists
- Allocation for residential development with potential Section 106 benefits

2.2 The G&WR Study Areas: Area 2 – White Rock Gardens (East)



This 4.7 hectare site is the setting for cliff top pleasure gardens and sports facilities. Its elevated location affords spectacular views of the newly restored Hastings Pier.

Current issues and conflicts:

- Steep topography with difficult pedestrian and cycle access from the seafront
- Under-used and redundant sports facilities need rationalisation
- Falaise Hall (sports venue) occupies key central location
- Existing parking is intrusive in a pleasure gardens context
- Commercial venues (Clambers and Combat Zone) occupy key pier-viewpoint locations
- Some existing planting and cliff top car parking obstructs view of pier and seaside
- Poor night-time amenity and recreational offer

Existing assets and enhancement opportunities:

- Edge of town centre location
- Walkable distance from town centre
- Relocated sports facilities centred around Horntye
- Greenspace could be enhanced as a recreational and amenity destination
- Spectacular maritime views and vistas should trigger new regeneration opportunities
- Reinterpretation of the Pleasure Gardens concept
- Improved connectivity, by cliff-lift/funicular/cable car would transform access to White Rock
- Spectacular potential setting for new White Rock Theatre (Falaise Hall site)
- Adjacent Falaise Road has excellent capacity for coaches and buses
- Integral Greenway link would help resolve access and connectivity problems

2.3 The G&WR Study Areas: Area 3 – White Rock Gardens (West).



This 6.2 hectare site is the setting for several sports venues, some active and some redundant. Because of its elevated location, the site is notable for its spectacular views and panoramic vistas.

Current issues and conflicts:

- Redundant sports facilities and underused Greenspace
- Introspective indoor bowling centre occupies a key viewpoint location
- Poor connectivity with St Leonards town centre and railway station
- Poor night-time amenity and recreational offer
- Area lacks a convincing landscape structure
- Barrier effect of Convent site's boundary wall.

Existing assets and enhancement opportunities:

- Integral Greenway link would help resolve access and connectivity problems
- The Oval upgraded as an adaptive Greenspace for seasonal events
- New venues should exploit spectacular maritime views
- Multi-use games area (MUGA) is especially attractive to youngsters
- BMX Skateboarding Centre users may prefer venue relocation to seafront
- Car parking should be screened or relocated underground
- New night time venues (cafe culture/arts cinema?) would add vibrancy to the amenity offer
- Adjacent Falaise Road has excellent capacity for coaches and buses (sustainability)
- Robust new landscape structure would create stronger sense of place and identity

2.4 The G&WR Study Areas: Area 4 – The Convent site



This enclosed 4.93 hectare site has a strong sense of identity and place with important architectural buildings & historical links. A unique site which needs restoration, repair, and regeneration of high quality to provide a key historic asset and a catalyst for the sensitive upgrading of the greenspace & connectivity within the White Rock area.

Current issues and conflicts:

- Listed buildings require blend of restoration and/or adaption
- Publicly inaccessible greenspace and duplicated playing fields.
- The Convent boundary wall is a barrier to site access
- Direct access from Central St Leonards is difficult.

Existing assets and enhancement opportunities:

- Grade II* listed Chapel at Convent of Christ Jesus
- Gate Lodge and Gateway to the former Convent of the Holy Child Jesus
- Training College, former Convent of the Holy Child Jesus
- Church of St Thomas of Canterbury and the English Martyrs
- Planning Policy of the HBC Development Management Plan HN6
- Sympathetic conversion and re-use of listed buildings
- Allocation for residential development with potential Section 106 benefits
- Potential residential conversion of Priory, Gothic Building, Gate Lodge and Convent Building
- Restored listed buildings might support a “Architectural Heritage” trail
- Integral Greenway link would help resolve access and connectivity problems

2.5 The G&WR Study Areas: Area 5 – The Pier & Seafront



This 5.5 hectare site is the setting for the seafront and pier which is a defining feature for Hastings & St Leonards. Several seafront strategies have identified the seafront's great regeneration potential in the context of the UK's current seaside renaissance.

Current issues and conflicts:

- Seafront to White Rock access difficult for walkers cyclists and disability needs
- A259 traffic remains a safety hazard for walkers cyclists and disability needs
- White Rock Theatre (too small for major productions?)

Existing assets and enhancement opportunities:

- Hastings Pier (restored 2016)
- Seafront improvements strategy
- Viability of relocated outdoor BMX park (a new seafront location?).
- Seafront Sustrans National Cycle Network -Route
- White Rock Theatre – An important cultural facility – relocated in White Rock?
- Expanding seafront Café Culture.
- Significant maritime views and vistas.
- Innovative underground parking (Sidney Little's holistic seafront vision)
- The Source (Europe's largest indoor skate park/BMX centre)
- True Crime Museum
- Traffic calming measures along St Margaret's Road & A259
- Seafront enhanced with more robust maritime planting
- Integral Greenway link would help resolve access and connectivity problems

3.0 GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE AND THE HASTINGS GREENWAY

Urban Greenspace like White Rock is now seen as a regeneration asset, and to reflect this the Hastings Planning Strategy 2011-2028 includes a draft Green Infrastructure Network as set out in the Planning Policy EN2.

- Network includes open spaces, woodlands, wildlife habitats, parks, and recreation areas
- Network provides multiple social, economic and environmental benefits.
- Network protection/management/enhancement is essential in Hastings's dense urban fabric



The Hastings Greenway project aims to support and enhance the Green Infrastructure network. Urban Greenways create safe (mostly traffic-free) connectivity for urban walking and cycling; and as linear parks also create new greenspace settings for local community and wider civic use.

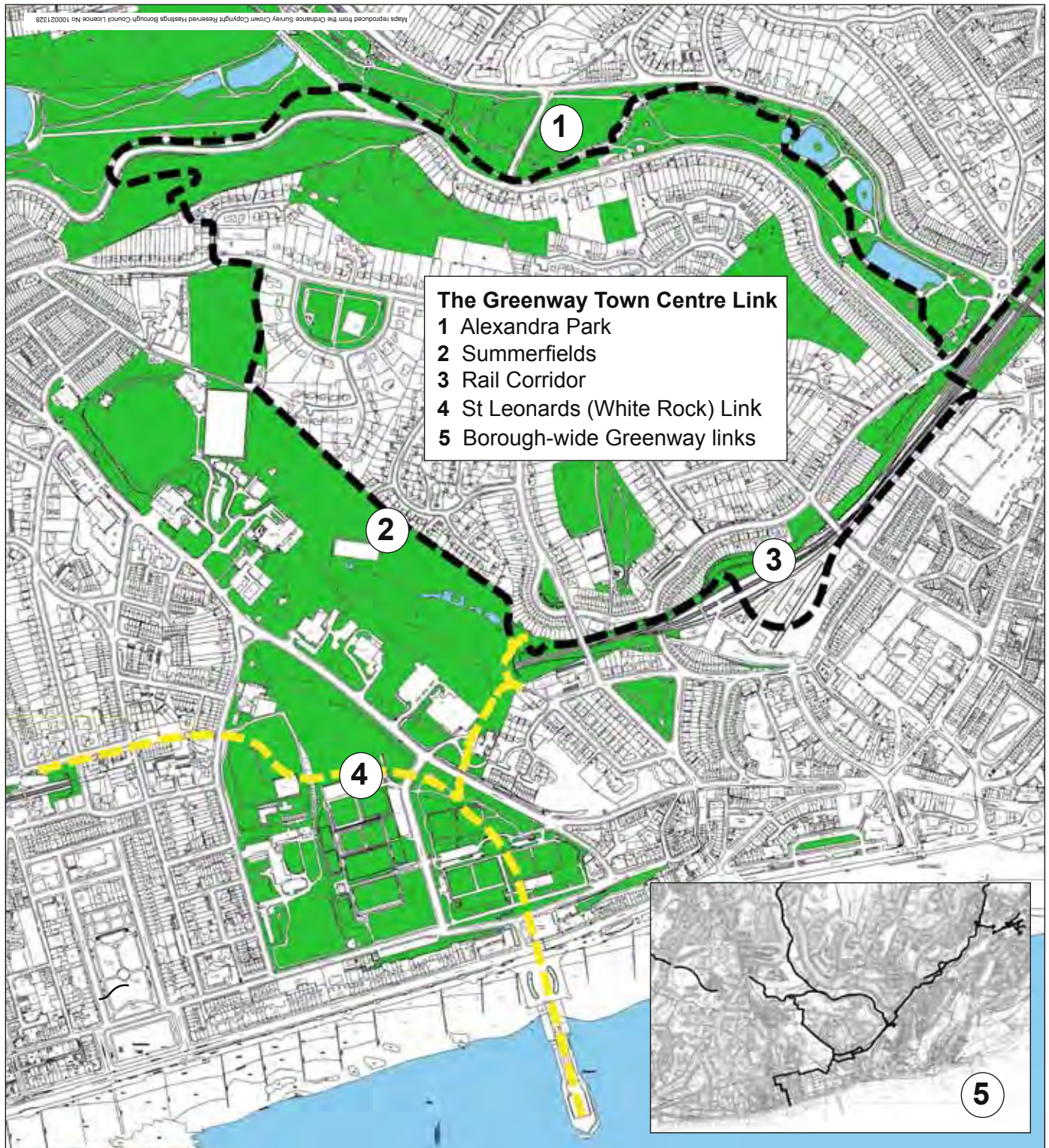
- Greenway has wide support from local community, Network Rail, South Coast College.
- HBC, ESCC, Railtrack and others partnered early pilot Greenway projects here in Hastings
- Greenway are currently being developed with the University and the Academy of Urbanism
- Key sections of the Greenway (the rail corridor link) are in the Hastings Local Plan

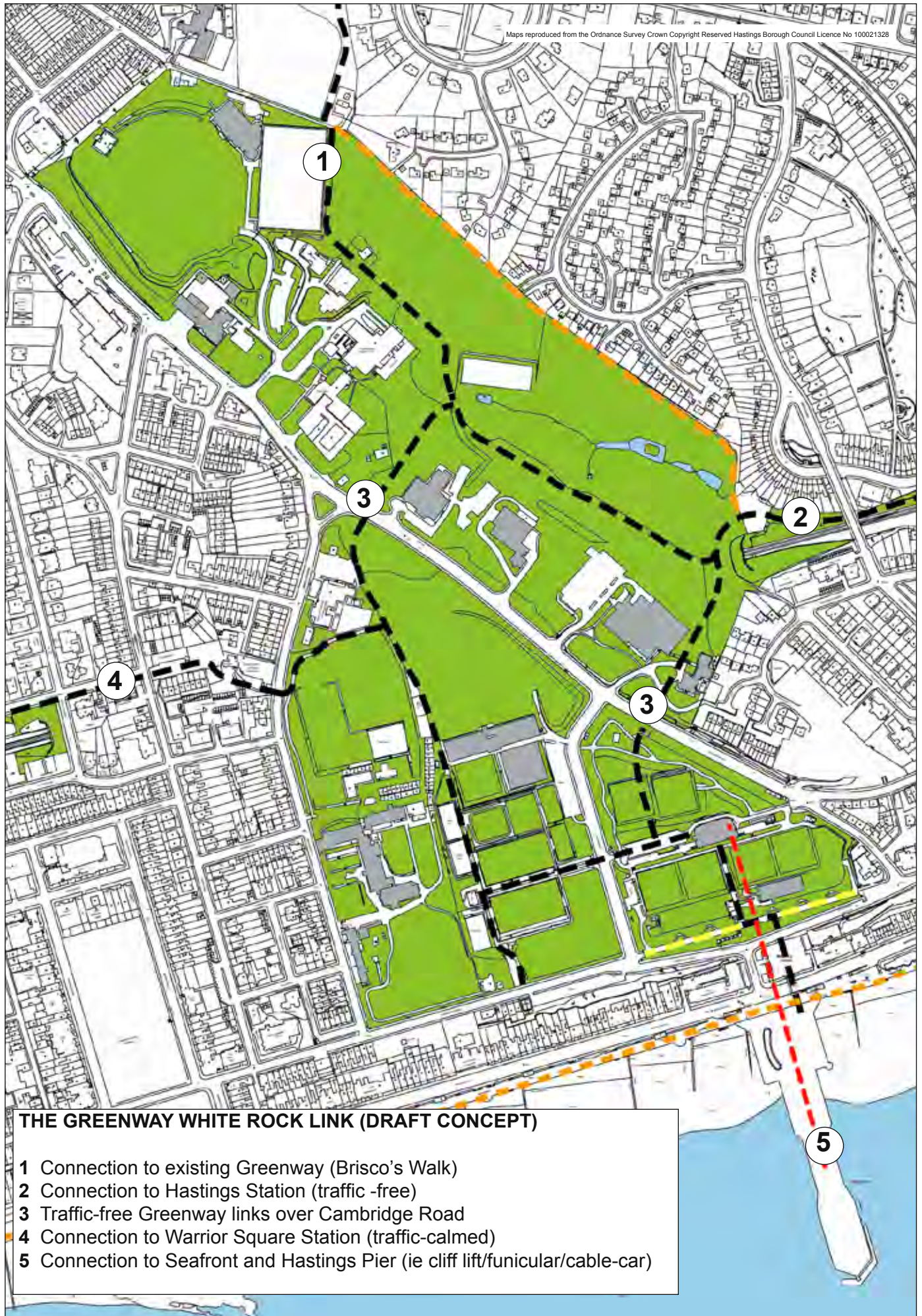


3.1 The Hastings Greenway Town Centre Link

In Hastings, early phases of the Greenway project (1995-2015) were focused on the town centre, aiming for traffic free links that will connect Alexandra Park with Summerfields and the existing rail corridor.

- £450k of SRB funding enabled pilot projects to start the Greenway loop or hub.
- When completed the Greenway hub can support borough-wide strategic Greenway links
- Strategic Greenway links radiate North South East & West of the town centre.
- A proposed St Leonards Greenway link would create safe access through White rock.





3.2 WHITE ROCK GREENWAY LINK (DRAFT CONCEPT)

A key part of the White Rock study is to identify how the Hastings Greenway Project could help enhance the White Rock Greenspace. The outline Greenway concept (page 12) has three major design objectives :

- A Enhanced access and connectivity (North South East and West) to White Rock.**
- B Removal or mitigation of existing hazards and current conflicts arising from traffic, physical barriers and steep topography.**
- C To create a robust landscape framework on which to develop a White Rock vision and supporting masterplan.**

Collaborative University of Brighton/Greenway research studies.

Students from the University of Brighton (UoB), using the Greenway concept as a placemaking tool, are helping to research the enhancement and regeneration opportunities for White Rock.

In 2014 UoB Town Planning students looked to identify the potential health & wellbeing and added value benefits of regenerated urban Greenspace including White Rock.

In 2015 engineering and construction students in the Science without Borders initiative (a Brazilian Government scholarship programme) looked at potential options to improve White Rock access and connectivity.

In 2015 the UoB's community outreach department (CUPP) attracted by the Greenway Project's regeneration potential, commissioned this White Rock Study.

Collaborative Academy of Urbanism/Greenway monitoring.

The Academy of Urbanism, an independent urban design think-tank, are currently monitoring the Greenway projects potential as an urban regeneration catalyst in Hastings.

In 2013 the AoU awarded Hastings & St Leonards "The Great Town Award" based on criteria that included:

- A can-do attitude and forward looking momentum
- Multi-level partnerships and viable sustainability initiatives
- The great cultural-offer potential

In 2015 the AoU undertook a Place Partnering Diagnostic visit that looked at the Old Town In Hastings, which was subsequently awarded "The Great Neighbourhood Award"

In 2016 Hastings Borough Council (HBC) commissioned the AoU to undertake a diagnostic visit to assist with shaping and informing a brief for the future development of the town's White Rock area, based on criteria that included:

- Community engagement
- Economic development
- Retail / leisure development
- Heritage considerations
- Strategic brief preparation

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3.3 WHITE ROCK ENHANCEMENT THEMES:

A Greenway-based landscape framework for White Rock would support the concept of integrated regeneration themes. Each theme developed around the phased enhancement of existing White Rock assets:

A Amenity & Recreation theme

A focus on Hastings Pier, the Seafront and White Rock Pleasure Gardens, responding to the UK's current sea-side renaissance and "staycation" trends.



B Education & Discovery theme

A focus on new "discovery venues" for Local Schools, Hastings Academy, South Coast College, visiting english-language students, and 1066 Country tourists.



C Biodiversity & Sustainability theme

A focus on Summerfields Nature Reserve and new "Green Architecture" venues that address the issues of climate change and mitigation strategies.



D Heritage & Culture theme

A focus on an enhanced or relocated Hastings Museum & Art Gallery, a 1066 Discovery Centre, a relocated White Rock Theatre, and the Convent site's historical listed buildings.



E Localism & Community theme

A focus on responding to local community needs with new support venues e.g community centre/library/cafe/pharmacy, that help support social cohesion.



F Sports & Play theme

A focus on White Rock's scattered sports facilities better relocated to Horntye Sports Centre, Summerfields Sports Centre, and the Oval.



4.0 G&WRP COMMUNITY WORKSHOP 13 APRIL 2016 UoB (HASTINGS CAMPUS).



The Community Workshop provided an opportunity for local residents and other stakeholders to brainstorm and explore possibilities together. Following a walkabout of the area, a buffet lunch and some introductory presentations, the 16 workshop participants were asked to brainstorm opportunities, a wish list and action needed on the following themes:

- 1 Planning & Sustainability
- 2 Amenity & Recreation including Health & Wellbeing
- 3 Heritage & Culture
- 4 Access & Connectivity
- 5 Organisation & Engagement

The session was facilitated by community planner Nick Wates who provides the following summary of the results:

4.1 Planning & Sustainability.

Need a reason to go there:

Key to a sustainable future for the area is creating reasons for people to go there. There could be a major draw, such as a 1066 heritage centre/experience, or a range of smaller attractions with better coordination of facilities and promotion. Either way there need to be drivers to bring significant investment into the area.

Quality housing:

There is potential for building a limited new housing as enabling development, providing it is of high quality design, unlike so much of what has been proposed locally in the recent past. Possible locations include the Convent site and around the civic facilities on Bohemia Road.

4.2 Amenity & Recreation including health & wellbeing.

Consolidation of facilities:

Facilities have been developed in a piecemeal fashion over the years and there is a need for consolidation and rationalisation.

Review the offer:

Many of the facilities currently provided are no longer sufficiently popular to be economically viable. A rethink is needed to ensure that the offer is future proofed. Better refreshment facilities are required.

Masterplan:

A masterplan is required to ensure a commonly agreed approach and many options will need testing. One option is to have a café and cultural centre in restored gardens at the east end of the gardens above the pier with a new swimming pool and sports centre and play zone on the West side of Falaise Road.

Planting for wildlife:

The natural areas should be protected physically and enhanced by design to prevent undesirable green infrastructure loss. It may be desirable to increase the extent of natural areas by adopting sustainable planting for wildlife and reducing the amount of mowed grass.

Ecology centre:

Potential to create an educational wildlife centre, possibly in the Museum.

4.3 Heritage & Culture.

Focus on heritage:

There is huge interest in the past of Hastings and St Leonards – worldwide – and not just relating to 1066. More needs to be made of St Leonard's valuable heritage on the White Rock site which includes the Convent, an important example of Gothic architecture which was built by Pugin's son and designed by William Wilkinson Wardell. More research is needed and ways of interpretation explored. More also needs to be made of the splendid Museum & Art Gallery building.

White Rock Pleasure Gardens check:

The history and heritage of the pleasure gardens needs to be researched further and a decision made on which parts to restore and which parts to up date.

Save the Convent East Wing:

The Italianate extension to the Convent should be preserved.

Review local listing:

The listing of local buildings of historic interest should be reviewed.

4.4 Access & Connectivity.

Improve pedestrian and cycle routes to and through the site:

There is a need for improved pedestrian and cycle routes to and through the site, particularly from Hastings and St Leonards Warrior Square stations and from the seafront.

Extend the Greenway:

The Greenway network should be extended through the site.

Integrated transport:

An integrated transport system needs to be developed making use of bus, train and innovative new modes. Car parking is already at capacity during peak periods. Continuing a Hastings tradition, the potential for underground parking should be explored. The possibility of closing Falaise Road should also be explored, so creating more space and flexibility for new uses.

Footfall study:

There needs to be more understanding of how people use the area at present and how they might use it in future.

Better signage:

Better signage is needed so that people can find and understand the heritage and facilities available.

4.5 Organisation & engagement.**Coordination of businesses and facilities managers**

Ways need to be found engage the many separate businesses and facilities in planning the best way forward.

Website needed

There is a need for online information about the area and about the future planning of the area.

Feedback

The results of consultation exercises and planning workshops need to be fed back to people to avoid consultation fatigue and disillusionment in the planning and development process. A more personal approach to consultation is thought likely to be productive in the near future, using street stalls for instance.

Engage young people

More effort should be made to involve young people in decisions regarding the area.

Masterplan

A masterplan should be developed for the whole of the green space. Local residents and businesses should be involved in its creation and it should build on current and past work and consultation.

Community led projects and management

The potential for community led projects and management needs to be explored in partnership with Hastings Borough Council to ascertain what resources could be available for the task

4.6 Community Workshop participants:

Joan Bones (White Rock Bowls Club).
Abigail Callaghan (University of Brighton).
Heather Callister (Local Resident).
Nicole Collomb (Landscape Architect).
Rosella de Tommaso (University of Brighton).
Christine Francies (Burton St Leonards Society).
Jane Freund (Nick Wates Associates).
Timothy Jemison (Hastings Greenway Group).
Christopher Lewcock (Hastings Urban Design Group).
Steve Manwaring (Hastings Voluntary Action).
Bernard McGinley (Blueprint St Leonards).
Frank Rallings (University of Brighton).
Suzy Tinker (White Rock Trust).
Helen Walker (University of Brighton).
Bob Walters (Bottle Alley regeneration project).
Nick Wates (Nick Wates Associates)



5. KEY FINDINGS OF THE GREEN & WHITE ROCK PROJECT

The Upper White Rock is an area of green infrastructure and piecemeal development located between the town centres of Hastings and St Leonards. The overall site offers major opportunities for regeneration along with green infrastructure enhancement to provide a significant asset for the health and wellbeing of local residents, for civic use, and for tourism. The report outlines the main findings of the Study along with the views of the community.

The key findings are that:

- a. The Upper White Rock area is an underused resource located between the town centres of Hastings and St Leonards.**
- b. The predominant Green Infrastructure with Summerfields Local Nature Reserve and the clifftop location with significant views and vistas across the English Channel provide a quality location for regeneration for tourism, cultural and residential activities.**
- c. The Hastings Museum is a heritage asset which gives opportunities for expanded cultural and tourism offer, and can act as a catalyst for the regeneration of Upper White Rock.**
- d. The Convent site is a heritage asset which gives an opportunity for historic buildings restoration and enhancement, and some sensitive vernacular residential regeneration.**
- e. The locality suffers from access and connectivity problems insofar as the cliff topography creates a barrier between the seafront and the Upper White Rock. Similarly access from Magdalen Road in St Leonards is not currently possible and pedestrian routes and access in to Summerfields Wood are limited. New Greenway routes across the site are a key component to any regeneration.**
- f. There are a number of underused buildings and facilities within the Study area and some form of rationalisation could benefit the built environment and upgrade the landscape.**
- g. The Green Infrastructure within the White Rock area could be upgraded by landscaping and sustainable planting schemes which reflect 21st century thinking relating to climate change, coastal location and maintenance issues.**
- h. There is an opportunity to re-interpret the former Pleasure Gardens creating an exciting and interactive 21st century Greenspace for community use, civic use, and for visitors to Hastings and St Leonards.**
- i. The Upper White Rock provides an opportunity to provide a revitalised area of the town and create a greenspace that will contribute to the health and wellbeing of its residents.**
- j. For the potential of the White Rock area to be realised by the community, the key recommendation from the Green & White Rock Project is that the area would benefit from a Master Planning exercise as a precursor to the Hastings Town Centre and White Rock Area Action Plan (AAP).**

6. CONCLUSIONS

In the UK and elsewhere, exciting and innovative urban greenspaces play an increasing important role in successful regeneration programmes. Here in Hastings and St Leonards, the local community, along with key partners and stakeholders, are keen to explore and redefine the role urban Greenspace can play in the community and civic fabric of the town.

Throughout its long history the White Rock area has changed its shape and character in response to the changing needs and values of the day. Whilst the White Rock's existing offer is currently low key and somewhat ambiguous, its spectacular regenerational potential as strategic urban Greenspace remains undiminished.

Further information:

The Hastings Greenway Group is preparing a more detailed report on the Green & White Rock Project which will be available in early 2017. For any queries or your suggestions please contact:

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TJAssociates Tel: 01424 427526 (tjassociates@btinternet.com)