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**Downland Initiative Feasibility
Study**

Prepared for:

**Brighton and Hove City Council
The Countryside Agency**

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Note

This report has been prepared for Brighton and Hove City Council and The Countryside Agency. No responsibility will be accepted to any third party. This version of the report has had some sections relating to individual Council farms removed as they were considered commercially sensitive.

The views expressed in this report are those of the report's authors and do not necessarily reflect those of Brighton and Hove City Council or The Countryside Agency except where expressly stated.

Report for

Brighton and Hove City Council
The Countryside Agency

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“Inevitably much of the work of the Sussex Downs Conservation Board [now the South Downs Joint Committee] must be carried out incrementally and will involve working closely with farmers, landowners and a range of statutory and local authority agencies. This implies that a strategic approach is of critical importance if landscape change is to be directed positively, creatively and effectively.”

Interim South Downs Management Plan (2004)

Natural England

A new integrated agency, comprising all of English Nature, the landscape, access and recreation elements of the Countryside Agency, and the environmental land management functions of the Rural Development Service will be created and known as Natural England from 1 October 2006.

Reference is still made in this report to English Nature, the Countryside Agency and Rural Development Service as at the time of writing they were the effective agencies and as many of the policies and tools referred to in the report were developed by them as individual agencies.



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Executive summary

Brighton and Hove City Council wishes to facilitate significant changes in the management of the 4,045 hectares (9,991 acres) of farmland it owns around the city of Brighton so that it delivers greater social and environmental benefits. The Council's project is called the Downland Initiative. The Council's proposals for the downland were set out in *The Space To Be* (2005). The broad aims were:

Agriculture and land use

- Establish a sustainable agricultural system on the Downs, with a greater emphasis on local, healthy food production, diversification and farming practices that are sympathetic to wider downland objectives.

Access

- Significantly expand the amount of access land adjacent to the urban areas of Brighton and Hove.
- Connect existing blocks of open access land into landscape-scale units.
- Achieve improved links between open access land and Rights of Way, including a range of 'easy access' routes, connecting the urban area into the countryside, for people with varied abilities and access needs.
- Provide for the needs of cyclists and horse riders, including an extension of the cycle path network onto the Downs.

Wildlife and landscape

- Conserve and enhance downland habitats and species to meet Biodiversity Action Plan targets.
- Work with the Landscape Enhancement Initiative to establish a national pilot on sustainable land management, targeting the conversion of arable land to chalk / species rich grassland where the highest benefits can be gained.
- Work with English Nature to identify the right land for habitat restoration and to better target agri-environment scheme funding.

Education and interpretation

- Implement an integrated interpretation and publicity strategy, to enhance the access experience and to ensure residents and visitors know about the new access opportunities available on their doorstep.
- Introduce a conservation regime for the Council's many scheduled ancient monuments and other downland archaeological features, to ensure their protection and public appreciation into the foreseeable future.

Smiths Gore and The University of Reading have been employed by Brighton and Hove City Council to examine the feasibility of the Downland Initiative. The purpose of the feasibility study is to prioritise aims and objectives for the Downland Initiative, to identify factors affecting the achievability of the Initiative and identify and appraise possible implementation mechanisms.

Council officers, the Council's tenant farmers and local interested parties were consulted to seek their views on the Downland Initiative and, resulting from this, a number of changes are suggested to the broad aims (see tables below).



Recommendations are made on how to achieve the broad aims, their priority, achievability and cost. For each aim and the recommendations made under them, the following are set out:

- Priority (low / medium / high)
- Achievability (easy / medium / difficult)
- Political achievability (ongoing / proposed action / explore further / long term future)
- Potential capital cost (low (less than £5,000)/ medium (£5,000 - £30,000) / high (more than £30,000))
- Potential running cost (low (less than £5,000)/ medium (£5,000 - £30,000) / high (more than £30,000))
- Start up timing (1-5 years / 5-10 years / 10-15 years / whole period)

The assessment of political achievability has been made by Brighton and Hove City Council and not by the research team.



Aim	Recommendation (section number in report)	Priority (L/M/H)	Achievability (E/M/D)	Political achievability*	Potential capital cost (L/M/H)	Potential running cost (L/M/H)	Start up timing (Years 1-5 / 5-10 / 10-15 / whole)
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Overarching aim

Reconnect the people of Brighton and Hove to a more biodiverse downland with better education, improved access and a better sense of connection to the land.

Section 6.1

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Agriculture and land use

Encourage the establishment of sustainable land management systems on the Downs, with a greater emphasis on local, healthy food production, diversification and farming practices that are sympathetic to wider downland objectives.

Support the creation of a retail outlet for the tenants to sell lamb, beef, flour and other products to the public. Section 6.2	M	E	Explore further	H	L	5-10
Re-energise the Farmers' Forum into a best practice club for the tenant farmers. Section 6.2	H	E	Proposed action	L	L	1-5
Tell the public what measures are being taken to introduce a sustainable agricultural system on the Downs. Section 6.2	M	E	Proposed action			whole
Make the Council's policy on land use and diversification clear to tenants. Section 6.2	H	E	Proposed action		L	whole
Reinstate a programme of school and other visits to the Council's farms. Section 6.2	M	E	Explore further		L	whole
Identify buildings, possibly at Stanmer Home Farm, for an education and interpretation centre. Section 6.2	M	E	Explore further			1-5



Aim	Recommendation (section number in report)	Priority (L/M/H)	Achievability (E/M/D)	Political achievability *	Potential capital cost (L/M/H)	Potential running cost (L/M/H)	Start up timing (Years 1-5 / 5-10 / 10-15 / whole)
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Access							
<i>Significantly expand the amount of access land adjacent to the urban areas of Brighton and Hove.</i>	Implement new routes proposed in Access for All and the Rights of Way Improvement Plan. Section 6.3	H	M	Ongoing			1-5
	Any access improvements should be included in the integrated interpretation and publicity strategy. Section 6.3	M, then H	E	Ongoing			whole
<i>Connect existing blocks of open access land into landscape-scale units.</i>	Allow and encourage open access on existing chalk grassland and areas where chalk grassland is being recreated, particularly where they link to existing blocks of open access land or into the rights of way network. Section 6.3	M	D	Proposed action	L	L	1-5
<i>Achieve improved links between Open Access Land and Rights of Way, including a range of 'easy access' routes, connecting the urban area into the countryside, for people with varied abilities and access needs</i>	See implement new routes above. Section 6.3			Ongoing			
<i>Provide for the needs of cyclists and horse riders, including an extension of the cycle path network up onto the Downs.</i>	See implement new routes above. Section 6.3			Ongoing			



Aim	Recommendation (section number in report)	Priority (L/M/H)	Achievability (E/M/D)	Political achievability * (Proposed action / explore further / long term future)	Potential capital cost (L/M/H)	Potential running cost (L/M/H)	Start up timing (Years 1-5 / 5-10 / 10-15 / whole)
Wildlife and landscape							
<i>Conserve and enhance downland habitats and species to meet Biodiversity Action Plan targets.</i>	Produce a Farm Environment Plan for each Council owned farm. Section 6.4	H	E	Proposed action	M		1-5
	Encourage all farm tenants to enter into Higher Level Stewardship within the next five years. Section 6.4	H	D	Proposed action	M	M	1-5
<i>Priority should be to protect existing habitats and to manage them better.</i>	Existing areas of chalk grassland, and other habitats of importance, including archaeological, should be protected from damaging agricultural operations and they should be managed better. Section 6.4	H	D	Proposed action		L	1-5
<i>Attention should be paid to the conservation value of overlooked habitats such as farm woodland and chalk scrub, and species such as arable plants when deciding on land management options.</i>	It is recommended that information on the nature conservation value of overlooked habitats (e.g. farm woodland, chalk scrub) and species (e.g. rare arable plants) on the estate is collected in order to inform decisions on land management options such as reversion of arable land or the clearance of scrub on existing areas of downland. Section 6.4	M	E	Explore further	M	L	1-5
	Work with the Landscape Enhancement Initiative to establish a national pilot on sustainable land management, targeting the conversion of arable land to chalk grassland where the highest benefits can be gained. Section 6.4	M	E	Long term future			whole
<i>Work with English Nature to identify the right land for habitat restoration and to better target agri- environment scheme funding.</i>	Provide feedback on the use of the Habitat Potential Mapping Tool within the Initiative area. Section 6.4	M	E	Long term future	N/A	N/A	whole



Aim	Recommendation (section number in report)	Priority (L/M/H)	Achievability (E/M/D)	Political achievability * (Proposed action / explore further / long term future)	Potential capital cost (L/M/H)	Potential running cost (L/M/H)	Start up timing (Years 1-5 / 5-10 / 10-15 / whole)
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Education and interpretation

Implement an integrated interpretation and publicity strategy, to enhance the access experience and to ensure residents and visitors know about the new access opportunities available on their doorstep.

Implement an integrated interpretation and publicity strategy, to enhance the access experience and to ensure residents and visitors know about the new access opportunities available on their doorstep. Section 6.5	M	M	Explore further	M	Unknown	whole
The Council should explore the possibility of providing land at or near schools for vegetable growing. Section 6.5	M	M	Explore further	M	L	whole

Introduce a conservation regime for the Council's many scheduled ancient monuments and other downland archaeological features, to ensure their protection and public appreciation into the foreseeable future.

The County Archaeologist(s) and / or Brighton and Hove Archaeological Society should identify key sites and assess the sustainability of their current and best practice land use. Section 6.5	H	E	Explore further			1-5
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It is recommended that this feasibility study is used as a tool to implement/coordinate the Downland Initiative.

The aims of the Downland Initiative are feasible. The recommendations made to achieve them are practical and, in the researchers' opinion, possible to achieve but may result in both additional capital and revenue cost to the Council if they were to seek implementation of all of the Initiative.

There are currently only limited externally funding schemes in operation which the Council or their tenants could tap into and many of these do not necessarily provide the flexibility that is required for joint landlord and tenant applications. As a result the aims of the Initiative will only be achieved with the support of the Council, its officers and particularly the farm tenants together with identifying new funding opportunities from



appropriate Agencies and stakeholder bodies. It will require co-operation and trust between all of these groups. Building a stronger relationship has started already but further significant change is needed.

If the Downland Initiative is to be successfully implemented in its entirety, new sources of income need to be identified to mitigate falling income for both the Council and their tenants through a combination of grant support, greater flexibility in the planning framework and a willingness by the Council to support and invest in appropriate diversification opportunities.

The anticipated loss of income and the possible costs involved in implementing the Downland Initiative needs to be balanced against political acceptability of the Initiative if all or part of the Downland Initiative is to succeed.

Implementing significant change on the Estate will require the support and co-operation of the tenant farmers who, at the current time, whilst reasonably supportive of the Initiative, seem not to effect change until there is a strong financial case to do so.



1.0 Introduction

Brighton and Hove City Council (also referred to as the Council) wishes to facilitate significant changes in the management of the 4,045 hectares (9,991 acres) of farmland it owns around the city of Brighton so that it delivers greater social and environmental benefits. With support from The Countryside Agency, the Council is assessing: how it can deliver an enhanced downland landscape, in particular the feasibility of re-establishing large areas of species rich grassland; encouraging a move towards more sustainable farming practices, and opening up much more of the Downs to public access, including reconnecting people with the countryside (farmers and visitors). The Council's project is called the Downland Initiative.

The Council set out its proposals for the downland in a document called *The Space To Be* (2005). It describes the background to the Council's ownership of the downland estate, the Council's views on the current use and management of the estate and its vision of how the estate could be used.

The vision for the estate in *The Space To Be* (2005) is to reconnect the people of Brighton and Hove with the City's downland.

1.1.1 Background

Brighton and Hove Council is a unitary authority with a total population of 247,817 (2001 Population Census). According to Countryside Agency definitions, only half of Brighton and Hove's area is urban with the balance either urban fringe or countryside.

The Corporation of Brighton purchased about 4,000 hectares (10,000 acres) of downland in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with the aim of protecting the town's water supply and controlling development. Most of the land purchased was subject to agricultural tenancies and since this time agricultural tenancies have been the principal method by which land has been managed. Due to the structure of these tenancies and changing economic and social trends which have affected agriculture since the estate was purchased, there has been a continual process of agricultural intensification on the land, initially as part of the war effort and the pressing need for self-sufficiency in food production, and more recently as a result of the Common Agricultural Policy, where production decisions were directly linked to European and Government support. The intensification has led to a number of undesirable effects or externalities on the land, including soil erosion, nitrate pollution of the aquifer, and loss of natural and semi-natural habitats. Many of the externalities have direct costs, for example, cleaning soil from the roads and removing nitrates from the water supply.

Brighton and Hove City Council has revisited its need for ownership of the estate. Whilst the initial reasons for purchase remain valid, it wishes to review its management in an effort to identify new, complementary ways in which existing management practices might be influenced through sustainable land management. This would include reconnecting the general public with the countryside through improved and increased public access, education, and the production of high quality, locally consumed food.



1.1.2 The Downland Initiative

As part of the Council's review of the management of the land, four principal drivers have emerged which helped develop the broad aims of the Downland Initiative:

- The Downland Vision
- Landscape value, both grassland and other landscape features and habitats (South Downs Landscape Enhancement Initiative)
- Increased and enlarged areas of open access land
- Economic viability of farming on the estate

The broad aims have been grouped by the research team into four themes for ease of consideration (see Table 1). The Council recognises that to achieve the aims, any implementation mechanisms must be based on sound economics, a phased change in management, obtaining the support and co-operation of land occupiers, that any public benefits being secured in perpetuity and that the agreed proposal for implementing the Initiative offers the greatest gain or best value for public investment.

Table 1 The broad aims of the Downland Initiative

Agriculture and land use

- Establish a sustainable agricultural system on the Downs, with a greater emphasis on local, healthy food production, diversification and farming practices that are sympathetic to wider downland objectives.

Access

- Significantly expand the amount of access land adjacent to the urban areas of Brighton and Hove.
- Connect existing blocks of open access land¹ into landscape-scale units.
- Achieve improved links between open access land and Rights of Way, including a range of 'easy access' routes, connecting the urban area into the countryside, for people with varied abilities and access needs.
- Provide for the needs of cyclists and horse riders, including an extension of the cycle path network onto the Downs.

Wildlife and landscape

- Conserve and enhance downland habitats and species to meet Biodiversity Action Plan targets.
- Work with the Landscape Enhancement Initiative to establish a national pilot on sustainable land management, targeting the conversion of arable land to chalk / species rich grassland where the highest benefits can be gained.
- Work with English Nature to identify the right land for habitat restoration and to better target agri-environment scheme funding.

Education and interpretation

- Implement an integrated interpretation and publicity strategy, to enhance the access experience and to ensure residents and visitors know about the new access opportunities available on their doorstep.
 - Introduce a conservation regime for the Council's many scheduled ancient monuments and other downland archaeological features, to ensure their protection and public appreciation into the foreseeable future.
-

¹ Open access land refers to land over which the public has been granted a statutory right of access on foot under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (often referred to as the 'CROW Act'). The right covers open country and registered common land in England and Wales. Open access land is a distinct concept to Access for All, which is Brighton and Hove City Council's assessment of how to improve access for all members of the local community.



2.0 Purpose of the feasibility study

Smiths Gore and The University of Reading have been employed by Brighton and Hove City Council to examine the feasibility of the Downland Initiative.

The study has the following objectives:

- Review and assess existing studies, reports, policy documents and management statements to determine their relevance to the Initiative.
- Seek the views and ideas of local interested parties.
- Define, agree and prioritise aims and objectives for the Downland Initiative.
- Identify factors (opportunities, constraints and others) affecting the achievability of the broad aims of the Downland Initiative.
- Identify and appraise possible implementation mechanisms and the extent to which each possible mechanism might require public and landlord intervention to support change; this will include an assessment of the impacts of proposed changes on the tenants.
- Recommend the most cost-effective strategy to implement the agreed Initiative by means of a costed project plan.

These objectives are used as the structure of this report.

2.1 Research method

To seek to answer the above objectives, this research has involved a review of existing relevant literature, a series of discussion groups with the Council's officers, tenant farmers and other interested parties and a series of telephone interviews was also carried out.



3.0 Review and assess existing studies, reports, policy documents and management statements to determine their relevance to the Initiative

A review of reports and studies has been carried out as these documents set out the policy framework and analysis carried out on the area previously. This section summarises the main points of relevance to the existing and proposed management of the Council's downland from the review:

3.1 The Downland Vision for the land

Since 2002 the Downland Forum and Farm Policy Steering Group of the Council has been working within the context of European and national agricultural policy changes towards a Downland Vision. The need for such an initiative has emerged not just from the agricultural policy changes but also the problems faced by agriculture and the demand for greater public access and closer linkages with the local urban area. A particular problem faced by some local farmers and adjacent residents has been the incidence of flooding and mud flows resulting in water runoff from downland farms. This is a further reason for adjusting farming methods. Initiatives aimed at diversification in farming to improve economic, social and environmental conditions are seen as a key element of the Downland Vision.

The Downland Vision seeks to address the issues on a broad front, recognising the links between the rural and urban communities and the needs of both. The initial development of the Vision has taken place and the Group continues to meet in order to identify opportunities to put the Vision into practice.

It is the Downland Vision that helped inform the Council's production of *The Space to Be (2005)*, which is its vision for the Downland.

3.2 Management Plans for the South Downs

There are a number of management plans relevant to the Council's downland. The *Interim South Downs Management Plan (2004)* updates two separate management plans prepared for the two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) which the South Downs Joint Committee encompasses; these are the East Hampshire and Sussex Downs AONBs. Its key aim, like the AONB and proposed national park designations, is to protect, conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area. (It is noted that national parks have the additional aim of promoting public understanding and enjoyment.)

The draft vision for the Downs is:

"The South Downs is a beautiful unspoilt landscape to be enjoyed by everyone, now and in the future. Air, land and water are cleaner, wildlife and communities flourish, and history and culture are respected. Natural resources are used more wisely and everyone enjoys a better way of life."

The principles of the plan are that:



- The conservation and enhancement of natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage is a pre-requisite.
- The principle of sustainable development is fundamental.
- Objectives and policies will be integrated.
- Partnership is essential.
- The policies are socially inclusive (and satisfy the needs of different ages and sectors of society, including physically and socially disadvantaged people).

The Management Plan is based on a large number of existing plans, reports and other documents. Its purpose is to seek the involvement of a wide range of interested parties in achieving a long-term vision for the South Downs. Short-term actions and business plans should progress incrementally to the longer-term vision over the next 50 years.

The issues that it identifies as most influential to the management plan, and the management of the South Downs, are:

- Understanding what is special about the South Downs.
- Sustaining and influencing farming and forestry.
- Managing recreation demand and traffic.
- Managing development.
- Water quality and supply.

These issues will be key to the Downland Initiative as well.

The Interim Management Plan sets out a series of objectives, policies and key actions to ensure that its vision is achieved. The objectives are listed below.

3.2.1 Landscape character and diversity

The vision is for a landscape of high quality, character and diversity which is protected from damage and / or loss. This will be achieved by protecting the overall character and quality of the Downs and also the hidden treasures and special features.

3.2.2 Connecting with the past

The objectives of policy are to protect the historic environment, historic buildings, settlements and their cultural heritage.

3.2.3 Unspoilt and tranquil landscapes

The Management Plan's vision is for a landscape comprising unspoilt rural areas of high tranquillity. The aim is to ensure that changes in land use or development do not affect the tranquillity of the area, especially from traffic. Many of these policies will be affected through the planning system – but the Council can also ensure that any activities on its land do not adversely affect its tranquillity. There is a balancing act to be achieved here with the desire for increased access to the land by the general public, by foot, bicycle or vehicle.



3.2.4 Biodiversity action

The vision for the South Downs, which is the same as the Downland Initiative's, is that the biodiversity of the area is rich and robust as a result of traditional and innovative management and protection. The Management Plan recognises that there is not an overall or detailed understanding of the ecological state of the South Downs.

One of the most fundamental questions for the Downland Initiative is to establish a baseline of biodiversity data for the area and then agree what type of land management is needed to achieve it. If this can be achieved, the Downland Initiative would be a pioneering project in the United Kingdom.

3.2.5 Natural resources

The Interim South Downs Management Plan's vision is that it is a model of sustainable resource use, through protecting the rocks, soil, groundwater and air from loss, damage and pollution.

3.2.6 Living and working in the Downs

The vision is for vibrant rural communities, where the economic and social needs of the local people are provided for.

3.2.7 Enjoying the landscape

The area should be enjoyed by residents and visitors, who should help conserve its special features. However, it is also the workplace for farmers. These demands need to be balanced by the Management Plan for the area. The objective is to ensure that recreational pressure is managed sustainably so there is high quality access for everyone.

3.2.8 New values for a new generation

The vision is that those who visit the South Downs are inspired and informed by their experience – that they understand better their impact on the area and the wider world – through the provision of interpretative and educational resources.

Some of the main issues to tackle are that, in general, people have lost contact with the South Downs, people other than ABC1² category are unlikely to visit the Downs, there is a lack of provision for physically disabled people and educational and interpretative information is inconsistent across the Downs.

² The National Readership Survey social grade definitions have been in use for decades, ostensibly for population profiling, and have become established as a generic reference series for classifying and describing social classes. ABC1 refers to classes A (upper middle class, higher managerial, administrative or professional), B (middle class, intermediate managerial, administrative or professional) and C1 (lower middle class supervisory or clerical, junior managerial, administrative or professional). These are the highest social grades, and account for about 55% of the UK population aged over 15 years old.



3.2.9 Managing the land

Farming and forestry should help meet the environmental objectives for the South Downs. Environmentally-friendly, economically viable, job-creating farming which produces quality foods is desirable.

3.2.10 Sustaining the economy

The vision is that the economy of the South Downs is diverse and supports and maintains the special qualities of the area.

3.3 Landscape

The Sussex Downs was recognised as one of the country's finest landscapes by its designation as an AONB in 1966. The Landscape Assessment of the Sussex Downs produced by Landscape Design Associates (March 1996) identified 15 distinct landscapes within the AONB, five of which occur within the Council's downland estate:

- Open east chalk uplands.
- Principal chalk valleys.
- East chalk valley systems.
- Open chalk escarpment.
- Wooded chalk escarpment.

These types provide more detail of the more general South Downs Countryside Character Area descriptions produced by the Countryside Agency.

The landscape assessment identified 10 key priority issues that should form the basis of any landscape management action. These issues should be central to any actions taken under the Downland Initiative:

1. Retain and strengthen diversity and typical variations in scale.
2. Hedgerows are particularly important in defining the visual structure of the landscape and their restoration in intensively farmed areas is a priority³.
3. Woodlands have important local characteristics – e.g. regular, large-scale, irregular and small-scale.
4. Rivers, streams, ditches and damp meadows provide striking visual contrasts and should be regarded as special areas within the overall landscape.
5. Identify and enhance existing distinctive visual, archaeological and historic landscape features.
6. Prominent features with a negative visual impact should be upgraded, screened or removed.
7. Detailed appraisal of recreational 'honey pots' is needed to upgrade and protect their landscapes.
8. There is considerable scope to improve the urban / rural edge to the south of the South Downs. Planting schemes, some large scale, are most appropriate around Brighton but should only be done following detailed visual analysis.

³ Hedgerows are not a feature of much of Brighton's downland landscape. In some areas, removal of hedges and fence lines may be more appropriate.



9. Road developments which cross several different landscape character areas should be designed to reflect the variations in the character of the areas.
10. The landscape assessment should be used as the basis of management strategies to enhance local distinctiveness and thus counteract the gradual homogenisation of the landscape. The sense of remoteness must be retained.



3.4 Wildlife

Many organisations have objectives relating to the enhancement of the landscape and habitats of the South Downs, and there is a large degree of overlap in their content. The main set of objectives relating to wildlife is found in the Sussex Biodiversity Action Plan and English Nature's South Downs Natural Area. In addition, the Sussex Downs AONB Management Plan sets out a range of objectives for various habitats and the landscapes in which they are found.

The main habitats on the Brighton and Hove farmland are:

- Chalk grassland.
- Arable farmland.
- Hedgerows.
- Historic parkland.
- Woodlands.

English Nature has developed a series of habitat suitability models as part of the South Downs Lifescapes project. These models identify the most suitable locations for habitat creation and the model for chalk / species rich grassland has been used in this research to identify potential recreation sites. The models' output has also been supplemented by local knowledge of suitable sites.

The objectives for wildlife habitats can be summarised as follows:

- Existing sites for nature conservation are all protected and managed for biodiversity. This includes Castle Hill National Nature Reserve, which has SAC and SSSI status, along with the areas of SSSI at Ashcombe Bottom.
- Existing areas of important habitats are enlarged by allowing adjoining land to revert by natural colonisation.
- New wildlife corridors and broad swathes of habitat are established, connecting and embracing special sites.
- Conditions are created which allow locally extinct and threatened species to flourish once again.
- The targets outlined in local Biodiversity Action Plans are met.
- Appropriate criteria are identified to allow the best decisions to be made regarding potentially conflicting usages. These should relate to the value of the existing habitat, the suitability for creation of a new habitat, the likely value of the habitat produced, the availability of alternative sites for the same use and compatibility with landscape character, the farming system and with other uses.



3.5 Natural resources

The protection of natural resources is covered in a number of plans, including the Interim South Downs Management Plan, the Sussex Biodiversity Action Plan and the Environmental Stewardship Scheme objectives.

Environmental Stewardship, the Government's new, key national agri-environment scheme, is comprised of three schemes: Entry Level Stewardship, Organic Entry Level Stewardship and Higher Level Stewardship.

The Government would like the majority of farmers in England to enter Entry Level Stewardship (ELS), which has basic resource protection, landscape and wildlife objectives and has an objective relevant to water quality:

3.5.1 ELS Potential benefits on the Downs

To help prevent deterioration in water quality caused by high nutrient levels

Relevant options: Buffer strips; nutrient/manure management plans; permanent grassland with low or very low inputs

Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) is solely targeted at high priority areas, habitats and species. One of the scheme's secondary targets is water quality:

3.5.2 HLS Potential benefits on the Downs

Enhancement of water quality within the rivers and streams which flow across the downs.

Secondary target: Enhance water quality within the rivers and streams which cross the downs, through improved land management and establishment of buffer zones to reduce the risk of soil erosion. This applies to land within 200m of bodies of water.

3.6 Access

There are a number of documents and policies that affect access in and around Brighton, some of which are produced by the Council. The most relevant Council plans are the Rights of Way Improvement Plan, the Missing Links project, and Access for All.

The Rights of Way Improvement Plan, which all local authorities are required to produce by November 2007 under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, aims to identify and prioritise improvements to the existing rights of way network and ensure that a holistic approach is taken to access in the Council's area. It also includes the Missing Links project which has identified new rights of way which would improve the connectivity of the rights of way network.

The Access for All project recognises that all members of society should have access to the countryside. It has identified the challenges and difficulties facing people with disabilities and has identified 26 routes which deliver access to the countryside for both able bodied and disabled people.



The Council's initiatives should take into account research and projects carried out by other organisations. The most relevant study to the Downland Initiative is the Countryside Agency's Countryside In And Around Towns. It considers the interface between town and country and makes suggestions for the better use of the urban-rural fringe for access. Many of its conclusions on the key functions of the urban-rural fringe are relevant to Brighton and Hove:

1. A bridge to the country.
2. A gateway to the town.
3. A health centre.
4. A classroom.
5. A recycling and renewable energy centre.
6. A productive landscape.
7. A cultural legacy.
8. A place for sustainable living.
9. An engine for regeneration.
10. A nature reserve.

Improving access is also an objective of the Environmental Stewardship scheme which provides a mechanism and funding for increasing access.

3.7 Culture and history

Brighton's Downs are rich in archaeological and historical interest. This is recognised in both The Space to Be (2005) and the Interim South Downs Management Plan. Both documents provide a brief review of the area's history and set out objectives to connect the past to the present:

The Space to Be

- Achieve a sympathetic land management regime for the majority of the City's Scheduled Ancient Monuments.
- Ensure that the best archaeological sites and wider cultural areas are publicly accessible and interpreted for visitors, using the most appropriate media.

Interim South Downs Management Plan

- Ensure the protection, conservation and, where appropriate, restoration of the historic environment.
- Protect and conserve the character of historic buildings, settlements and other historic structures and their settings including their cultural heritage.

The Environmental Stewardship scheme also has objectives relevant to archaeological and historic sites, and may be a useful mechanism for achieving the above objectives:

ELS To increase protection for archaeological and historic sites.

Relevant options: Take archaeological features out of cultivation; reduce cultivation depth; management of scrub on archaeological sites; archaeological features on grassland.



HLS Protect archaeological features and landscapes.

- Primary target: Protect archaeological features or landscapes (Scheduled Ancient Monuments or locally recorded sites).
- Primary target: Protect or restore designed historic parklands listed on the English Heritage register.
- Primary target: Conserve structures and non-residential buildings of historic, architectural or archaeological importance that are on the Listed Buildings At Risk Register built using traditional materials and construction methods. Restore these structures where they are situated on farmland and they promote the enjoyment of the countryside by the public.
- *Secondary target: Protect archaeological features and landscapes that have not been previously recorded. Maintain or restore designed historic parklands that are locally designated.*

3.8 Summary of review of existing studies, reports, policy documents and management statements

The majority of the broad aims for the Downland Initiative are complementary to the policies, visions, aims and objectives contained in the many documents pertaining to the South Downs and Brighton and Hove.

Some of the aims of the Initiative, notably to establish a national pilot on sustainable land management, reflect the ambition of the Council for the Initiative and are not contained in the other documents.

It was noted in the Lessons Learned from the Land Management Initiatives that the pursuit of sustainability is a journey rather than an end state, with objectives for sustainability setting a direction for travel rather than a clear destination. It is recommended that this way of thinking about sustainability is adopted for the Downland Initiative.



4.0 Seek the views and ideas of local interested parties

4.1 Consultation with estate tenants and other interested parties, and summary of views

As part of the assessment of the aims and objectives, outcomes and implementation of the Downland Initiative, a number of meetings were held to gauge local and regional opinion on the proposed objectives of the Initiative. Meetings were held with:

- Council officers.
- Council tenant farmers.
- Local interested parties.

The purpose of these discussion group meetings was to seek the views of the consultees on the Downland Initiative, to scope / identify the range of issues involved, to review what its aims should be, how these should be implemented and the potential management structure and funding sources.

Details of the discussion groups and summaries of the discussions that took place are presented in Appendix A.

The main conclusion to be drawn from the discussion groups is that there is considerable 'goodwill' towards the Downland Initiative; the research team was surprised at the level of support, local passion for the Initiative and the amount of consensus on its aims.

A challenge for the Council in implementing the Downland Initiative will be managing expectations in the local community. Whilst everyone appears to agree about the vision for the downland and the broad aims for the Initiative, there is likely to be less consensus on how the Initiative is actually implemented. For example, while all the local interested parties agreed that new areas of chalk / species rich grassland should be created, there was little agreement (or even prior consideration) on how much should be established.

The problem about quantity is far from unique to the Initiative. For example, for nature conservation, national governments and international conservation organisations do not agree on the quantum required of habitats and species, and the amounts desired are likely to be different at international, national, regional and local levels.

The four broad themes of the Initiative (agriculture and land use, access, wildlife and landscape, and education and interpretation; see Table 1) were supported by all parties consulted.

There was also agreement between the groups that the four goals were interlinked, which made it difficult to prioritise them. The majority of respondents expressed a view that the Initiative should be holistic and address all of the goals, and that they were largely complementary.

The key issues which emerged for each of the four broad themes were:



4.2 Agriculture and land use

A key recurrent message was that the downland must be farmed in a sustainable way; the definition of sustainability was very broad and included issues such as economic viability, landscape, wildlife, water quality, transport, access and the health of local residents.

Although it is likely that different parties hold different definitions of what 'sustainability' means, all of the discussion groups agreed that sustainability included the economic sustainability of the tenant farmers' businesses.

The main mechanisms identified to encourage sustainable land management practices were agri-environment schemes and working with the farm tenants to adopt best practice. However, there may be occasions where the land has to be taken back in hand by the Council.

The production of food that could be consumed by the local population was another recurring theme, and it was noted that the land at present does not do this. A wide range of products from lamb and beef to fruit and vegetables were mentioned as having potential local markets.

4.3 Access

Despite agriculture being seen as key to the future management of the downland, the majority of discussion focussed on access; however, this may have been due to the composition of the discussion groups. Allowing the people of Brighton and Hove to experience 'their' land emerged in its own right as an important message.

The overall message is that more access is wanted / needed and that it had to provide for a range of users: walkers, cyclists and horse riders; elderly people, families and disabled people; the confident and fearful of the countryside. Due to this, a range of demands for access emerged, from new open access areas which could be used by cyclists and horse riders, to short, circular routes which could be for people using wheelchairs and pushchairs.

There was also a practical view from some consultees who held that getting the Rights of Way Improvement Plan and Missing Links plans implemented were the most important steps towards improved access. The importance of good quality information on access opportunities to enable people to make informed choices was also raised.

4.4 Wildlife and landscape

Whilst other habitats were referred to in the discussion groups, the key habitat mentioned in the discussion groups was chalk / species rich grassland. The overall feeling is that its management must be improved, probably through increased use of grazing, and that some existing areas of chalk / species rich grassland should be buffered from agricultural operations. There was also considerable discussion about creating new areas of chalk / species rich grassland, not necessarily adjacent to extant



areas, although it was recognised that linking areas would be biologically more advantageous.

There was little mention of any other habitat or landscape type. The research team was surprised at this as they expected more mention of hedgerows, woodland and general landscape aesthetics, although there was a brief mention of the need to control the visual impact effect of farm diversification projects.

4.5 Education and interpretation

The need to re-establish the link between town and country, and between the people of Brighton and Hove and the tenant farmers, recurred in all discussions. A general view was that the link should start with school children visiting the land to gain a better understanding of how the land is managed, the role of farmers and how food is produced.

Although many respondents noted that the quality of signage along rights of way had improved in recent years, there was still a feeling that it could be further improved. As well as the want for increased physical access (via rights of way and open access land), there was a demand for 'intellectual' or 'perceived' access. For example, signs informing the public what is growing in the fields, how it is managed and what it will be used for. The same could apply to chalk / species rich grassland (and the difference between it and permanent pasture and temporary grassland), hedgerows, woodland, ponds, set-aside and access routes and areas.

The amount and quality of interpretation material on the downland's history and culture was felt to be poor. Better material would improve the local communities' 'intellectual' access to the land and would contribute to increasing the public's ownership of the land.

Based on the consultation and the broad agreement with the Council's aims for the Downland Initiative observed in the consultation, it is proposed that the four broad aims are not changed. The consultation did however highlight priorities under each of the broad aims that should be included in the Downland Initiative. It is these priorities that are assessed next.



5.0 Define and agree aims and objectives for the Downland Initiative

This section will review the broad aims of the Downland Initiative (see Table 1) in light of the review of existing information and the findings of the discussion groups.

In Section 6.0, the aims will be prioritised, based on the discussion groups' responses and the judgement of the research team.

5.1 Proposed changes to broad aims

It is recommended that the broad aims for the Initiative are amended as follows (*proposed changes are in bold italics*):

Based on the review of existing information and on the discussion group findings, the broad aims set by the Council in *The Space to Be* appear to be consistent with government policies and there is wide ranging local support for them.

It is recommended that an overarching aim is added:

Overarching aim

- ***Reconnect the people of Brighton and Hove to a more biodiverse downland with better education, improved access and a better sense of connection to the land.***

5.1.1 Agriculture and land use

An important theme to have emerged from the discussion groups was that many of the people of Brighton and Hove are not 'connected' with the downland surrounding the city. This disconnection is both physical, as many do not venture onto the farmland and downs, but also, and probably as importantly, intellectually.

The intellectual disconnection occurs at all ages, from school children upwards. It is also possibly most acute for ethnic minorities, as well as less able and less affluent members of society⁴. There was a feeling that the 'kids must know what a cow is' and should be 'taken out to meet their supper', that people should feel able to walk on 'their' land and that greater effort should be made to provide interpretation material to inform people about the land and land management practices. This could be called 'informed access'.

It should be noted that this is a national issue, and that The Countryside Agency are currently investigating what can be done to support the participation in outdoor recreation of disabled people, black and ethnic minority people, people who live in inner city areas, and young people.

The research team makes a number of proposals to improve the connection between the people and the Council's downland:

⁴ It should be noted that this statement is based on a small number of responses in the discussion groups.



- Produce food for the community from the estate – ‘Brighton’s food grown on your land’. Some of the food could be provided by a new market garden.
- Continue to improve the relationship between the Council and its tenant farmers.
- Manage the amount of illegal access.
- Encourage the sense of ownership of the land by the community. This could be done by ‘informed access’, with better information and interpretation material, improved access (e.g., more easily used rights of way) and by creating stronger links between farmers and the community.
- Support visits to the Council’s farms by local schools; all of the tenant farmers who attended the discussion groups supported this idea and many had hosted school visits in the past. They had stopped the visits due to concerns about health and safety, and insurance. The farmers said that the Council could help by reducing their liability and by drafting or providing information packs for the visits.
- Encourage a greater partnership between the Council, people and the tenant farmers so that all parties better understand the constraints on them.

All of the discussion groups agreed that sustainable land management was key to the Initiative and that it was necessary to retain farmers so that they could continue to manage the land. There was also an understanding that agriculture alone was unlikely to provide adequate incomes for the tenants and that the farmers must be allowed to diversify. It was also noted that the diversification must be sustainable, particularly in relation to transport.

Agriculture and land use

- ***Encourage the establishment of sustainable land management*** systems on the Downs, with a greater emphasis on local, healthy food production, diversification and farming practices that are sympathetic to wider downland objectives.

5.1.2 Access

The discussion groups highlighted that there should be a concentration of effort on a few key points, including implementing the Rights of Way Improvement Plan, Missing Links and Access for All. The aims of the Initiative may be met once these are implemented, in conjunction with any new access over areas of land reverted to chalk / species rich grassland.

5.1.3 Wildlife and landscape

A few additional aims are proposed. However, the general feeling from the discussion groups was that there should be efforts to protect, buffer and properly manage the existing features as well as creating new ones. The buffering of the Castle Hill Special Area of Conservation (SAC) was a recurring theme; it is viewed as the nature conservation ‘jewel in the crown’ of the Estate.

An expansion of the area under chalk / species rich grassland through arable reversion can meet a number of objectives relating to nature conservation, landscape appearance, protection of archaeological features and provision of public access opportunities. However, when deciding on the location of new arable reversion sites, the existing biodiversity value of the arable land needs to be considered, especially with respect to



rare arable plants. Similarly, the nature conservation value of scrub on existing areas of chalk / species rich grassland needs to be assessed before decisions are made regarding scrub clearance for chalk / species rich grassland restoration.

It is recommended that two additional aims are added to reflect this:

- ***Priority should be to protect existing habitats and to manage them better.***
- ***Attention should be paid to the conservation value of overlooked habitats such as farm woodland and chalk scrub, and species such as rare arable plants when deciding on land management options.***

5.1.4 Education and interpretation

The view was that the Council's broad aims do not need to be added to, although the discussion groups highlighted detail under them.

Education and interpretation were viewed as inextricably linked to agriculture and the use of the downland estate. The general feeling was that the current provision of interpretation material on the land's history, culture and archaeology was poor and should be improved. There was also, as already stated, a want for more 'intellectual access' to the land – in terms of what it is growing and why, what crops and stock will be used for, the actions that happen on the land, its appearance through the changing of the seasons.



The research team recommends that the broad aims are amended as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Proposed broad aims for the Downland Initiative
(proposed changes are in bold italics)

Overarching aim

- ***Reconnect the people of Brighton and Hove to a more biodiverse downland with better education, improved access and a better sense of connection to the land.***

Agriculture and land use

- Establish a sustainable ***land management*** system on the Downs, with a greater emphasis on local, healthy food production, diversification and farming practices that are sympathetic to wider downland objectives.

Access

- Significantly expand the amount of access land adjacent to the urban areas of Brighton and Hove.
- Connect existing blocks of open access land into landscape-scale units.
- Achieve improved links between Open Access Land and Rights of Way, including a range of 'easy access' routes, connecting the urban area into the countryside, for people with varied abilities and access needs.
- Provide for the needs of cyclists and horse riders, including an extension of the cycle path network onto the Downs.

Wildlife and landscape

- Conserve and enhance downland habitats and species to meet Biodiversity Action Plan targets.
- ***Priority should be to protect existing habitats and to manage them better.***
- ***Attention should be paid to the conservation value of overlooked habitats such as farm woodland and chalk scrub, and species such as arable plants when deciding on land management options.***
- Work with the Landscape Enhancement Initiative to establish a national pilot on sustainable land management, targeting the conversion of arable land to chalk / species rich grassland where the highest benefits can be gained.
- Work with English Nature to identify the right land for habitat restoration and to better target agri-environment scheme funding.

Education and interpretation

- Implement an integrated interpretation and publicity strategy, to enhance the access experience and to ensure residents and visitors know about the new access opportunities available on their doorstep.
 - Introduce a conservation regime for the council's many scheduled ancient monuments and other downland archaeological features, to ensure their protection and public appreciation into the foreseeable future.
-



6.0 Key priorities and targets for the Downland Initiative

Under each of the broad aims, key priorities and targets have been identified. The priorities are scored on a simple scale (low, medium and high) to help target effort under the Initiative.

A significant concern raised by all discussion groups, but by the tenant farmers and other interested parties in particular, was that the Downland Initiative must be realistic and achievable.

There was considerable feeling that this Initiative must not be like many others where little action takes place. One attendee summed the feeling up as, "The broad aims proposed [for the Downland Initiative] are super but, by past history, nothing will happen." There was also a want expressed in the discussion groups that some 'early action and wins' were needed to give the Initiative momentum. This would also help develop interest in the community and also generate 'ownership' of the Initiative by the public, Council Officers, the tenant farmers and other interested parties.

The remainder of this Section has been drafted with this quote very much in mind, and with reference to the 80:20 rule (for any task, by focussing on the most important 20% of a task, 80% of it can be achieved⁵.)

Therefore, a small number of key priorities have been identified under each of the broad aims. If they are achieved, then much of the vision and the broad aims of the Initiative should also have been achieved.

6.1 Overarching aim

- *Reconnect the people of Brighton and Hove to a more biodiverse downland with better education, improved access and a better sense of connection to the land.*

This is achieved through the other broad aims and also by involving local stakeholders in the management of the Downland Initiative.

⁵ This is often incorrectly called the Pareto Principle and attributed to the Italian economist Vilfredo Pareto.



6.2 Agriculture and land use

6.2.1 Encourage the establishment of sustainable land management systems on the Downs, with a greater emphasis on local, healthy food production, diversification and farming practices that are sympathetic to wider downland objectives.

Support the creation of retail outlets for the tenants and other local producers to sell lamb, beef, flour and other products to the public.

Priority - medium

It is recommended that the tenants have a retail outlet to sell the lamb, beef and other goods produced on the estate. It would be a benefit to the tenants and also help reinforce the community's connection to the downland. Outlets must be financially viable and should not be directly operated by the Council.

Although there is an existing lamb and beef marketing project in the South Downs (called South Downs Marketing Ltd), many of the Council's tenants do not subscribe to it due to the breed requirements to sell through the scheme (e.g., for sheep, Hampshire or Southdown). It is recommended that the tenants join the existing scheme if the barriers to them joining can be overcome. If this is not possible, there may be scope for agreement of a different tier of accreditation within the existing scheme. Otherwise, the requirements of an existing quality assurance scheme, such as Farm Assured British Beef and Lamb or Freedom Foods, may be used so that there is some quality assurance for the production; assurance schemes with environmental requirements may be more appropriate as they provide additional environmental benefits. There is anecdotal evidence that there would be considerable local demand for downland lamb and beef.

There may be an opportunity to develop an interpretation centre at the same site (see below). This could be at Stanmer Park or another suitable location, for example, in the city centre.

Re-energise the Farmers' Forum into a best practice club for the tenant farmers.

Priority - high

This approach has been very successful around the United Kingdom and has generated significant benefits to farmers and to local economies (for example, see the Cogentsi report on the Planning to succeed programme in Dumfries and Galloway (Cogentsi, 2005)). A similar approach of providing training and skills to tenant farmers is being taken by the National Trust (Farmers' Weekly, 2005). The most successful clubs are usually the ones that have active farmer members, use a professional facilitator and set their own agendas, as critically this retains the interest of the farmer members and allows them to explore subjects and issues that are relevant to them. It may be possible to recommend subjects and speakers for the group, which can address issues of concern to the Council, for example machinery sharing, livestock marketing, sharing of ideas, benchmarking, visits to best practice farms, etc.



Tell the public what measures are being taken to introduce sustainable agricultural systems on the Downs.

Priority – medium, but will increase to high priority once access aims achieved

Engendering greater public ownership of the downs is considered key to the Initiative; it will help get more people using the Downs and should also reduce any conflict or tensions between the urban population and the farm tenants. It is recommended that the public are informed about the Downland Initiative through a number of routes, including Council and other newsletters and websites, leaflet drops, schools and social services (including pre-school clubs, Sure Start, the Family Welfare Association, youth clubs, etc), health walks, local radio, newspaper articles and local television.

Make the Council's policy on land use and diversification clear to tenants.

Priority - high

It is clear from the discussion group, that the farm tenants are not clear what the Council policy for the estate is. This needs to be clarified, preferably in writing, in relation to access, sustainable agriculture, diversification, business and other advice, tenancy succession and building maintenance.

A number of the tenants requested a single point of contact at the Council so that they can receive consistent messages about the Council's policy, and that quick, consistent responses are made to requests to enter schemes or for consents.

There is also a lack of trust of the Council by the tenants; this trust needs to be rebuilt if the tenants are to fully participate in the Initiative. Clear communication between the Council and the tenants will be a very important start to this.

Reinstate a programme of school and other visits to the Council's farms.

Priority - medium

This is an important recommendation as it helps to build bonds between the people of Brighton and the farmers. Although the relationship between the farmers and the wider community is generally felt to be positive, this will help improve understanding of both party's views and public understanding of the land.

All of the Council's farm tenants should have public liability insurance in place which should cover allowing visitors onto their farms for a variety of purposes. The insurance premia should not rise due to farm visits as they should already include cover for the maximum claim they would be likely to pay and this is unlikely to have changed e.g loss of life.

For the insurance to cover visits, the farmer should have carried out a risk assessment. These might need to be reviewed and / or tailored for each visit and, in some cases, they may not exist. The Council can assist with these assessments and also in providing health and safety advice. This would give the farmers confidence they have done all that was reasonable in the circumstances.



It should also be noted that in the case of a school visit, it is beholden on the school to visit the farm and request the appropriate risk assessments in advance of a visit, i.e., for the school to participate in sharing the responsibility.

The Council can also assist with student information packs. Organisations like Farming and Countryside Education (FACE) and Linking Environment and Farming (LEAF) already produce excellent information packs and material that the Council could use.

The Council's Education Department should have a role in this and the trips could be linked to the National Curriculum.

Identify buildings, possibly at Stanmer Home Farm, for an education and interpretation centre.

Priority - medium

This should be linked to proposals to be considered by the Council. This could create a multi-functional hub to the estate, with a retail outlet, education and interpretation centre, museum and, possibly, National Park headquarters.

6.3 Access

6.3.1 Significantly expand the amount of access land adjacent to the urban areas of Brighton and Hove.

Implement new routes proposed in Access for All and the Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

Priority - high

This will create a large number of new rights of way and links between existing routes on the downland and adjacent to the urban area (including the Greenway network). Once these routes have been established, it is suggested that their use is monitored. Based on that assessment, a decision can then be taken on whether further new routes are needed or desirable.

Although it is understood that the Council would like to reduce the number of car journeys made for access in the countryside, it is the research team's view that some of these journeys are inevitable. People will use their cars to get to access routes that they cannot walk to or use public transport to get to. It is suggested that increasing the usage of the access land by the public should be as high a priority as reducing car usage. Car usage can be reduced by improved provision of public transport and better accessibility through an improved Rights of Way network, although it is likely that only a limited amount of local car usage may be prevented by it. It is therefore likely that some of the existing car parks will continue to be used by people for access onto the downland. Better public transport may help reduce local journeys made to and in the South Downs.

Increasing access to the downland may also involve more fundamental changes, such as better public transport, introducing car park charges, traffic calming, closing or restricting particularly intrusive roads and car parks, and providing information which encourages people not to use their cars to access the land. The research team supports



the Council's desire to encourage alternative forms of transport and their more aspirational methods of increasing access but considers, given the brief for this study of providing practical, deliverable recommendations, that it is more important to deliver access routes and interpretation before trying to change ingrained public behaviour (i.e., car use).

Any access improvements should be included in the integrated interpretation and publicity strategy.

Priority - medium, but will increase to high priority once access aims achieved

This should include details of new, short routes as well as the more informal additions to the rights of way network (see section 6.5.1).

6.3.2 Connect existing blocks of open access land into landscape-scale units.

Allow and encourage open access on existing chalk / species rich grassland and areas where chalk / species rich grassland is being recreated, particularly where they link to existing blocks of open access land or into the rights of way network.

Priority - medium

It is generally accepted that there are few conflicts between the objectives of chalk / species rich grassland establishment and public access. Therefore the public should be allowed open access on the new areas of chalk / species rich grassland. Where necessary, the open public access should be guided by clear access points, low key 'desire lines', and other access furniture to create the best links with existing rights of way. Furniture such as benches and picnic tables may be important on the urban fringe to encourage greater use of routes near built-up areas. However, such furniture should only be used where visually appropriate in the wider landscape.

6.3.3 Achieve improved links between Open Access Land and Rights of Way, including a range of 'easy access' routes, connecting the urban area into the countryside, for people with varied abilities and access needs.

See section 6.3.1 on significantly expanding the amount of access.

6.3.4 Provide for the needs of cyclists and horse riders, including an extension of the cycle path network up onto the Downs.

See section 6.3.1 on significantly expanding the amount of access.



6.4 Wildlife and landscape

6.4.1 Conserve and enhance downland habitats and species to meet Biodiversity Action Plan targets.

Produce a Farm Environment Plan for each Council owned farm.

Priority - high

Farm Environment Plans were introduced by Higher Level Stewardship. They appraise the historical, landscape and conservation value of land by identifying features and suggesting appropriate management options for them under Higher Level Stewardship. It highlights the most important environmental features and makes recommendations on how best to manage them. This would include all features of value (including chalk / species rich grassland, arable flora, hedgerows, trees etc). They also include areas such as soil erosion and nutrient management, and so provide a useful tool for ensuring that a whole farm is managed in a sustainable way. They will provide the Council and the farm tenants with a record of what is environmentally valuable on the farm and what can be done to manage the farm in an environmentally sensitive way.

Higher Level Stewardship was introduced following the Mid-Term Review of the Common Agricultural Policy. It replaced the Countryside Stewardship and Environmentally Sensitive Areas schemes. Although the previous agri-environment schemes required a considerable amount of baseline data to be recorded for farms, the Farm Environment Plan is significantly more time and data intensive. Uptake of Higher Level Stewardship (and the associated Farm Environment Plan) has been lower than expected due to the amount of time taken to produce the Plan, although it is noted that the scheme was only introduced in 2005. The National Farmers' Union has reported that the Plans took professional farm environment advisers three times longer to produce than expected⁶.

It is recommended that the Council pays for a Farm Environment Plan to be produced for all of its farms (The Council's commitment would be to pay the net amount after any payment Defra makes for producing the Plans; Defra will only make a payment once a Higher Level Stewardship application is made and either approved or rejected). The plans should try and be produced so that a consistent approach is taken on all farms in order to meet the objectives and targets of the Downland Initiative and to ensure that they work beyond the farm unit scale and address landscape scale issues. The cost of producing the plans could be spread over a number of years.

The plans should be reviewed by both tenants and the Council before they are finalised. Both parties should have a copy of the Plan.

Encourage all farm tenants to enter into Higher Level Stewardship within the next five years.

Priority - high

Managing a farm under a Higher Level Stewardship agreement is likely to meet most of the Council's aims for sustainable land management. The agreements include management options for wildlife, landscape, access and natural resource conservation,

⁶ NFU News, 21 October 2005



including water quality. They would also help Brighton's tenants carry out many of the actions required for Catchment Sensitive Farming, a Defra initiative to meet the objectives set by the Water Framework Directive.

The Scheme provides a single agreement solution to this aim; there is also the added benefit that many of the tenant farmers already have agri-environment scheme agreements so they are willing to enter (and comfortable) with them. This approach is also likely to be more simple than having a series of agreements with each tenant dealing with wildlife, landscape, soil erosion etc.

The Farm Environment Plan is a necessary pre-requisite for entering land into Higher Level Stewardship. Once a Farm Environment Plan has been produced (and accepted by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs), it will remain valid for five years. The research team's understanding is that existing Environmentally Sensitive Areas Scheme agreements can be terminated early and the same land entered into Higher Level Stewardship; this should allow those Council tenants with existing agreements to enter their land into Higher Level Stewardship as soon as they would like.

The Council can not compel its tenants to enter into Higher Level Stewardship. However with the current finances of farming and the response from the discussion group, it is the research team's opinion that a significant number of the farmers are likely to want to enter their farms into Higher Level Stewardship. Similar to the Farm Environment Plan, it is recommended that the Council financially supports its tenants doing this by paying for some of the professional fees incurred in making applications to the Scheme. The Council's payment should be net of any grant available from Defra for submitting an application(s) (if any).

It is recognised that some of the Council's tenants may not want to enter into the Scheme. Thus it is recommended that the Council reviews these cases with its professional land management advisers. The most suitable action for the Council to take depends on a number of factors including the importance of the farm in terms of key environmental features, the environmental condition of the farm and the likelihood that the tenant continues farming. Actions available to the Council range from providing individual business and environmental advice to the tenant, to negotiating bespoke agreements for the management of key environmental features, to negotiating the surrender of the tenancy for the whole farm. There is a range of options available.

6.4.2 Priority should be to protect existing habitats and to manage them better.

Existing areas of chalk / species rich grassland, and other habitats of importance, should be protected from damaging agricultural operations and they should be managed better.

Priority - high

English Nature's Habitat Potential Mapping Tool has been used to identify areas of land around existing chalk / species rich grassland that are suitable for buffering the extant areas. The areas identified will be reviewed with English Nature. It is recommended that the 'buffer zones' are created as soon as possible, either through agri-environment schemes or by bespoke agreements with the farm tenants. This is a high priority.



Some of the buffer areas may be on land not owned by the Council. If the Council considers these areas important, it should consider options for improving their management. These range from negotiating better management with the current occupier, assisting with agri-environment scheme applications through to buying the land.

6.4.3 Attention should be paid to the conservation value of overlooked habitats such as chalk scrub and farm woodland, and species such as arable plants when deciding on land management options.

It is recommended that information on the nature conservation value of overlooked habitats (e.g. chalk scrub, farm woodland) and species (e.g. rare arable plants) on the estate is collected in order to inform decisions on land management options such as reversion of arable land or the clearance of scrub on existing areas of downland.

Priority - high

Much of this work could be done through the preparation of Farm Environment Plans, which will ensure that it is incorporated in the Plans and will also defray some of the cost.

6.4.4 Work with the Landscape Enhancement Initiative to establish a national pilot on sustainable land management, targeting the conversion of arable land to chalk / species rich grassland where the highest benefits can be gained.

Priority - medium

It is recommended that details of the Downland Initiative are provided to the South Downs Joint Committee, English Nature and The Countryside Agency. It is recommended that the Council works in close partnership with these agencies and that any reporting from the Initiative is brief and 'light touch' to avoid the reporting becoming too onerous, especially for tenants to whom there would be little obvious benefit.

6.4.5 Work with English Nature to identify the right land for habitat restoration and to better target agri-environment scheme funding.

Provide feedback on the use of the Habitat Potential Mapping Tool.

Priority - medium

This tool, developed by the University of Brighton for English Nature as part of the Lifescapes Project, has been used to identify areas of land for chalk / species rich grassland creation through reversion of arable land. The areas identified will be reviewed with English Nature, and a monitoring / assessment system agreed and implemented. The current model takes account of broad soil type, elevation and slope. Additional factors need to be considered before decisions are made to take particular parcels out of arable production. These include local variations in soil type (especially near the clay caps on the top of the Downs), the proximity of existing chalk / species



rich grassland and the practicalities of instituting appropriate grazing regimes on the land. The Initiative will provide English Nature with a test of the usefulness of the Habitat Potential Mapping Tool within the Initiative area and may have benefits in assisting in the preparation of Higher Level Scheme applications.

Some of the recommendations will contribute to the Council's targets for farms in its draft Food Strategy (Brighton and Hove City Council, undated draft), most notably objectives 5.2 (develop a pilot with a Council tenanted farm to raise environmental standards and facilitate engagement in the local food system), 5.3 (develop a farm policy which implements 'the downland vision' for the sustainable future of farmland owned by the City Council) and 6.9 (Brighton and Hove tenant farmers to supply lamb to the branded scheme 'South Downs Lamb' being piloted by South Downs Joint Committee).



6.5 Education and interpretation

6.5.1 Implement an integrated interpretation and publicity strategy, to enhance the access experience and to ensure residents and visitors know about the new access opportunities available on their doorstep.

This is a very important element of the Downland Initiative and a key factor in increasing access to the downland. The strategy should cover a range of issues affecting the downland Estate, including access, wildlife, landscape, sustainable land management, sustainable transport, geology, culture and archaeology.

Implement an integrated interpretation and publicity strategy.

Priority - medium

It is recommended that the public are informed about the Downland Initiative through a number of routes, including Council and other newsletters and websites, leaflet drops, schools and social services (including pre-school clubs, Sure Start, the Family Welfare Association, youth clubs etc), health walks, local radio, newspaper articles (e.g., Brighton Living and Sussex Life) and local television.

Responses from the discussion groups suggested that although way marking in the South Downs has improved significantly in the recent past, there is still an opportunity to make improvements. Interpretation boards and materials should make the public feel as at ease in the countryside as possible. This may mean providing way marks at short intervals close to the urban fringe and wider intervals further out onto the Downs. The South Downs Access Forum has done considerable work on this area in 2005 and its experience should be drawn on (South Downs Access Forum, 2005).

Access should be made as easy as possible. It is strongly recommended to create two or three access routes which are suitable for everyone. Professionally produced paper guides should be produced for the routes giving information for identified 'stopping points' on the area's history, geology, culture, landscape, wildlife and land use.

The Council should explore the possibility of providing land at or near schools for vegetable growing. This will help recreate the links between the school children and their food, and how it is produced.

Priority - medium

Access and interpretation material should be developed in partnership with schools and other relevant organisations and interested parties for children to grow vegetables and also for interesting habitats near schools so that children can visit (and help manage) the sites with teachers.

The interpretation material should be linked to the National Curriculum so that the teachers are more likely to see the benefit of visiting the sites. This will help developed the children's 'ownership' of plants, wildlife, nature conservation and their surroundings.



6.5.2 Introduce a conservation regime for the Council's many scheduled ancient monuments and other downland archaeological features, to ensure their protection and public appreciation into the foreseeable future.

The County Archaeologist(s) and/or the Brighton and Hove Archaeological Society should identify key sites and assess the sustainability of their current and best practice land use. There are obvious educational opportunities here.

Priority - high

All sites of archaeological or historic interest should be identified by the County Archaeologist(s) and/or the Brighton and Hove Archaeological Society. They should be included in the Farm Environment Plan prepared for each of the farm tenants and built into the interpretation and publicity strategy (see 6.5.1).

6.6 Summary of key priorities and targets for the Downland Initiative

A summary of the key targets and priorities is presented in section 8.0.



7.0 Possible implementation mechanisms

The main implementation mechanisms for the Downland Initiative are set out in Section 8.0.

As this is a complex, long-term project that will require input from numerous departments within the Council and from outside organisations, a named individual should be made responsible for the project management / co-ordination of the Initiative. Funding may be available for this position, possibly from The Countryside Agency as a development of the Land Management Initiative. He or she should be supported by a steering group which should be composed of local and national stakeholders.

The parties and organisations which are likely to have a main role in the implementation of the Initiative are:

- Brighton and Hove City Council's Countryside Team.
- Brighton and Hove City Council's estate managers.
- Brighton and Hove City Council's farm tenants.
- The Local Access Forum or a stakeholder group in relation to access.
- The Countryside Agency has considerable experience of projects designed to change the management of large tracts of land. A representative should be invited to sit on the Initiative steering group.

Other stakeholders and cross-Council teams may also have a role in their area of interest.

The recommendations can be categorised as capital type projects and operational type projects.

The capital projects (e.g., interpretation centre, interpretation boards) will require potentially large amounts of capital. The main sources for this are likely to be the Heritage Lottery Fund or income streams that the Countryside Agency or the National Park authority can access. The Countryside Agency's Access Management Grant Scheme may fund the interpretation boards.

Some of the operational type projects could be achieved using the Council's existing staff and funding, supplemented by some grant aid. For example, re-energising the Farmers' Forum could be grant aided under Defra's Vocational Training Scheme.

Similarly, telling the public what measures are being taken to introduce a sustainable agriculture system on the Downs can largely be done through existing media, such as the Council's website, information centres, newspaper articles, press briefings and mailshots.

It is recommended that this report is used as part of an application, possibly to the Countryside Agency, to secure a project officer for the Downland Initiative. As previously stated, this a complex project which involves many of the Council's departments; it should be coordinated by an individual who liaises between departments to drive the Initiative forward.



7.1 Sources of funding

There are also other opportunities for supporting the Downland Initiative. For example, The Countryside Agency is undertaking a project on dedicating land for public access. This three year project will explore ways in which the voluntary dedication mechanism under section 16 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 can be promoted at the local level, to help future policy development and to deliver a number of dedications which improve access opportunities for the public. The Countryside Agency is looking for partners, including local authorities, to work with. This may be a suitable opportunity to build on the work already being done within the Council on the Rights of Way Improvement Plan, Access for All, Greenways etc. It may provide funding to support faster development of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan and in negotiating the improved access links desired under the Downland Initiative.

It will be easier to identify possible implementation mechanisms once the recommendations of this report have been prioritised by the Council. Potential sources are:

- **The Countryside Agency** – which has numerous grants for rural issues. Almost more important is the expertise within the Agency, which would greater add to the implementation of the Initiative. Grants that might be appropriate for the Initiative include the Access Management Grant to improve access signing and furniture. The Initiative coordinator, communication with tenants, a programme of visits to the farms could be funded by the Countryside Agency. The Access Management Grant may fund the interpretation and publicity strategy and the interpretation boards. The Countryside Agency is currently running a three project on dedicating land for public access; funding and support may be available through this project for improving public access and interpretation material. Funding may be available through the Landscape Enhancement Initiative (or its equivalent) for the coordinator of the Downland Initiative.
- **Heritage Lottery Fund.**
- **South Downs Joint Committee** – like The Countryside Agency, as well as being a potential source of grant aid, the Committee contains expertise as well as local and regional contacts. These may be valuable in implementing the Initiative.
- **English Nature** – funds are available under the Wildlife Enhancement Scheme for the management of Sites of Special Scientific Interest and also the land around them, if there is evidence that buffering would be beneficial. English Nature could also support applications to the Environmental Stewardship Scheme as well as advising on the use of the Habitat Potential Mapping Tool.
- **Defra** – operates the Environmental Stewardship Scheme and also schemes like the Vocational Training Scheme. Other schemes like the Rural Enterprise Scheme, which supports economic development in the countryside, might also be appropriate to support the creation of a retail outlet or to support the improvement of access to the downland. At the time of writing the report, many of these England Rural Development Plan schemes are under review.



They are likely to be replaced sometime in 2006 or 2007. The Farmers' Forum could be funded through the Vocational Training Scheme.

- **South East England Development Agency and Government Office South East** – have funding streams available to them for business support and environmental improvements.
- **Department for Culture Media and Sport, Department for Trade and Industry and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister** – these government departments operate numerous schemes and initiatives. For example, the Rural Bus Grant may be suitable to improve the public transport service to the Estate.
- **Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund** – is a tax that was introduced in April 2002, to “address, by taxation, the environmental costs associated with quarrying operations (noise, dust, visual intrusion, loss of amenity and damage to biodiversity) in line with the Government's statement of intent on environmental taxation. It is used to fund environmental projects in the area it operates. Some of the recommendations, such as the collection of information on conservation value, may qualify for this funding.
- **Landfill Tax** – is a tax intended to address the environmental costs of landfilling by encouraging the diversion of waste away from landfill to the hierarchical management of waste. Like the Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund, it also can fund environmental projects in the area it operates. As for the Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund, some of the recommendations may qualify.
- **Private sector funding.** It might be worth while investigating corporate sponsorship as part of larger organisation corporate & social responsibility requirements.
- **EU funding** – through funding streams such as LEADER+ and Inter Reg.

Even if these sources are not suitable to fund the project, they may be able to provide advice and support.

7.2 Agricultural sources of funding

Much of the tenant farmers' income, in common with most farmers in the UK, will come from agricultural subsidies (now known as the Single Farm Payment) and agri-environment scheme payments (currently Environmentally Sensitive Areas Scheme payments, but this scheme has been replaced by the Entry Level Scheme and Higher Level Scheme).

As the UK Government and the EU must pay Single Farm Payments to all eligible farmers, it has been assumed that the Council's tenants will continue to claim them.



8.0 Proposal plan

Recommendations are made on how to achieve the broad aims, their priority, achievability and cost. For each aim and the recommendations made under them, the following are set out:

- Priority (low / medium / high)
- Achievability (easy / medium / difficult)
- Political achievability (ongoing / proposed action / explore further / long term future)
- Potential capital cost (low (less than £5,000)/ medium (£5,000 - £30,000) / high (more than £30,000))
- Potential running cost (low (less than £5,000)/ medium (£5,000 - £30,000) / high (more than £30,000))
- Start up timing (1-5 years / 5-10 years / 10-15 years / whole period)

The assessment of political achievability has been made by Brighton and Hove City Council and not by the research team.



Aim	Recommendation (section number in report)	Priority (L/M/H)	Achievability (E/M/D)	Political achievability*	Potential capital cost (L/M/H)	Potential running cost (L/M/H)	Start up timing (Years 1-5 / 5-10 / 10-15 / whole)
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Overarching aim

Reconnect the people of Brighton and Hove to a more biodiverse downland with better education, improved access and a better sense of connection to the land.

Section 6.1							
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Agriculture and land use

Encourage the establishment of sustainable land management systems on the Downs, with a greater emphasis on local, healthy food production, diversification and farming practices that are sympathetic to wider downland objectives.

Support the creation of a retail outlet for the tenants to sell lamb, beef, flour and other products to the public. Section 6.2	M	E	Explore further	H	L	5-10
Re-energise the Farmers' Forum into a best practice club for the tenant farmers. Section 6.2	H	E	Proposed action	L	L	1-5
Tell the public what measures are being taken to introduce a sustainable agricultural system on the Downs. Section 6.2	M	E	Proposed action			whole
Make the Council's policy on land use and diversification clear to tenants. Section 6.2	H	E	Proposed action		L	whole
Reinstate a programme of school and other visits to the Council's farms. Section 6.2	M	E	Explore further		L	whole
Identify buildings, possibly at Stanmer Home Farm, for an education and interpretation centre. Section 6.2	M	E	Explore further			1-5



Aim	Recommendation (section number in report)	Priority (L/M/H)	Achievability (E/M/D)	Political achievability *	Potential capital cost (L/M/H)	Potential running cost (L/M/H)	Start up timing (Years 1-5 / 5-10 / 10-15 / whole)
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Access

Significantly expand the amount of access land adjacent to the urban areas of Brighton and Hove.

Implement new routes proposed in Access for All and the Rights of Way Improvement Plan. Section 6.3	H	M	Ongoing				1-5
Any access improvements should be included in the integrated interpretation and publicity strategy. Section 6.3	M, then H	E	Ongoing				whole

Connect existing blocks of open access land into landscape-scale units.

Allow and encourage open access on existing chalk grassland and areas where chalk grassland is being recreated, particularly where they link to existing blocks of open access land or into the rights of way network. Section 6.3	M	D	Proposed action		L	L	1-5
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Achieve improved links between Open Access Land and Rights of Way, including a range of 'easy access' routes, connecting the urban area into the countryside, for people with varied abilities and access needs

See implement new routes above. Section 6.3			Ongoing				
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Provide for the needs of cyclists and horse riders, including an extension of the cycle path network up onto the Downs.

See implement new routes above. Section 6.3			Ongoing				
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Aim	Recommendation (section number in report)	Priority (L/M/H)	Achievability (E/M/D)	Political achievability * (Proposed action / explore further / long term future)	Potential capital cost (L/M/H)	Potential running cost (L/M/H)	Start up timing (Years 1-5 / 5-10 / 10-15 / whole)
Wildlife and landscape							
<i>Conserve and enhance downland habitats and species to meet Biodiversity Action Plan targets.</i>	Produce a Farm Environment Plan for each Council owned farm. Section 6.4	H	E	Proposed action	M		1-5
	Encourage all farm tenants to enter into Higher Level Stewardship within the next five years. Section 6.4	H	D	Proposed action	M	M	1-5
<i>Priority should be to protect existing habitats and to manage them better.</i>	Existing areas of chalk grassland, and other habitats of importance, including archaeological, should be protected from damaging agricultural operations and they should be managed better. Section 6.4	H	D	Proposed action		L	1-5
<i>Attention should be paid to the conservation value of overlooked habitats such as farm woodland and chalk scrub, and species such as arable plants when deciding on land management options.</i>	It is recommended that information on the nature conservation value of overlooked habitats (e.g. farm woodland, chalk scrub) and species (e.g. rare arable plants) on the estate is collected in order to inform decisions on land management options such as reversion of arable land or the clearance of scrub on existing areas of downland. Section 6.4	M	E	Explore further	M	L	1-5
	Work with the Landscape Enhancement Initiative to establish a national pilot on sustainable land management, targeting the conversion of arable land to chalk grassland where the highest benefits can be gained. Section 6.4	M	E	Long term future			whole
<i>Work with English Nature to identify the right land for habitat restoration and to better target agri- environment scheme funding.</i>	Provide feedback on the use of the Habitat Potential Mapping Tool within the Initiative area. Section 6.4	M	E	Long term future	N/A	N/A	whole



Aim	Recommendation (section number in report)	Priority (L/M/H)	Achievability (E/M/D)	Political achievability * (Proposed action / explore further / long term future)	Potential capital cost (L/M/H)	Potential running cost (L/M/H)	Start up timing (Years 1-5 / 5-10 / 10-15 / whole)
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Education and interpretation

Implement an integrated interpretation and publicity strategy, to enhance the access experience and to ensure residents and visitors know about the new access opportunities available on their doorstep.

Implement an integrated interpretation and publicity strategy, to enhance the access experience and to ensure residents and visitors know about the new access opportunities available on their doorstep. Section 6.5	M	M	Explore further	M	Unknown	whole
The Council should explore the possibility of providing land at or near schools for vegetable growing. Section 6.5	M	M	Explore further	M	L	whole

Introduce a conservation regime for the Council's many scheduled ancient monuments and other downland archaeological features, to ensure their protection and public appreciation into the foreseeable future.

The County Archaeologist(s) and / or Brighton and Hove Archaeological Society should identify key sites and assess the sustainability of their current and best practice land use. Section 6.5	H	E	Explore further			1-5
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9.0 Summary and conclusions

The Downland Initiative is a forward thinking, innovative approach to land management. Brighton and Hove City Council wishes to change the management of the 4,045 hectares (9,991 acres) of land it owns around Brighton so that it delivers greater social and environmental benefits.

The Council set out its proposals and broad aims for the Downland in *The Space To Be* (2005).

This feasibility study has assessed the objectives and aims of the Initiative, and has canvassed the opinions of Council officers, the Council's farm tenants and other interested parties. Some minor changes to the aims of the Initiative are recommended based on the consultations.

The aims of the Downland Initiative are feasible both in part and in full but with financial implications that may or may not be acceptable.

A number of recommendations have been made to achieve the aims. The recommendations are practical and, in the research teams' opinion, possible to achieve. They are set out in section 8.0, with a timetable and estimated costs.

This loss of income and the costs incurred by the Council through the Downland Initiative need to be politically accepted if the Initiative is to succeed.

It is for this reason that the Council may only seek to implement aspects of the Downland Initiative which are affordable until other financial support is available. Some elements of the Initiative could be funded from the estate, through tenancy restructuring (when the opportunities arise) and capital receipts from the sale of non-key property, provided such receipts are ring-fenced for reinvestment in the Estate and Downland Initiative.

The aims of the Initiative will only be achieved with the support of the Council, its officers and particularly the farm tenants. It will require co-operation and trust between all of these groups. Building a stronger relationship has started already but further significant change is needed.

The Initiative should be monitored against its aims and recommendations. This monitoring should be 'light touch' and allow comparison with other areas, particularly for biological indicators.



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Appendix A Seek the views and ideas of local interested parties

Summary of responses from the discussion groups with Council Officers, the Council's tenants and with other interest parties

As part of the assessment of the aims and objectives, outcomes and implementation of the Downland Initiative, a number of meetings were held to gauge local and regional opinion on the proposed objectives of the Initiative. The purpose was to understand what each group thought of the Downland Initiative, what its aims should be, how it should be implemented, its management structure and funding sources.

Four meetings were held with Council officers, the Council's tenant farmers and other interest parties to discuss the Downland Initiative. They took place between 11 October and 20 October 2005.

All invitees received an invitation letter, a summary of the Downland Initiative and a survey form to help them formulate their thoughts.

Eight Council officers, seven (of 14) Council agricultural tenants and 16 other interested parties took part in the discussion groups. The project steering group provided a list of consultees to invite to the discussion groups. This list was added to by Smiths Gore and a total of 50 organisations and individuals were invited to attend.

Each discussion group was chaired by a trained facilitator from Smiths Gore. The facilitators had been briefed to let the discussion flow naturally to allow issues the group felt were important to be discussed in detail. The main points arising were minuted and each meeting lasted about two hours.

Summaries of the discussions that took place with each of the three groups are presented below. The minutes for the two 'other consultees' meetings have been combined for ease of interpretation. The responses from the attendees are preceded with a bullet point.



Brighton and Hove City Council officers

General views

What are your general views on how the Council's downland is managed?

What are your general views on the Downland Initiative?

- Vision for the estate is greater biodiversity, a productive landscape, producing locally-consumed food with greater access to the land that the people own

Aims and objectives

The Space to Be lists four aims for the Downland Initiative. Below, please rank them and give your reasons why.

- Like other groups, the Council Officers viewed many of the aims as complementary and so ranking them was difficult
1. To enhance the opportunities for access to Brighton's downland.
 - Original purpose of estate was to protect water quality, protect land from development and access – objectives not fully met
 - Council's priority is walkers, especially if they walk from home or use public transport, not by car
 - Cyclists wants to get from A to B need decent surface (better than bridleways) to allow use by non-mountain bikes. Consider a few key surfaced routes (e.g., to and from Devil's Dyke), linked to existing bridleways
 - Tim Squire has a report on new key access routes (written a few years ago)
 - Open access areas – highest priority is area near Bevendean Estate (noted that footfall counters would be useful to assess level of access), followed by Sheepcote Valley, Cockroost Hill (check) and Waterhall (where people go due to the sports fields). The area west of the A270 and south of A27 is already well used
 - Key places people drive to are Ditchling Beacon, Devils Dyke and Stanmer Park – due to views and free car parks
 - Key rights of way are the three long distance routes – Monarch Way, South Downs National Trail and Sussex Border Path
 - Some fields near to urban areas have been left as set-aside with ad-hoc unpermitted public access due to damage to crops / stock
 - Improved access for bikes and horses could be negotiated on CROW access land
 - Need more open access within 0.5-1 mile of urban fringe, corridors into the wider countryside
 2. To enhance and restore the landscape, in line with identified landscape character and habitat priorities.
 - Priority: protecting chalk grassland, Castle Hill SSSI ⁷(affected by some fertiliser and pesticide drift from adjacent land – could be buffered, line of Sites of Nature Conservation Interest near Woodingdean

⁷ Identified as highest priority for Initiative



- Conflict between access and wildlife only where there are many people, although this can normally be managed. Castle Hill is opened for access already with few problems
 - Existing areas of chalk grassland need better management (although no survey of their condition carried out; a survey needs to be done as some may be reclassified as woodland on next review of the CROW Act)(better management should include better grazing, local community involvement, grants for fencing and water)
3. To enhance the sustainability of farming practices on the Downs.
- Original purpose of estate included protection of water quality – economic cost of cleaning water at Brighton is not known
 - There is a strong demand for locally-produced food
 - Issues include soil erosion at Bevendean
 - Relationship between the tenants and Council is not good – tenants lack trust
 - Downland needs to be grazed
 - Diversification is likely to be important to economic sustainability – the sustainability office has offered farmers general, non-prescriptive advice but not detailed. Perhaps the Council should be more pro-active in supporting farmers
 - Bed and breakfast, hotel rooms and caravan and camping sites are poorly developed at the moment. A capacity study has been done on visitors
 - Council is preparing a farm diversification note for farmers which details what is acceptable and not. Small scale accommodation in existing buildings is acceptable
 - Suggested that farmers are supported to develop local produce markets; may be an opportunity to provide produce for school meals / market gardening; the Council's food strategy (draft) includes supporting farmers to produce local food; Simon Bishop at the Netherfield Centre (JV with Plumpton College) is a researcher on local food markets
 - None of the farmers do Council contract work
4. To secure the conservation, interpretation and promotion of the area's historic and cultural interest.
- Tourists do not come to Brighton to walk on the Downs but they might visit a 'site'
 - South Downs is a distinct brand from Brighton
 - Horse riding may be important for tourism
 - More links between schools and farmers / downland needed (currently only two schools do it; great potential; 'kids must know what a cow is')
 - The areas archaeology is an underused asset, despite courses run by B&H Archaeology Society and the University of Brighton; interpretation is poor; could have an archaeology trail, possibly with hosted walks

Are there any other aims, objectives or issues that should be included?

- No others were discussed



Outcome of the Downland Initiative

What do you think the outcome of the Downland Initiative should be?

- See above

By when should the outcome be achieved?

- Long term project with varying time scales for different elements

Management

How do you think the Downland Initiative should be managed?

- Not covered

Who should be involved? What management structure do you suggest?

- Not covered

Getting the Downland Initiative done

How do you think the aims and objectives can be achieved?

What implementation mechanisms (e.g., in-hand farming, agri-environment schemes, council grants) should be used?

1. To enhance the opportunities for access to Brighton's downland.
 - See above
2. To enhance and restore the landscape, in line with identified landscape character and habitat priorities.
 - See above
3. To enhance the sustainability of farming practices on the Downs.
 - See above
4. To secure the conservation, interpretation and promotion of the area's historic and cultural interest.
 - See above

What funding sources could the project use? Who should fund the project?



- Not covered



Brighton and Hove City Council tenant farmers

General views

- About 50% of attendees had heard of the DI
- Two farmers were supportive of the local lamb and beef initiatives but stated that it was limited for them by the requirement to use Sussex rams and bulls (noted that Welsh and Scottish brand initiatives do not require use of native breeds – only that the livestock is reared there; opening of a local abattoir in last few years had helped (but it was noted at another discussion that it was small / its throughput was limited); view is scheme could succeed
- General support for group marketing of livestock – possibly through local shops, restaurants, caterers or supermarkets
- No ideas for how arable farmers can add value to their crops

What are likely to be the income generators on your farm in the future?

- Not directly asked but it was clear that agriculture was likely to provide less income in the future
- Diversification was mentioned, which included agri-environment schemes (to take areas out of production), letting buildings, lamb and beef initiatives

What are your general views on the future of farming in the Downs?

- Vision for 10-15 years time is to be profitable
- Becoming more extensive with less arable and more livestock
- Few farms employing staff
- Not keen on joint ventures with Council as want to keep their businesses separate
- Council could help with HLS applications as forms and Farm Environmental Plan is 'mind boggling'

How do you see the future for your farm?

- Some mentioned that income from farming was low / negative and that other income, from diversification (mainly letting buildings), supported the farm. Noted that diversification was difficult due to planning rules. Noted that Lewes District Council has its own farm diversification officer. Main issue seems to be unfair planning conditions, e.g., on car parking, road surfacing, street lighting
- General acceptance of need to develop new sources of income, such as agri-environment schemes and diversification
- Supportive of proposals for wildlife / landscape / access if economically advantageous to them
- Some tenants mentioned that their businesses may be limited by capital equipment in the future (e.g., small grain store)

Aims and objectives

The Space to Be lists four aims for the Downland Initiative. Below, please rank them.

- Like other groups, the tenant farmers viewed many of the aims as complementary and so ranking them was difficult



Would you be happy for these aims (e.g., promotion of the area's cultural interest) to happen on your farm? Please give reasons for your answers.

- Generally yes, subject to financial incentives
1. To enhance the opportunities for access to Brighton's downland.
 - Would prefer targeted linear access, rather than open access, which group felt general public prefers
 - If need for additional access can be demonstrated, farmers are generally supportive
 2. To enhance and restore the landscape, in line with identified landscape character and habitat priorities.
 - Yes, through agri-environment schemes so that cost is granted aided / subsidised
 3. To enhance the sustainability of farming practices on the Downs.
 - Yes. Key issue here was economic sustainability
 - Some mentions of soil erosion
 4. To secure the conservation, interpretation and promotion of the area's historic and cultural interest.
 - Not discussed

Thinking about the Council's aims, what are the current areas of agreement and contention?

- Farmers want to remain farmers, not park keepers / 'butterfly counters'
- Generally supportive of Council's access objectives but Council must help with public access (signs, education of public, better interpretation material)
- Lots of illegal access at University / Falmer. Need to educate students

Management

If the Council wanted you to make adjustments to your farming system (e.g., revert some land to chalk grassland, create new access), what is the best way to do it? (e.g., rent reduction, using an agri-environment scheme, surrendering parts of the farm etc)

- Generally supportive and keen to listen
- No preference expressed between receiving payments or rent reductions

Is there anything the Council could do to encourage you to go into the Higher Level Scheme of Environmental Stewardship?



- Yes, help with Farm Environmental Plan and application. Farmers do not mind who helps them – the Council, FWAG or a farm management consultant.
- General feeling is do not have time (or experience / skills) to do the paper work
- Viewed as important source of future income
- Questions about how it works with existing ESA agreements

If there is a change in the Council's policy for its farmland, who would you prefer to deal with? (The Council? Someone independent? Different specialists? One point of contact?)

- Farmers do not mind who helps them – the Council, FWAG, Council land agent or a farm management consultant. A number of comments on how helpful Rangers are
- Tenants may need support with restructuring – possibly through FBAS

Getting the Downland Initiative done

How do you think the Council's aims and objectives can be achieved?

- Not directly asked; general view was through agri-environment schemes and Council financial support for other aims

What could the Council do to help you meet its aims?

1. To enhance the opportunities for access to Brighton's downland.
 - See above
2. To enhance and restore the landscape, in line with identified landscape character and habitat priorities.
 - See above
3. To enhance the sustainability of farming practices on the Downs.
 - See above
4. To secure the conservation, interpretation and promotion of the area's historic and cultural interest.
 - Most keen to restart farm walks (but stopped doing them due to health and safety and insurance concerns; stated that Council could help reduce liability and paperwork and provide information packs)

Any other suggestions?

- Council should offer more (financial) assistance for additional livestock buildings, particularly if grazing is going to be increased
- Important that repairs budget is not reduced due to Downland Initiative
- Grazing / fencing near urban areas is difficult due to vandalism



Other interested parties

General views

What are your general views on how the Council's downland is managed?

- Need positive management of existing important registered and non-registered archaeological features
- Greater interpretation of archaeology – on and off site
- More opportunities for green tourism and less dependence on cars
- Opportunity for better education of the general public (to shut gates, reduce litter). Sheepcote Valley has found that increasing education has reduced problems
- Poor access historically to the downs for walkers
- Land management has already changed in the last 10 years due to tenants entering agri-environment schemes
- View is that there are few successors to the current tenants – this was seen as negative
- Some is managed okay but most is 'rubbish' due to loss of chalk grassland (a lot was removed in 1960-70s) and less grazing
- Few small areas of chalk grassland that are left are small, fragmented and poorly managed

What are your general views on the Downland Initiative?

- Must be realistic and achievable – proposals followed by action
- 'Broad aims are super but, by past history, nothing will happen'
- Sustainable agriculture is key to the Initiative – farmers are needed to manage the land
- Must have a quick start to the project as there is a Council election in 2007
- Consider creating one large piece of extensive downland (1920s style open downland with few fences)
- 'The downland is the peoples' land – we are just managing it for future generations'

Aims and objectives

The Space to Be lists four aims for the Downland Initiative. Below, please rank them and give your reasons why.

- The consensus view is that the project must be holistic so all aims are important
- There was general reluctance to rank the aims and, quite often, attendees ranking changed during the discussion group
- A viable farming use of the land is key to the way the land looks, the biology it supports and how people can use it. Farmers must adapt to public demand for landscape – view it as a new crop

Are there any other aims, objectives or issues that should be included?



- Encourage communities sense of ownership in the land and its use and history, possibly through the 'Friends of...' societies
- Travellers sites; some new sites are needed for travellers and they could be on farms
- Link to City Farm which may be created in East Brighton Park / Sheepcote Valley, to complement the City Park
- Create better links between farmers and the community – to avoid 'them and us' situation. This could include a farm forum or open days to the farm
- The health benefits for the local people from active recreation

Outcome of the Downland Initiative

What do you think the outcome of the Downland Initiative should be?

- Sustainable land management, which includes access, archaeology, agriculture, landscape and wildlife, local food (which should range from fruit and vegetables to lamb and beef), transport (avoid people driving into and out of Brighton for access) and 'whole' costs of land management (including pollution, effects on health etc)
- Example of farmer at Beachy Head is seen as a good example for integrating agriculture, access, tourism and diversification (holiday accommodation)
- Reconnect people to the land by local food, access and interpretation
- More joined up thinking e.g., to implement some simple actions that are currently not finished, like the Rights of Way Improvement Plan
- Partnership between the Council, people and the farmers – with both sides better understanding the constraints on them
- More access on CROW open access land for horses and bikes
- Total economic cost of estate must be considered, including access, economics, water and social costs. It was noted that Southern Water spend £20m on nitrate removal from water.

By when should the outcome be achieved?

- View was the Initiative is long-term (10-15 years) but that some action needs to happen quickly to give the Initiative momentum – otherwise 'nothing will happen' and there is a Council election in 2007

Management

How do you think the Downland Initiative should be managed?

Who should be involved? What management structure do you suggest?

- Single point of contact, small management team, accountable to a steering group which could include Natural England, Local Access Forum, Countryside Agency, the City Council, South Downs Joint Committee, Tenant Farmers Association, Sussex Wildlife Trust, citizens' panel)
- The Downland Initiative could be managed by a sub-group of the South Downs Forum executive panel. This would reduce the risk of duplicated effort and use existing knowledge



- Need for involvement / consultation with a wide range of interests (Council, farmers, environmentalists, health workers)

Getting the Downland Initiative done

How do you think the aims and objectives can be achieved?

- Must be realistic and achievable – proposals followed by action
- 'Broad aims are super but, by past history, nothing will happen'
- Mixture of mechanisms (see below)

What implementation mechanisms (e.g., in-hand farming, agri-environment schemes, council grants) should be used?

1. To enhance the opportunities for access to Brighton's downland.

- Implement Missing Links and rights of way improvement plan – key old routes – to link rights of way and communities
- Link to Health walks and better links into City centre
- Access initiatives at Stanmer seen as good; could act as a focal point for people to walk from
- 'Council does not financially support the rights of way network'. It is in unfavourable condition. An application to the Countryside Agency's Access Management Grant Scheme would be refused as the work should have been done statutorily
- It is recognised that the Council are working on the rights of way but that progress is slow
- Council could introduce new access terms into tenancy agreements
- 'Green access'
- Ideal is to reduce dependence on cars to get to access; consensus was to maintain existing car parks; recognised that public transport was needed to reduce car use
- Some new bus services have been set up to key sites but could set up a Rambler Bus Service, like at Seven Sisters Country Park
- Could pay farmers for new car parks if they are well screened and pay and display; noted that car parks are very important for the disabled
- Could tie access into the Park and Ride scheme (by taking walkers the other way / away from the City)
- Many urban dwellers are scared of the countryside; this needs to be reduced, probably from school level by farm visits etc. 'Kids should be taken out to meet their supper'.
- Access for schools: many are near the downland. Walks could be included in the curriculum. Farming and Countryside Education (FACE) have experience with this.
- Needs to be access for all – able and disabled



- Complete open access over whole estate was not generally supported as the farmers must be allowed to continue to farm and as it may damage archaeologically and biologically important sites
 - Access needs to be balanced with other demands but that the current provision is too low
 - Needs to be a range of clear access options for people, including long and short routes, circular ones, and mix of linear and open access, as different people have different demands; it was noted that much open access land is crossed by existing Rights of Way so both types of demand are met
 - Access can be controlled / directed by using benches / tables / toilets / way marks – would also make the countryside feel friendlier
 - Boundaries to access are needed to control access otherwise people wander everywhere; defined (or bound) access may feel more friendly to people
 - Access on arable land: not open access but on Rights of Way and linear routes. Unless there is a need for open access, don't do it. Little conflict expected between access and wildlife except for ground nesting birds.
 - Create multi-use paths, rather than just cycle paths
 - Few key green 'tongues' into city must be preserved e.g., Benfield Valley
-
- Illegal use of Rights of Way by motorbikes. Consider providing an area for riding. A site was identified next to the A23 but nothing happened. Consider funding (Sussex Police), site and insurance. A scheme in Yorkshire was based on issuing a warning, confiscating the bike, then a training course. The scheme reduced calls to the police from 200 per week to 20 per week
-
- Interpretation material and signage must be discrete to avoid urbanising the countryside; leaflets can be distributed through buses, cafes and stopping points
 - Opportunities for access near urban areas are: old fort area
 - Create 'intellectual' or 'perceived' access by using signs to tell the public what the crops are and what they are used for. Signage is not seen as a problem – SDJC has improved the quality of the signs
 - Signposting is generally poor; people do not know where they can go and the countryside can be daunting
2. To enhance and restore the landscape, in line with identified landscape character and habitat priorities.
- The way the land looks is crucial as people see the land before they experience it
 - Few small areas of chalk grassland that are left are small, fragmented and poorly managed
 - Fences not viewed as appropriate in some open areas; Lookers were mentioned as a way of controlling stock to enable the land to be more extensively managed
 - Whitehawk Hill noted as SSSI quality but not designated; public access helps to keep the grass down
 - Horse numbers are increasing, which is not a problem, but they do bring clutter (stables, fences, jumps etc) which affects the landscape
3. To enhance the sustainability of farming practices on the Downs.



- Farming should be mixed but there needs to be a better balance – some arable, more chalk grassland and more grazing, and production of local food
 - Important to produce local food. Council should facilitate farmers to produce local food – ‘Brighton’s food grown on your land’
 - Market garden: this would allow the public to buy locally produced food, possibly at Stamner
 - Farmers should be financially supported if an environmentally ‘sustainable’ agricultural system is not economically sustainable
 - Lack of investment by City Council demonstrated by the National Trust purchase of Devil’s Dyke; the Trust only buy land as a last resort purchase of threatened land. Lack of investment was in taking / buying some land rights back from the tenants.
 - Feeling that the estate was used as a ‘cash cow’ by the Council. Rent roll from the estate should be kept separate and reinvested back into the estate (in various forms including access, landscape schemes, repairs etc)
 - Noted that in past years, some of the tenants had asked to do conservation works but no action was taken by the Council or its advisers
 - Using agri-environment schemes. National Trust pays whole cost of work carried out under an Environmentally Sensitive Areas scheme but reclaims the grant from the tenant. National Trust responsible for drafting the scheme application.
 - Should not dictate farming system to tenants
4. To secure the conservation, interpretation and promotion of the area’s historic and cultural interest.
- Need positive management of existing important registered and non-registered archaeological features
 - Greater interpretation of archaeology – on and off site
 - Whitehawk Hill is not used enough for its archaeological interest. There should be more interpretation there. Open access spreads footfall; noted that linear access can damage archaeological features due to cutting into earth

Are there any other aims, objectives or issues that should be included?

- Allow farmers to diversify. Need for small scale campsites and bothy blocks. Biggest constraint on this is planning. Could allow light industrial / office use of buildings
- ‘Farmers can not survive on agriculture but need to use redundant buildings’
- Must achieve objectives of the Water Framework Directive

What funding sources could the project use? Who should fund the project?

- Will be a range of sources, including Council support (English Nature, Countryside Agency, South Downs Joint Committee, Defra (ELS / HLS), National Park Authority, English Heritage, Heritage Lottery Fund, Heritage Lottery Memorial Fund, Tourism South East, European Funding, EU Rural Development funding, farmer update of Defra’s free advice on sustainable farming, Landscape Enhancement Initiative, Local Transport Plan, Access Management Grant Scheme, Rights of Way Improvement Plans, central government)



- A difficulty may be the number of authorities to deal with (Horsham, Lewes, Mid Sussex, Brighton and Hove, east and west Sussex)