



**Directorate of Community Services**  
Director **Sarah Mitchell**

## **Historic Environment Action Plan Atherfield Coastal Plain**

**Isle of Wight County Archaeology  
and Historic Environment Service**

**October 2008**

**01983 823810**  
*archaeology@iow.gov.uk*

## **HEAP for Atherfield Coastal Plain.**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This HEAP Area has been defined on the basis of geology, topography, land use and settlement patterns which differentiate it from other HEAP areas.

This document identifies essential characteristics of the Atherfield Coastal Plain as its distinctive coastal landscape, its exposed and windswept agricultural landscape with large arable fields and lack of woodland or hedgerows, and its dispersed pattern of settlement with buildings strung out along Atherfield Road. The visible force of the sea and the strong influence of the wind and weather are defining characteristics of this area.

The most significant historic landscape features, important forces for change and key management issues for the Area are considered in this document. Actions particularly relevant to this Area are identified from those listed in the Isle of Wight HEAP Aims, Objectives and Actions.

### **ANALYSIS AND ASSESSMENT**

#### **Location, Geology and Topography**

- Occupies strip of land between *South Wight Sandstone and Gravel* and coast.
- Coastline in this Area stretches from Shepherd's Chine to Blackgang Chine and comprises soft, eroding cliffs with areas of landslip and *chines* at Whale, Walpen and Ladder.
- Access to beach currently only at Shepherd's Chine, on boundary with *South-West Wight Coastal Zone*.
  - Whale Chine is defined as a Right of Way on the Definitive Map but has been closed for some years due to coastal erosion.
- Low-lying and flat area inland with maximum altitude of 55m OD south of Samber Hill. Low relief and coastal location distinguishes this area from the generally hillier terrain and somewhat higher altitude of *South Wight Sandstone and Gravel Area*
- Geology is mainly Ferruginous Sands in the Lower Greensand Series with superficial deposits of Alluvium and Blown Sand Shingle.
- Atherfield Brook flows to the west and then to the south-west, reaching the sea at Shepherd's Chine. Small streams flow through Whale Chine and Walpen Chine to the sea. Ditches and drains around Atherfield.
- Light, fertile soils supporting arable agriculture, particularly the production of brassicas. Some of this HEAP Area is Grade 2 on the Agricultural Land Classification Map, in contrast with most of the Island's agricultural land which is Grade 3 or 4, except within the Arreton Valley.
- Free-draining fertile soils distinguish this HEAP Area from the *South-West Wight Coastal Zone* which is characterised by damp clay soils derived from the Wealden clays.

#### **Defining Attributes and Principal HEAP Types**

- Flat, open and exposed to south westerly winds from the sea.
- Higher cliffs than in much of the neighbouring *South-West Wight Coastal Zone* coupled with the dramatic Whale Chine and the quiet, sparsely used beaches, give the coastal landscape of this area a particular character.
- Large arable fields with few hedgerows or trees.
  - This HEAP Area contains over 67% (by area) of field patterns classified as *large* (over 12 hectare), this being the highest proportion of large field patterns in any HEAP Area on the Island.
  - By comparison, large field patterns account for 64% of all field patterns in the *Thorley/Wellow Plain*, under 32% in the *South-West Wight Coastal Zone*, just over 24% in the *Arreton Valley* and less than 24% in the Isle of Wight as a whole.

- To the north of Atherfield Road there are *small-medium* fields (3-6 hectares) on the damper land at the northern edge of this Area, where there are small streams, ditches, drains and agricultural reservoirs.
- Almost total lack of woodland and hedgerows except for shelterbelt planting beside houses and some very recent hedgerow planting.
- Settlement consists of dispersed farmsteads, mainly along Atherfield Road.
- Only vehicle routes are the Military Road (A3055) running parallel to the coast, Atherfield Road and Southdown Lane.
- The long-distance Coastal Path runs through this HEAP Area and there are a few footpaths and bridleways inland.
- An essentially agricultural landscape with visitors confined mainly to the coastal path and beaches.

### Principal Historical Processes

- Prehistoric flintwork and a few prehistoric hearths recorded from the eroding coastal slope and from Whale and Walpen Chine provide evidence of early activity, as do *crop marks* and *soil marks* in ploughed fields recorded by aerial photography and some worked flint recorded from ploughed fields.
  - Roman pottery has been found near the cliff edge but no Roman structures have been recorded.
- Atherfield contains the Old English place-name elements *ing* and *feld* and has been interpreted as meaning 'the open land of Æþelhere's people' (Kökeritz 1940, 217).
- Much of the Area fell within the Anglo-Saxon estate of Atherfield granted by King Edgar to the church at Winchester between AD 959 and AD 975 (Margham 2005, 82-85).
- Two manors at Atherfield and one at Walpen are recorded in Domesday Book (1086).
  - Compton Fields is first mentioned as a separate holding in 1249 when it was purchased by Adam de Compton, Lord of Compton in Freshwater Parish.
- This HEAP Area lay mainly within three medieval parishes - Shorwell on the western side of the Area, a large detached portion of Brighstone (stretching from the north of Atherfield Farm to the coast) in the middle and Chale in the east.
  - There were also various other small detached medieval parish fragments, (including two relating to Brighstone and one relating to Kingston) entirely surrounded by the land of Shorwell Parish.
- The detached portions of Brighstone Parish owe their origin to the grant of Atherfield to Winchester in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. (At this time Brighstone formed part of Winchester's Calbourne estate, becoming an independent parish at a later date).
  - The largest detached portion of Brighstone Parish was coterminous with Atherfield Farm in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.
- In the Middle Ages arable open fields may have accounted for much of the land use within the western and eastern parts of this HEAP Area.
  - This assumption is based on the patterns of the enclosed fields shown on the OS 1793 map.
  - These interlocking field patterns may have been formed by the enclosure of *open-field* strips at some time prior to 1793.
- In the central part of this Area the pattern of fields shown on the 1793 map suggests a different enclosure process.
  - This central part of the Area (corresponding with the detached portion of Brighstone Parish and coterminous with the land of Atherfield Farm) contained larger fields than those to the west and east.
  - Some of these larger fields may have been enclosed from a former green.
  - A triangular remnant of this green is shown on the 1793 map to the east of Atherfield Green Farm and south of Atherfield Farm but this had become an enclosed field by the time of the 1<sup>st</sup> Edition OS 25" map (published in 1866).

- The green may formerly have occupied a more substantial area, represented on the 1793 map by some of the fairly large fields shown in the detached portion of Brighstone Parish.
- The 1793 map shows a track from Walpen Manor (now lost) which passes diagonally through one of these large fields,
- Where tracks cross fields in this fashion it can indicate enclosure from open grazing land – in this case Atherfield Green. However, a second track from Walpen Manor (also now lost) is shown cutting across fields thought to have been enclosed from *open-field*. Further documentary work is required to clarify the land use history of this Area.
- Until its enclosure, the green at Atherfield probably functioned as the main communal grazing area within the *Atherfield Coastal Plain* although Walpen Manor had rights of common grazing on St Catherine's Hill within the *South Wight Downland Area*
  - Roads and tracks from the hamlet of Atherfield Green, Atherfield Farm and Walpen Manor all led onto the green.
- The historic settlement pattern shown on the OS 1793 map is similar to that of today, comprising *dispersed* farmsteads and cottages and one small hamlet strung out along Atherfield Road.
  - A farm is shown at the northern end of Atherfield Road in the position of the present 'Ashhill Farm' but is unnamed on the 1793 map.
  - Three buildings are shown in the area of the present 'Home Farm' but are unnamed on the 1793 map.
  - Two buildings are shown in the area of the present 'Little Atherfield Farm' but are unnamed on the 1793 map.
  - A small hamlet comprising at least six stone or brick buildings is named as 'Atherfield' on the 1793 map but as 'Atherfield Green' on the 1<sup>st</sup> Edition OS 25" map of 1866. The main farmstead has subsequently become known as 'Atherfield Green Farm'.
  - The naming of this hamlet as 'Atherfield Green' is puzzling at first sight, since the green appears to have been situated to the east of the hamlet and south of Atherfield Farm (see above). However, the hamlet may have originated as a *green-edge settlement* beside the drove road (now Atherfield Road) leading to the green.
  - Atherfield Farm stands by itself some way to the east of the hamlet and is the only individual farmstead within this Area to be named on the 1793 map apart from Comptonfield (near Shepherd's Chine) and Walpen.
- The OS 1793 map shows small irregular pasture fields or hay meadows on the damper valley-floor land to the east and north of Atherfield Road, close to the dispersed farmsteads and to the hamlet at Atherfield Green.
- In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Coastguard Service was developed and a coastguard station and cottages were built to the east of Shepherd's Chine and north of Atherfield Point.
  - The present coastguard cottages date from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and replaced a mid 19<sup>th</sup> century coastguard station sited closer to the cliff edge.
- Atherfield Lifeboat Station was operational from 1890 to 1915.
  - The station was a large shed at the top of the cliff near Atherfield Point from which the lifeboat was lowered down a 240 ft slipway to get to the sea (Isle of Wight AONB Project 1998, 19).
  - The site of the lifeboat station has now been lost to coastal erosion.
- The Military Road (on the line of the A3055) was laid out in 1860s, extending from Freshwater to Chale, in order to link the *Palmerston forts* between Yarmouth and Freshwater with the back of the Wight, allowing defence of *chines* and beaches against possible invasion.
  - The Military Road followed the course of an existing track from Whale Chine to Chale, passing Walpen Manor. This track is marked on the OS 1793 map
  - In 1920s the road was upgraded from an unmetalled track as a job creation scheme, facilitating tourist access to the Island's south-west coast.

- The OS 25 inch map of 1909 shows that field patterns at that date remained similar to those shown on the 1793 map.
  - However, during the 20<sup>th</sup> century a dramatic transformation of the landscape took place; removal of existing boundaries and reorganisation of enclosures resulting in large fields with few boundaries and the loss of the internal variation shown on the 1793 map.
  - No trace of Atherfield Green now remains; the green now being entirely incorporated within the large arable fields to the south of Atherfield Road.
- Between 1793 and the present day some farmsteads or cottages seem to have disappeared from the landscape.
  - The OS 1793 map shows a building to the east of Ashhill Farm, two buildings to the east of Little Atherfield and two buildings to the west of Southdown Road, none of which survive to the present day.
  - It is difficult to compare the number of dwellings at Atherfield Green today with those shown on the 1793 map. (Although the 1793 map shows stone or brick buildings in red, these cannot necessarily be interpreted as dwellings).
- Some hedgerows were planted beside the Military Road by Island 2000 at about the time of the millennium.
  - The hedgerows were intended to provide habitats for birds but the planting scheme was not based on a study of historic hedgerow patterns.
  - Due to the exposed, coastal situation of this Area the planting scheme was only partially successful and some hedges had to be replanted.

#### **Archaeology and Built Environment (details in HER)**

- Prehistoric flintwork and a few prehistoric hearths recorded from the eroding coastal slope and chines.
- Fieldwalking near Pyle Farm has produced prehistoric worked flint, mainly of *Neolithic* date and a small amount of Roman and Medieval pottery (Trott 2003).
- Buried crop marks and soil marks visible on air photographs include *ring ditches* (probably ploughed out Bronze Age burial mounds); also linear and rectilinear features of probable prehistoric date.
- Roman pottery from Atherfield Cliff and from Whale and Walpen Chines.
- Medieval Beacon site at Atherfield Point recorded in 1324.
- Walpen Manor House is a fairly small 17<sup>th</sup> century stone building with a thatched roof. It was a working farmhouse until the later 20<sup>th</sup> century in common with most of the Island's small manor houses.
  - There are a number of vernacular post-medieval farmsteads and cottages within the Area although only four buildings have listed building status.
- The Military Road, first laid out in the 1860s but widened and metalled in the 1920s.
- Late 19<sup>th</sup> century coastguard cottages.

#### **Relationships with other HEAP Area**

- Until the 20<sup>th</sup> century the field patterns in the western part of this HEAP Area were not very different in size from those of the adjacent *South West-Wight Coastal Zone* although the average field size is now considerably larger.
  - Before the 20<sup>th</sup> century enlargement of fields, particularly affecting the *Atherfield Coastal Plain*, these two adjacent Areas could be seen as a continuum of land use and landscape, although with some variation along the length of the south-west coast.
- Parochial links with the medieval parishes of Shorwell and Brighstone (within the *South-West Wight Coastal Zone* and *West Wight Downland Edge Areas*) and Chale (within the *South Wight Downland Edge Area*).

- Walpen Manor had rights of common grazing on St Catherine's Hill within the *South Wight Downland Area*.
  - Between 1559 and 1576 the tenant of Walpen was involved in a dispute with other landowners having rights of common grazing on St Catherine's Hill and St Catherine's Down (Hockey 1982, 212-218)
- The *Atherfield Coastal Plain* abuts the *South Wight Sandstone and Gravel Area*.
  - Atherfield Road provides a physical connection between the two Areas but no particular historic links between these two Areas have been identified.

### Time-Depth

- Great geological time-depth is visible in the exposed cliff-face.
- Prehistoric finds buried or exposed in cliff face.
- The boundaries of the Anglo-Saxon estate of Atherfield may be the earliest surviving features in the landscape.
  - Margham (2005, 82-85) has attempted a reconstruction of the bounds even though no contemporary charter survives.
  - His reconstruction follows an existing field boundary which runs north from Whale Chine to Atherfield Road, then turns north-west along the line of a watercourse to the north of Atherfield Farm before running in a mainly westerly direction along the course of the stream flowing into Shepherd's Chine.
- The boundaries of the Atherfield Estate partially correspond with medieval parish boundaries, as shown on Margham's map of the estate bounds.
- An old field boundary to the west of Atherfield Farm corresponds with the historic western boundary of the farm, which was coterminous with a detached portion of the medieval Brighstone Parish.
- The northern part of Hills Lane (bridleway SW 27), part of Atherfield Road and footpath SW 28a follow the boundaries of another detached portion of the medieval Brighstone Parish shown on Margham's map.
- The former existence of this 'enclave' of Brighstone Parish explains the serpentine course of Atherfield Road and suggests that its present route could possibly date from about the 11<sup>th</sup> century when the Island's medieval parochial boundaries started to be fixed.
- The Domesday manorial centre of Walpen may have occupied the same site as that of the existing 17<sup>th</sup> century manor house at Walpen.
  - The existing site of Atherfield Farm may not have been the site of either of the two manors of Atherfield recorded in Domesday Book (Margham 2005, 85).
- A number of vernacular buildings of post-medieval date survive within this Area, including Walpen Manor and Atherfield Farm.
- The historic *dispersed settlement* pattern along the Atherfield Road probably developed during medieval times although it is first accurately shown on the OS 1793 map.
- Some Rights of Way shown on the Definitive Map (Isle of Wight Council 2000) are also shown on the OS 1793 map. These include SW 23, SW24, SW 27, SW 31 and SW 32.
  - Some tracks marked on the 1793 map no longer exist.
  - Some Rights of Way marked on the Definitive Map appear to be of recent date e.g. SW 28 and SW55.
- The Military Road dates from the 19<sup>th</sup> century but was modified in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- The coastguard cottages at Atherfield date from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, replacing a mid 19<sup>th</sup> century coastguard station sited closer to the cliff edge.
- Very little 20<sup>th</sup> century residential development within this HEAP Area.
- The *Atherfield Coastal Plain* is one of the few HEAP Areas where it is difficult to relate modern field patterns to those shown on the OS 1793 map due to radical re-organisation of fields in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
  - The field patterns as they exist today show evidence for the extensive removal of boundaries in the later 20<sup>th</sup> century, in line with the agricultural trends of the time.

### **Contribution of Historic Landscape to Present Landscape Character**

- Historic elements that contribute to present landscape character include the following:
  - Boundaries relating to the Anglo-Saxon Atherfield Estate and to medieval parishes
  - The settlement pattern, probably largely of medieval origin
  - Roads and Rights of Way including the Military Road (of 19<sup>th</sup> century origin but upgraded in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century)
  - Some vernacular farmsteads and cottages of post-medieval date, including Walpen Manor of 17<sup>th</sup> century date.
  - Late 19<sup>th</sup> century coastguard cottages
  - The large fields that contribute much of the present landscape character are of 20<sup>th</sup> century origin.

### **Values, Perceptions and Associations**

- The coast is probably the most highly valued element of this HEAP Area, having unspoilt beaches, the cliff top coastal path and the dramatic Whale Chine.
- The Island's south-west coast, including both this Area and the *South-West Wight Coastal Zone*, is known locally as 'Back of the Wight' and is particularly associated with shipwrecks and smuggling.
  - Fred Mew captured the flavour of this region in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in his appropriately titled and colourful book, 'Back of the Wight' (Mew 1977).
- The Atherfield area is associated with the short-lived cult of St Simon of Atherfield.
  - In the early 12<sup>th</sup> century an estate at Atherfield (coresponding to Atherfield Farm) was held by Simon de Atherfield in the right of Avice, his wife.
  - Simon was murdered at Atherfield on 21 March 1210/1211, for which crime Avice was burned to death in the early summer of 1212.
  - Simon was regarded as a saint by the Island's inhabitants who soon began to leave oblations at his tomb. The bishop quickly stepped in to claim the oblations and to suppress this popular cult. (Notes on Royal Surveys, IWCRO).

### **Research and Documentation**

- Historic Environment Record is basic resource for archaeology and built environment (includes HLC Layer)
- Article on Anglo-Saxon charter bounds of IW describes the Atherfield Charter (Margham 2005).
- Shorwell Parish Landscape Character Assessment (AONB 2005).
- A popular booklet on Island Chines provides useful information about this Area (Isle of Wight AONB 1998).
- Two popular books on Island shipwrecks include information about this Area (Medland 1986; Phillips 1995)

### **Amenity and Education**

- Good coastal access along cliff-top coastal path.
- Shepherd's Chine and Whale Chine provide the only access points to the seashore and beach. Unfortunately the right of way down Whale Chine has been subject to temporary closure for some years as a result of coastal erosion.
- Educational value of geological strata in this Area.

### **Features of Particular Significance within this HEAP Area**

- Coastline and close relationship of whole area with the coast, symbolised by the coastguard cottages at Atherfield Point.
- Archaeological material exposed and eroding from cliff face
- Landscape features linked to Anglo-Saxon Atherfield Estate and to medieval parish boundaries, including watercourses, Rights of Way and field boundaries.
- *Dispersed Settlement* pattern of probable medieval origin.

- Roads and Rights of way relating to parish boundaries, medieval land use and medieval settlement patterns.
- Military Road.
- In common with the *Thorley/Wellow Plain* and the *Arreton Valley*, this HEAP Area illustrates later 20<sup>th</sup> century fieldscapes and the impact of modern agricultural processes.

## **VULNERABILITY**

### **Rarity and Typicality**

- The loss of historic boundaries and the resulting fieldscape of largely 20<sup>th</sup> century date are factors more typical of the mainland than of the other HEAP Areas on the Isle of Wight, with the exception of the *Thorley/Wellow Plain* and the *Arreton Valley*.

### **Coherence**

- The settlement pattern along Atherfield Road provides the defining theme for this HEAP Area but the loss of field boundaries has largely destroyed the context in which this pattern was set, although creating a 'coherent' 20<sup>th</sup> century agricultural landscape.

### **Condition and Fragility**

- Limited and relatively difficult access to the shore has meant that the coastline within this HEAP Area is under less pressure from visitors than the *South-West Wight Coastal Zone*.
- Cliffs are subject to rapid erosion

## **CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT ISSUES**

### **Forces for Change**

- Erosion of coastal cliffs, leading to loss of historic landscape features and archaeological material.
  - At the same time, this erosion is important for bio-diversity to create mosaic of habitats and new opportunities for colonisation post-erosion.
- Climate change may lead to changes in semi-natural vegetation and to changes in cultivated crops (e.g. growth of biofuels).
- Changing economic forces affecting agriculture are likely to have an impact on the historic landscape.

### **Management Issues.**

- Need to ensure that coastal path and access to beaches via chines stay open and remain safe
- Effective archaeological monitoring of eroding cliffs.
- Maintenance of historic features within farmed landscape.
- Need to investigate on the ground the *crop marks* and *soil marks* of probable prehistoric date recorded on air photographs.

### **Conservation Designations**

- All of the HEAP Area is within the AONB.
- There are no *Scheduled Monuments* within this HEAP Area
- There are no *Conservation Areas* within this HEAP Area.
- There are four *Listed Buildings* (all Grade II), these being Walpen Manor, Downend Cottage, Atherfield Farm and Sunnyside, Atherfield Green.
- There are no historic parks and gardens on the *English Heritage Register* within this HEAP Area.
- The coastline is within the Tennyson *Heritage Coast* and also within the South Wight Maritime SAC.



- All of the coastline and coastal slope area, including landslips and chins, falls within the Hanover Point to St Catherine's Point SSSI, which provides a complete geological section through the geological strata from the Wealden Group to the Lower Chalk.
- There are no *SINCs* within this HEAP Area.

## **FUTURE MANAGEMENT**

The Isle of Wight HEAP Objectives and Actions are set out in a separate document. These objectives and actions are generic and many of them are relevant to all HEAP Areas. Those that are most relevant to this HEAP Area are cited below.

- A10** Completion of Coastal HEAP (drawing on existing Coastal Audit and HLC, identifying management objectives and actions) setting out proposals for adequate recording of eroding coastal archaeology and identifying funding sources.
- A11** Seek funding for long term coastal archaeology recording project.
- A12** Complete Field Patterns HEAP.
- A13** Identify field patterns of significance.
- A14** Complete Rural Settlement HEAP.
- A16** Completion of character appraisals for all existing and potential Conservation Areas, using appropriate HLC and HEAP data.
- A20** Complete Valley Floor HEAP.
- A23** Completion of HEAP for Roads, Lanes and Tracks.
- A24** Complete field survey of historic Rights of Way.
- A27** Complete Military HEAP.
- A28** Complete Boundaries HEAP.
- A29** Complete Climate Change HEAP.
- A32** Facilitate the supply of HEAP and HLC information to land managers, farm advisers, farmers and funding bodies.
- A33** Facilitate use of HLC information to assess importance of hedgerows affected by hedgerow removal notices.
- A34** Advocate protection of buried archaeological features within cultivated land.
- A35** Promote conservation of historic farm buildings.
- A39** Promote the retention of significant historic field patterns.
- A40** Support traditional grazing and other appropriate management of valley floor land.
- A45** Advocate maintenance of historic character of rural roads.
- A48** Promote the conservation of historic buildings and their settings where these contribute significantly to the character of HEAP Areas.
- A55** Encourage inclusion of HEAP information in community based strategies and initiatives.
- A56** Promote green transport initiatives for tourist and leisure visits to HEAP Areas.
- A57** Facilitate pedestrian access to all HEAP Areas and HEAP Types.
- L2** Characterisation study of Isle of Wight farmsteads in relation to HEAP Areas.
- L3** Investigate compilation of a Tourism and Recreation HEAP covering holiday centres, camp sites, golf course and allotments.
- L14** Encourage preparation of booklet on historic lanes and tracks