

From a White Horse to sustainable development

The White Horse depicted on this site is actually the White Horse of Uffington, one of the oldest surviving pieces of art around the UK. It's a chalk carving (about 70m long) - in other words it has been made by removing grass and topsoil from a hillside on the Downs (on the Wiltshire / Oxfordshire border) to expose the white chalk below.

Its simplicity and flowing lines mark it out as a classic (and beautiful) piece of design, and it is quite different from the many other chalk carvings to be found around the UK. No one is quite sure when it was made - the best guess seems to be in the Bronze Age around 1000 BC, although opinions differ as to who did it and when (a web search will give you far more information than you could ever need, but www.nationaltrust.org.uk/white-horse-hill/ is a good place to start). The fantasy writer Terry Pratchett uses the White Horse in a recent book (*'A hat full of sky'* for older children, but still worth reading!) where a character points out that "it's not what a horse looks like, but it's certainly what a horse *is*".

Because it's on a hill-side the horse can best be seen and appreciated from the air (although it is fairly clear from many surrounding places and is even partially visible from the London-Bristol railway, on the south side near Swindon), prompting some to suggest that it was designed so that it could act as a message to passing UFOs. I would suggest that (as with the Nazca lines in Peru) whoever the inspired 'dark ages' artist was, she or he was quite capable of envisioning and creating something that would look good on a big scale even if they couldn't see the whole thing.

It seems that there are a number of parallels with sustainable development here...

- The origins are not altogether clear, but people recognise the underlying value and simplicity;
- It needs regular care and attention (to prevent it getting overgrown...)
- It's hard to get a grip on the 'big picture' when you're in the middle of it (but just because you can't see the big picture from where you stand doesn't mean it isn't there....)

Feel free to develop your own analogies...