

<b>Body:</b>	<b>Cabinet</b>
<b>Date:</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> June 2015</b>
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Eastbourne Downland Management Plan 2015 – 2022</b>
<b>Report Of:</b>	Ian Fitzpatrick, Senior Head of Community and EHL MD
<b>Wards:</b>	All
<b>Purpose:</b>	To review the Eastbourne Downland Management Plan 2015 – 2022
<b>Decision Type:</b>	
<b>Recommendation:</b>	That Cabinet adopt the Eastbourne Downland Management Plan 2015 – 2022
<b>Contact:</b>	Simon Hurt, Specialist Advisor (Downland)

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## **1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 For many years the Eastbourne downland has been managed under various land management agreements with Natural England and its predecessors. Upon the expiry of all previous agreements a new 10 year Higher Level Stewardship Agreement (HLS) was entered into beginning on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2012. The new agreement entitles the council to financial support to enhance the management of those parts of the Downs included in the new stewardship arrangements. This amounts to an annual payment of £49,863.95
- 1.2 A requirement of the HLS with Natural England is a new management plan. The agreement requires that a new overall site, mowing, grazing and woodland plan should be agreed with Natural England. In the past several different documents have dealt with individual areas of work but all elements are now pulled together into one management document.
- 1.3 A new Downland Management Plan (DMP) was commissioned in 2013. attached as Appendix 'A'. The DMP timescale is aligned with the end of the HLS in 2022 and therefore forms the basis of downland management for an eight-year period.
- 1.4 The new Downland Management Plan satisfies the requirements of Natural England and creates a single reference source for future downland operations.
- 1.5 Much of the plan's content is the result of a specially commissioned vegetation survey carried out in the summer of 2013. This highlighted a range of themes and assisted with the decision to introduce new management techniques on parts of the downland estate.

- 1.6 The plan recommends various objectives. These include:
- Measures to prevent loss of chalk grassland to scrub encroachment
  - A reduction in the frequency of mowing where this will enhance the chalk grassland
  - Removal of grass cuttings to reduce soil nutrient levels and thus encourage the less vigorous small herbs favoured by bees and other insects
  - The use of Exmoor ponies to graze areas of poor pasture or steep slopes where commercial livestock are unsuitable
  - Reintroduce rotational coppicing of scrub blocks to create a varied age structure

1.7 Management targets include:

For scrub

- Scrub cover within grassland/scrub areas should be between 20-50% by 2020
- Dense scrub blocks should contain no more than 50% mature scrub by 2020
- At least a 1m strip between scrub and grassland should be maintained at a sward height of 30cm and between 2-10cm within small grassland patches surrounded by scrub
- Scrub species should be rare or at most occasional (especially bramble) within the grassland swards identified as under threat from scrub invasion by 2020

For grassland

- Introduce Exmoor pony grazing on at least two grassland areas by 2015
- Reduce heavy mowing of grassland by at least 75% by 2018
- Scrub species should be rare or at most occasional (especially bramble) within the grassland swards identified as under threat from scrub invasion by 2020
- Expand late summer/early autumn cut and collect management into at least two new grassland areas by 2016

- 1.8 In the DMP processes marked as priority 1 (high) will be undertaken first and those shown as 2 and 3 (medium and low) will only be undertaken once higher priority work has been completed and resources become available. The objectives and targets will be reviewed annually by the Downland Forum. Forum members include councillors, officers of Natural England and the South Downs National Park, RSPB, the Ramblers Association and others.

## **2.0 Consultation**

- 2.1 A draft document was distributed to stakeholders and user groups on 11<sup>th</sup> September 2014. The consultation period ended on 31<sup>st</sup> October 2014.
- 2.2 People and organisations provided with a draft copy of the Plan included local councillors; Natural England SSSI officer; Natural England Stewardship officer; South Downs National Park Authority; Sussex Ornithological Society; Sussex Wildlife Trust; Beachy Head Bird Ringing Station; Sussex Botanical Recording Society; The Eastbourne Society; Beachy Head Countryside Centre; The Downland Forum, Hodcombe Farm; four Eastbourne downland tenant farmers and council officers.

2.3 Seven returns were received by 31st October. All gave positive and detailed feedback regarding corrections, omissions and clarifications. All were broadly in agreement with the aims and objectives of the new Management Plan. All feedback was given due consideration and incorporated into the final document.

### **3.0 Resource Implications**

3.1 **Financial** – All operations can currently be carried out within existing budgets. Field operations are currently undertaken by contracted staff. This is due to be reviewed and re-tendered during 2015.

3.2 **Staffing** – All operations can currently be carried out within existing staffing levels. The current two operational staff are employed through an outside contractor. This is due to be reviewed and re-tendered during 2015.

### **4.0 Other Implications, Environmental, Community Safety, Youth, Equality and Fairness analysis**

4.1

**Environmental** - The land will be sensitively managed and new working methods and investment will ensure the future sustainability of the downland environment.

**Community Safety** - There are no direct Community Safety implications arising from this report. The council does however work with a number of agencies including Public Health to reduce the incidents of public harm.

**Youth** - the Downs are used both formally and informally by youths and indeed families and individuals of all ages, for walking, cycling, beach combing, nature study and many other activities. The Paradise bike trail was created to satisfy demand for a specific activity and is largely managed and kept clean by the regular users. The Southern Paragliding Club is licenced to fly from land near the pub. The South Downs National Park Volunteer Ranger Service provides a workforce that is open to all age groups. The iconic location is enjoyed by many thousands of foreign language students during their stays in Eastbourne.

**Equality and fairness** – an evaluation will be undertaken.

### **5.0 Summary**

5.1 The Downland Management Plan covers the years 2015 to 2022 and thus matches the end date of the current Higher Level Stewardship Agreement. It introduces important new management methods designed, in agreement with Natural England, to enhance and sustain the rare chalk grassland and heathland habitats, control scrub regeneration and improve the visitor experience. All management operations can be implemented within existing staff and budget resources.