

<b>Report to:</b>	<b>Cabinet</b>
<b>Date:</b>	<b>5 June 2019</b>
<b>Title:</b>	<b>Downland Whole Estate Plan</b>
<b>Report of:</b>	<b>Ian Fitzpatrick, Director of Regeneration and Planning</b>
<b>Cabinet member:</b>	<b>Councillor Jonathan Dow</b>
<b>Ward(s):</b>	<b>All</b>
<b>Purpose of report:</b>	<b>For Cabinet to note progress on the Downland Whole Estate Plan and agree the Council's draft vision for the Downland Estate.</b>
<b>Decision type:</b>	<b>Key</b>
<b>Officer recommendation(s):</b>	<b>(1) That Cabinet note progress on the Downland Whole Estate Plan.</b>  <b>(2) That the draft vision set out in paragraph 2.2 is agreed.</b>
<b>Reasons for recommendations:</b>	<b>In order to allow officers to progress the Downland Whole Estate Plan.</b>
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## **1 Introduction**

- 1.1 The Council's Downland Estate consists of four tenanted working farms and a small holding extending to approximately 3000 acres, as well as 1000 acres of Open Downland. The Estate sits within the South Downs National Park, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. There are four Sites of Special Scientific Interest across the Estate that are nationally important for their ecology and geology, the Downland is recognised as a Regionally Important Geological Site for its value to earth science and heritage and the coastal strip is designated as a Heritage Coast for its natural beauty and wildlife.
- 1.2 The South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) agreed a set of seven Special Qualities for the National Park in 2011
- i) Diverse, inspirational landscapes and breathtaking views;
  - ii) A rich variety of wildlife and habitats including rare and internationally

- important species;
- iii) Tranquil and unspoilt places;
- iv) An environment shaped by centuries of farming and embracing new enterprise;
- v) Great opportunities for recreational activities and learning experiences;
- vi) Well-conserved historical features and a rich cultural heritage;
- vii) Distinctive towns and villages, and communities with real pride in their area.

1.3 SDNPA has also set out its vision for the National Park for 2050, which focuses on:

- Conserving English lowland landscapes and heritage;
- Protecting and managing habitats to support wildlife networks throughout the landscape;
- Enhance the relationship between people and the landscape
- Create a self-sustaining and empowered community  
Support successful farming, forestry, tourism and other business activities within the national park .

1.4 SDNPA is seeking to collaborate with landowners across the National Park in the development of Whole Estate Plans (WEPs), a non-statutory plan that seeks to protect the Park and demonstrates the aspirations of its landowners. The Whole Estates Plan process seeks to assist SDNPA and large estate organisations to work together in delivery of this vision.

The Council has said that it wishes to develop a WEP for the Downland Estate. Officers have been liaising with SDNPA and have held workshop sessions with Members, the public and tenant farmers to draft a Vision for the Downland Estate. The SDNPA state that they expect Vision statements to be signed off at the highest level within organisations.

## **2 Proposal**

2.1 SDNPA has outlined the process for production of WEPs which covers four stages:

- Vision: Work is already well underway on the WEP but the Council needs to formally agree a Vision for the future of the Estate which sets out priorities and captures the Council's ethos. The Vision has been fomulated following feedback gained form the recent workshop events and engagement with key stakeholders, including SDNPA, and known future environmental priorities.
- Asset Audit : Establishing a complete picture of all of the assets.
- Ecosystem Service Analysis: SWOT (Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis of the many eco systems, services which provide us with life's essentials; clean air and water, food, fuel and raw materials. Climate regulation, flood management, pollution filters and opportunities for improved health and wellbeing.

- Action Plan: takes the opportunities and threats identified in the Ecosystem Services Analysis and identifies the actions required and the specific projects attached to achieving those actions.

A full report on the work that has been undertaken to date on the Council's WEP is attached at Appendix 1.

## 2.2 Draft vision:

Our vision for the Eastbourne Downland Estate over the next 25 years is to:

- Conserve the iconic downland landscape and cultural heritage of the Estate, so that these special qualities can be enjoyed, understood and valued by the public, with access for all, contributing to Eastbourne's sense of community, wellbeing and belonging and instil a strong sense of public stewardship that encourages visitors and people from all backgrounds to actively care for the Estate and invest in it.
- Maintain and enhance the 'natural capital' of the Estate, so that high-quality, well-managed habitats are resilient and adaptable to climate change, pests or disease; support wildlife networks throughout the landscape; and continue to deliver the widest range of ecosystem services into the future.
- Ensure that these ecosystem services are enjoyed, valued and understood by the public, with all Eastbourne residents feeling they are beneficiaries of the Estate – not just those who are able to visit regularly.
- Ensure that our farmers are supported and valued as stewards of our land, its soils and its wildlife, with sustainable and profitable businesses that can continue to flourish and innovate.
- Protect the Estate for future generations, ensuring that it is self-sustaining and financially resilient, built on diversified income streams, promoting innovation, craftsmanship, rural creative industries, and high-quality visitor experiences”.

## 3 Outcome expected and performance management

- 3.1 The draft vision will set the foundations for the future stages of the WEP process and ensure that the Plan captures the priorities of the Council and stakeholders for the protection of the Downland Estate for future generations, whilst ensuring it is aligned with SDNPA and Government priorities.
- 3.2 Officers will monitor progress of development of the WEP and report back to Strategic Property Board at regular intervals. It is anticipated that the Plan will be brought back to Cabinet for adoption in Winter 2019.
- 3.3 Once the Council has agreed its WEP, SDNPA will need to formally endorse the Plan and it is likely that this would happen in early 2020. Endorsed WEPs will be a material consideration for SDNPA in determining planning applications.

- 3.4 If these timescales are maintained the Council could be the first local authority in the country to finalise a WEP.

## **4 Consultation**

- 4.1 Visioning workshops have been held with Members (21<sup>st</sup> January) and public (29<sup>th</sup> January).
- 4.2 Meetings have been held with tenant farmers.
- 4.3 SDNPA have been, and will continue to be involved, in the development of the WEP as it progresses.
- 4.4 Further public consultation will be undertaken as the WEP develops prior to consideration by Cabinet later in the year.

## **5 Corporate plan and council policies**

- 5.1 This proposal meets the following aims of the Corporate Plan 2016-2020; Prosperous Economy: a prosperous and thriving economy and an outstanding seaside destination for tourism, arts, heritage and culture; Quality Environment: a clean, attractive, low-carbon town with excellent parks and open spaces, a high quality natural environment and first class seafront and coastal links; Thriving Communities: 2026 Partnership vision for a premier seaside destination within an enhanced green setting. The report at Appendix 1 outlines these themes in more detail.
- 5.2 The WEP will support the Council's aims within the adopted Corporate Asset Management Plan to achieve a sustainable asset base by 2020 and reduce the Council's liabilities.
- 5.3 Development of the WEP is clearly aligned with:
- the Agriculture Bill which focuses on public money for public good and a move away from the current flat-rate area based subsidies; and
  - the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan which has priorities around using and managing land sustainably, recovering nature and enhancing the beauty of natural landscapes, and connecting people with the environment to improve health and wellbeing;
  - SDNPA priorities.

## **6 Business case and alternative option(s) considered**

- 6.1 The importance of the Downland Estate both locally and nationally is clear. Producing a WEP is the best way in order to ensure that the Estate is protected, meets future environment priorities and is enhanced for future generations. Once completed, the Council will have a clear action plan setting out its future commitments to the Estate.

## **7 Financial appraisal**

- 7.1 There are no financial implications arising directly from this report. Consultancy

costs on producing the plan will be met from existing budgets and any financial implications arising from the action plan will be considered when the plan is considered further by the Cabinet.

## **8 Legal implications**

8.1 There are no legal implications arising directly out of this report.

2 May 2019 Ref: 008063-EBC-MR

## **9 Risk management implications**

9.1 The WEP is the best approach to ensuring the Council takes a holistic view of the Estate. There is therefore a risk associated with not proceeding with a WEP as this could have a detrimental impact on the Estate and impact adversely on the Council's position to deliver against future environmental policy.

## **10 Equality analysis**

An Equality Analysis has been completed and has not identified any equality impacts at this stage as a result of the recommendations of this report. A further analysis will be undertaken prior to final agreement of the Downland WEP by Cabinet.

## **11 Appendices**

- Appendix 1 – Downland Whole Estate Plan: Draft Vision Statement and supplementary report

## **12 Background papers**

- Guidance from SDNPA on producing a WEP:  
<https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/national-park-authority/supporting-communities-business/whole-estate-plans/producing-a-whole-estate-plan/>
- Eastbourne Borough Council Corporate Plan 2016-2020:  
[https://www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/\\_resources/assets/inline/full/0/257740.pdf](https://www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/_resources/assets/inline/full/0/257740.pdf)