

Appendix 1

Eastbourne Downland Estate: Draft Vision Statement

And supplementary report

Eastbourne Borough Council

21 May 2019

Quality information

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Eastbourne Downland Estate extends to approximately 4,174 acres, of which 2,963 acres is farmed and 1,211 acres is open access land. It lies at the easternmost end of the South Downs National Park. The Estate was bought by the local authority with compulsory purchase powers under The Eastbourne Corporation Act of 1926. It is currently owned and managed, on behalf of the public, by Eastbourne Borough Council.
- 1.2 Council officers have had some discussion with South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) regarding the development of a Whole Estate Plan (WEP) to help guide the longer term management of the Estate. The Council's aim is to prioritise conservation and enhancement of the Downland Estate, its special qualities and the ecosystem services it provides, while providing an income strategy within an informed context.
- 1.3 The idea of the WEP is to enable “...collaboration between individual estates and the National Park Authority to achieve the ambitions of the organisation and the purposes of the National Park”. The SDNPA Local Plan is landscape-led, with the concept of Ecosystem Services and Natural Capital the core focus of the approach. It recognises the significant influence of the estates and farms across the National Park, and the impact the management activities of these estates has in the short, medium and long term. It also recognises the challenges faced by those who own and operate these estates to both manage the land profitably while maintaining some of the most significant cultural/heritage assets within the National Park. By providing a degree of flexibility when considering development proposals on estates which have prepared an endorsed Whole Estate Plan (Strategic Policy SD22: Development Strategy) it is hoped that balance can be achieved. However this can only be done within an informed context which clearly sets out the longer term role of a development proposal within the overall ambition of the organisation and its contribution to the conservation and enhancement of the National Park, its special qualities and the ecosystem services it provides.
- 1.4 The WEP itself should follow the format set out in the *Whole Estate Plans Preparation Guidelines*, issued by the SDNPA (Revision B, published 22.05.2017). The simple form of the content is: **Vision** (Section 2); **Asset Audit** (Section 3); **Ecosystem Services Analysis** (Section 4); and **Action Plan** (Section 5). In line with the SDNPA Local Plan, the concept of Ecosystem Services and Natural Capital should be the core focus of the approach. This report sets out our recommendations for a Vision statement, following consultation with key stakeholders.

2. Approach

- 2.1 The SDNPA Whole Estate Plans Preparation Guidelines state that the Vision should be “a simple statement (approximately 200 words maximum) that clearly sets out your priorities for the Estate. This should not be development focused, but rather should focus on the ethos of the organisation”.
- 2.2 The purpose of the Vision is to ensure that everyone, including all parts of your own organisation, the South Downs National Park Authority, and members of the local community, can clearly and easily see what your priorities are.
- 2.3 The Estate Vision needs to be agreed at the highest level – ultimately by the leader of the Council / Cabinet – with cumulative buy-in to what the Council wishes to achieve for the future of the Estate. WEPs are not formal planning policy documents, so formal public consultation is not strictly required. However, in order to get the WEP endorsed by SDNPA, the Council will need to demonstrate how it has engaged with the wider community, and the impact this has had on the content of the WEP. We set out below the approach that has been taken to date:
- 2.4 **Inception Meeting with the Asset Development Lead**

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- 2.4.1 At this point we discussed the methodology and agreed communication protocols, contact points and data requirements.

2.5 Visitor Data Analysis

- 2.5.1 We have undertaken a desktop analysis of visitor numbers using the Outdoor Recreation Valuation Tool (ORVal), which was developed by the University of Exeter for Defra. ORVal is an online tool that allows users to explore the recreational use and welfare value of accessible open spaces, trails, and beaches in England and Wales. It has recently been incorporated into the UK Treasury's Green Book – the government's guidance for project appraisal and evaluation (H.M. Treasury 2018) – and features in the government's 25-Year Environment Plan (H.M. Government 2018). The tool is based on the nationally representative Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE) survey which uses interviews with a weekly quota sample, conducted since 2009. This data is aggregated, using population weights, to estimate visits to open spaces across the whole of England and Wales. The tool takes into account substitutes when estimating the recreational values of a given site, (for example the existence of parks nearby). The model can also estimate what proportion of visits to a site will be new (additional) or displaced from elsewhere, when the quality/ accessibility of a site changes.

2.6 Presentation to the Strategic Property Board

- 2.6.1 The Strategic Property Board is the consultation forum with Members regarding strategic property matters. This provided an opportunity to explain the overall approach to developing the WEP and discuss key objectives with Council officers and Members.

2.7 Engagement with Tenant Farmers

- 2.7.1 We have been in contact with the agricultural tenants individually to canvass their opinions and invite their feedback, and have arranged face-to-face meetings. A short semi-structured questionnaire was used during these visits to gather data and information that could inform the Estate Vision. The tenant farmers are obviously key stakeholders – or, in legal parlance, parties – in the delivery and supply of many of the ecosystem services on the Estate. The experiences and insights of these farmers are therefore critically important, not just at a practical or operational level but as a source of conceptual thought, analysis and ideas about how the Estate should be managed over the longer term.

2.8 Engagement with the SDNPA

- 2.8.1 We held a meeting with SDNPA's Countryside Policy Manager, Lead Ranger and Planning Link Officer in November, to explain our proposed approach and invite their feedback. We also took this opportunity to establish what data may be useful to inform the Asset Audit and how we collate it.
- 2.8.2 We held a further meeting with the SDNPA's Major Planning Projects Officer, Countryside & Policy Manager (Eastern Area) and Strategic Planning Lead in late April 2019. We explained our process of stakeholder engagement and we reviewed a draft Vision statement. Further amendments were made to the Vision statement in light of this discussion, incorporating the following suggestions:
- Emphasise the linkages with the Council's Corporate Plan and the National Park's Purposes and Duties
 - 'Future-proof' the Vision by testing for longevity and ensuring that all aspects will remain relevant, ambitious and sustainable for the timeframe in mind
 - Emphasise the dynamic nature of the environment and the potential changes we may see over a 25 year timeframe – for example climate change, or diseases such as Ash Dieback.
 - Identify and make explicit the Special Qualities of the National Park that are most relevant to the Estate
 - Emphasise the public benefits that the Estate provides for everyone, including those who don't visit but who are still beneficiaries
 - Better access to the Estate should include those who may be excluded for social reasons, lack of knowledge, mental health, anxiety, or cultural barriers.

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2.9 Internal Stakeholder Workshop

- 2.9.1 We arranged an internal stakeholder workshop for Members and officers with an interest in the future management of the Downland Estate, which was held at Eastbourne Town Hall on 21st January 2019.

2.10 Public Stakeholder Workshop

- 2.10.1 We held an open forum for all public stakeholders to input to the Vision in Eastbourne Town Hall on 29th January 2019. This was an opportunity for members of the public to come and express their views and aspirations for how the Estate is managed, highlighting the importance of the Downland in their lives.

2.11 Review

- 2.11.1 We have collated all of the input from meetings with the tenant farmers, National Park officers, the visitor data, the internal workshop and the external workshop, and we set out at section 4 below a draft Vision statement that reflects this. The Vision itself is a simple statement setting out the priorities for the management of the Downland Estate.
- 2.11.2 We recognise that different stakeholders have different priorities for the Downland Estate, and these need to be balanced against the Council's main aims and objectives as set out within the Council Plan and Corporate Asset Management Plan in the draft Vision Statement. We set out at section 3 below the main themes and objectives and how they have been incorporated into the Vision statement.
- 2.11.3 For the time being we envisage this remaining a 'live' document: formulating the Vision should be iterative, and there will be scope for further amendments following the Asset Audit and further public consultation as we move through the process.

3. Themes / Priorities / Objectives

3.1 Council Corporate Plan

- 3.1.1 The Eastbourne Borough Council Corporate Plan 2016-2020 sets out the Council's priority aims in order to help make Eastbourne the best place to live, work and visit. The current plan is divided into four priority themes, framed around a 2020 vision:
- **Prosperous Economy.** 2020 vision: *"we will have a prosperous and thriving economy which provides opportunities for businesses to grow and invest, supports employment and skills, invests in housing and regeneration along with the infrastructure to support economic growth. Eastbourne will continue to be an outstanding destination for tourism, arts, heritage and culture".* Priority aims include having an outstanding seaside resort and gateway to the South Downs National Park, a transformed and accessible town centre, and creating opportunities for improving skills, employment, learning, and participation for residents and tourists.
 - **Quality Environment.** 2020 vision: *"we will have a clean and attractive low carbon town, producing less waste than before. It will have a high quality built environment, excellent parks, open spaces and be served by a number of good transport options".* Priority aims are to transform sites that are currently under-used in the town centre, improve the quality and quantity of public space, produce less waste and recycle and reuse more and improve public transport and cycling facilities.
 - **Thriving Communities.** 2020 vision: *"we will have vibrant communities where diversity is valued, where people feel safe and healthy, and are able to access activities and opportunities to help them thrive".* Priority aims include having the lowest levels of crime in comparison to similar towns in the South East, supporting families and young people to reach their full potential, and having communities that are active in developing and taking part in a full range of cultural, sport, leisure, creative activities and events.

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- **Housing and Development.** 2020 vision: *“we will have communities whose housing needs are met through decent, affordable and well managed homes and communities; responding to and addressing homelessness and housing needs and through providing affordable housing”*. Priority aims include: increasing the supply of housing and in particular affordable housing; delivering a well-managed housing service to Council tenants; and developing sites where there is a clear housing and/ or site development need. This is a general vision for Eastbourne as part of the Corporate Plan priorities and shown here for completeness only, the draft vision for the Downland itself is set out later in this document.

- 3.1.2 The Plan also sets out the 2026 ‘Pride of Place’ Partnership vision for Eastbourne to be a premier seaside destination within an enhanced green setting - a safe, thriving, healthy and vibrant community with excellent housing, education and employment choices, actively responding to the effects of climate change. Eastbourne is one of six local authorities and six Local Strategic Partnerships that have worked together to produce Pride of Place. Priorities include developing the economy; providing high quality education, learning and skills opportunities; improving travel choices and access to services; providing high quality affordable housing; protecting natural and built environments and adapting and responding to climate change; improving health, well-being, safety, security; creating strong communities and community leadership; and supporting older people, children, young people and carers.

3.2 Corporate Asset Management Plan

- 3.2.1 While the key corporate objectives and priorities for Eastbourne are outlined in the Corporate Plan, supported through the Medium Term Financial Strategy, the Asset Management Plan is the primary tool to deliver the property elements of the corporate objectives. It sets out how the Council intends to plan and manage its corporate property portfolio.

- 3.2.2 The objectives of the Asset Management Plan are to provide the strategy framework for the Council to manage and maximise the potential of its property portfolio; ensure that the respective property portfolios are managed and operated in accordance with the Council’s Corporate plan and priorities and Medium Term Financial Strategy; ensure that the Property and Facilities Shared Service efficiently delivers benefits to each Council from the respective property portfolios; unlock the potential of land and buildings, working with external partners where appropriate. These objectives are underpinned by six asset management strategy themes, outlining the iterative work that will be undertaken across the Councils:

- **Theme 1:** *Establish a clear vision regarding how the Council will achieve a sustainable asset base by 2021.*
- **Theme 2:** *Challenge the reasons for retaining assets and ensure that retained assets contribute towards a sustainable asset base.*
- **Theme 3:** *Identify the benefits and make best use of each asset to stimulate regeneration including the provision of affordable housing.*
- **Theme 4:** *Seek opportunities where key strategic assets could realise significant capital and/or revenue returns in order to reinvest in the retained operational portfolio.*
- **Theme 5:** *Reduce on-going property maintenance and financial liabilities for the Council.*
- **Theme 6:** *Ensure that retained assets combine social, cultural, environmental and economic benefits: guarantees that the Councils are only holding properties that meet corporate aims and objectives.*

- 3.2.3 One of the key over-arching corporate objectives that the Council has set for their property portfolio is to achieve a sustainable asset base by 2021. In other words, reaching a position where every asset should at least ‘break-even’ and pay for itself, ensuring assets are not a drain on the Council’s resources or those of local tax-payers.

- 3.2.4 Rural property, notably let estates, farms and forestry, has been a comparable investment to alternative asset classes and financial instruments over the past 20 years (Savills Rural Research, 2019). It has delivered a healthy annualised total return of around 10 percent, only beaten by mainstream let residential portfolios with an annualised total return of 11.4 percent over the same

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period. The scenario is pretty similar over the past 10 years albeit at a slightly lower level of return (8-9%).

- 3.2.5 However, in the short term, the performance of rural assets, mainly because of pressure on capital values of farmland, has weakened. Total returns for rural property are driven primarily by long term capital appreciation: income yields are historically modest compared to other asset classes, and often less than one percent. The Council is stress-testing its property portfolio through the Asset Challenge process in order to identify under-performing assets. The Downland Farms are recognised as falling within this category, producing an income yield of less than 2% per annum.
- 3.2.6 Reducing on-going maintenance costs is therefore critically important if the Downland Estate is to provide a positive revenue return, as well as generating alternative income streams. Income opportunities extend beyond food production, and diversified income sources mitigate exposure to commodity price volatility and include:
- Energy
 - Forestry
 - Diversification and non-farming opportunities, including leisure and tourism enterprises
 - 'Natural capital' assets and the developing market for payments for ecosystem services from both public and private buyers
 - Property rental from residential and commercial assets
- 3.2.7 There may also be opportunities to crystallise capital returns through change-of-use or small scale development of redundant agricultural buildings, and the Whole Estate Plan, once complete, will help to provide an informed context which clearly sets out the longer term role of any development proposal within the overall ambition of the Council and its contribution to the conservation and enhancement of the National Park, its special qualities, and the ecosystem services it provides.

3.3 National Policy Context

- 3.3.1 The Corporate Asset Management Plan notes that, against a backdrop of the UK's decision to leave the European Union, the Council's property assets are going to need to work harder than ever before to sustain not only itself but support other services. Brexit presents both challenges and opportunities for rural property assets. The Agriculture Bill, which brings forward proposals for a new Environmental Land Management system, heralds a new era in the rural economy, challenging everything from tenancy arrangements to supply contracts. Alongside this the Government has published its 25 Year Environment Plan, a long-term management strategy for the environment in England, which recognises the enormous contribution that nature makes to our wellbeing and our economy. It is underpinned by the concept of natural capital, meaning it will take account of the full range of 'natural assets' that give benefits to humans, such as woodland and green spaces that provide clean air, absorb carbon, provide recreation, and other 'ecosystem services'. The Government's overriding ambition expressed in the 25 Year Environment Plan is to *"leave our environment in a better state than we found it"*.
- 3.3.2 The **Agriculture Bill** will move agricultural subsidies away from the current flat rate, area-based Basic Payment Scheme under the Common Agricultural Policy, towards a new system of paying farmers 'public money for public goods'. The principal public good the Government wants to invest in is environmental enhancement. This new environmental land management system is intended to incentivise and reward land managers to restore and improve natural capital and rural heritage. It will also provide support for farmers and land managers as the UK moves towards a more effective application of the 'polluter pays' principle (whereby for costs of pollution lie with those responsible for it). New and innovative funding and delivery mechanisms will be explored as part of the environmental land management system, which may include private payments for ecosystem services, reverse auctions and conservation covenants.
- 3.3.3 The **25 Year Environment Plan** sets out a number of priorities that will need to be reflected in the Whole Estate Plan. Those of most relevance to the Downland Estate are:
- **Using and managing land sustainably**

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- Embedding an ‘environmental net gain’ principle for development, including housing and infrastructure
- Improving how we manage and incentivise land management
 - i. Designing and delivering a new environmental land management system
 - ii. Introducing new farming rules for water
 - iii. Working with farmers to use fertilisers efficiently
 - iv. Protecting crops while reducing the environmental impact of pesticides
- Improving soil health
- Focusing on woodland to maximise its many benefits
 - i. Supporting larger scale woodland creation
- Reducing risks from flooding and coastal erosion
 - i. Expanding the use of natural flood management solutions
 - ii. Putting in place more sustainable drainage systems
 - iii. Making ‘at-risk’ properties more resilient to flooding
- **Recovering nature and enhancing the beauty of landscapes**
 - Protecting and recovering nature
 - i. Publishing a strategy for nature
 - ii. Developing a Nature Recovery Network
 - iii. Providing opportunities for the reintroduction of native species
 - iv. Exploring how to give individuals the chance to deliver lasting conservation
 - v. Improving biosecurity to protect and conserve nature
 - Conserving and enhancing natural beauty
 - i. Reviewing National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty
 - Respecting nature in how we use water
 - i. Reforming our approach to water abstraction
 - ii. Increasing water supply and incentivising greater water efficiency and less personal use
- **Connecting people with the environment to improve health and wellbeing**
 - Helping people improve their health and wellbeing by using green spaces
 - i. Considering how environmental therapies could be delivered through mental health services
 - ii. Promoting health and wellbeing through the natural environment
 - Encouraging children to be close to nature, in and out of school
 - i. Helping primary schools create nature-friendly grounds
 - ii. Supporting more pupil contact with local natural spaces
 - iii. Helping children and young people from all backgrounds to engage with nature and improve the environment.
 - Greening our towns and cities
 - i. Creating more green infrastructure
 - ii. Planting more trees in and around our towns and cities

3.4 South Downs National Park

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3.4.1 SDNPA have a Vision for the National Park as follows:

By 2050 in the South Downs National Park:

The iconic English lowland landscapes and heritage will have been conserved and greatly enhanced. These inspirational and distinctive places, where people live, work, farm and relax, are adapting well to the impacts of climate change and other pressures

People will understand, value, and look after the vital natural services that the National Park provides. Large areas of high-quality and well-managed habitat will form a network supporting wildlife throughout the landscape

Opportunities will exist for everyone to discover, enjoy, understand and value the National Park and its special qualities. The relationship between people and landscape will enhance their lives and inspire them to become actively involved in caring for it and using its resources more responsibly

Its special qualities will underpin the economic and social well-being of the communities in and around it, which will be more self-sustaining and empowered to shape their own future. Its villages and market towns will be thriving centres for residents, visitors and businesses and supporting the wider rural community

Successful farming, forestry, tourism and other business activities within the National Park will actively contribute to, and derive economic benefit from, its unique identity and special qualities

3.4.2 At our meeting with SDNPA officers, the following key priorities were identified for the Downland Estate:

- **Improving connections between Eastbourne residents and the Estate** – particularly those in the town who are least well off. The Estate should be seen as a place that everyone can enjoy, helping to build a sense of place and develop relationships with their community and the land. The contribution the Estate can make to residents' health and wellbeing should be emphasised, particularly given Beachy Head's notoriety as a suicide spot.
- **Promoting the Estate as an educational resource**, encouraging young people to enjoy it, care for it, value it, and understand how its special qualities and habitats should be managed.
- **Investing in natural capital** and ensuring that Ecosystem Services are embedded in decision-making and management principles.
- **Identify opportunities for strategic investment in habitat creation and restoration**, to help extend, buffer, and join up ecological networks across the South Downs.
- **Looking for added-value opportunities from the significant visitor footfall**. Eastbourne and the Downland Estate are an important gateway to the National Park, and there is also the potential to develop a heritage trail along the south coast.
- **Encouraging and incentivise good environmental land management**. The UK's departure from the Common Agricultural Policy, and the formulation of a new subsidy regime based on public payments for public goods, can help to deliver the step-change required to mainstream the environment into the way the Estate is managed and farmed.
- **Exploring 'payments for ecosystem services' schemes**. There are potentially opportunities to deliver revenue returns and reduce costs by crystallising the value of ecosystem services delivered by the Estate – from soil carbon sequestration and air pollution mitigation to water filtration and flood attenuation.
- **Better managing woodland on the Estate**, and restoring and re-creating priority habitat that has been lost to scrub encroachment.

3.5 Members

3.5.1 **Maximising the social value of the Estate**. Members made it clear that maximising the social and cultural value of the Estate should be a management priority. Specifically, Members recognise:

- The Estate's contribution to Eastbourne's sense of community and belonging;

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- The Estate's role in building connections among people that helps to ensure community cohesion and mental and physical wellbeing;
- The importance of instilling a sense of community ownership and involvement in decision-making;
- The Estate's role providing opportunities for communities to take part in a full range of cultural, sport, leisure, creative activities and events;
- Promoting health and wellbeing through the environment;
- The Estate's role in providing high quality recreational and open space;
- The Estate's role as an important educational resource.

3.5.2 **Enhancing the natural value of the Estate.** Members also recognise the importance of investing in the 'natural capital' of the Estate – its habitats and natural features – to maintain and enhance its special qualities, its iconic landscape, its wildlife, and the ecosystem services that flow from it.

3.5.3 **Improving the visitor experience and capturing the benefits of tourism.** Members recognise the potential the Estate offers as a 'gateway' to the South Downs National Park, its iconic downland landscape and historical significance, and the significant number of UK and foreign visitors – particularly from South Korea. Members want to promote and improve the visitor experience, with added-value tourism ventures, and capture more of the visitor spend on the Estate.

3.5.4 **Seeking opportunities to realise revenue returns.** Members are keen to explore income opportunities beyond agricultural rental income, and to work with the farm tenants to capitalise on other potential opportunities – including different farming systems (such as viticulture), renewables, leisure and tourism enterprises, 'habitat banking', and emerging 'payments for ecosystem services' schemes. Reducing ongoing costs associated with maintenance of the water infrastructure on the Estate was also seen as a priority.

3.5.5 A consensus emerged around a Vision for the Downland Estate that closely aligned with the Vision of the SDNPA.

3.6 Agricultural Tenants

3.6.1 **Opportunities for New Entrants.** Issues around business succession / routes into farming / opportunities for new entrants are particularly salient in the minds of farm tenants on the Estate. New entrants to the agricultural sector face significant hurdles. The price of land has increased so significantly over the last fifteen years that it is almost impossible for conventional new entrants to start out in farming by purchasing their own land. An alternative route to enter farming is by taking a tenancy; tenancies effectively separate the farming business from the land as an underlying asset, making it cheaper to become established as a farming business. Tenancies on council farms have historically provided many new entrants with a route into the industry, the legal framework for which is provided through the Agriculture Act 1970. These farms were often seen as "starter farms" that enable enthusiastic young people to obtain access to land and build a business. Across the UK, County Council farms have played a very important part in helping new entrants to the agricultural sector.

3.6.2 However, very little land comes onto the rental market, and there has been a trend towards greater aggregation of businesses, which leads to increased competition for land from existing farms and fewer opportunities for new entrants. Established farmers have an advantage over new entrants in securing whatever land does come onto the rental market, as they are more likely to be able to offer higher rents. New entrants can also often struggle to show sufficient track record, skills and financial security.

3.6.3 This is an issue that the Future of Farming Commission highlighted in their 2013 Future of Farming Review report. The report highlighted Staffordshire County Council as an example of a Local Authority that had changes to their tenancy framework designed to develop more opportunities for new entrants. The changes included shortening new tenancies on farms up to 90 acres (starter farms) and 90-150 acres (progression farms) and introducing break clauses to enable both parties to review the farm business. The report also noted that the National Trust is attempting to provide more

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opportunities for new entrants, keeping farmhouses with farms and introducing some environmental skills into the key attributes that they are looking for in new tenants.

- 3.6.4 **The conservation / stewardship ethic.** Farm tenants on the Eastbourne Estate are conscious of their role as stewards of this iconic landscape and its special qualities, and are motivated at least in part by a strong conservation and stewardship ethic.
- 3.6.5 **Importance of the farmed environment.** Eastbourne's farm tenants take pride in their role as food producers as well as good stewards of the land. One of concerns raised was the extent to which managing land primarily for environmental outputs might mean more than just a shift in the use of the land to favour certain ecosystem services over agriculture, and potentially an absolute move away from agriculture towards 're-wilding' of the land. Farm tenants feel there is no reason why the same farm and same farmer cannot produce both food and ecosystem services – indeed, they already do. Many of our most valued habitats are a function of historic farming practices, and farming is still integral to their maintenance in many cases. The environment and food production should not be seen as mutually exclusive. There is increasing consumer pressure to produce value-added, niche products that emphasise provenance and sustainability. Investing in natural capital and the provision of ecosystem services alongside food production is seen as a way of burnishing producer's 'green' credentials, and helps to differentiate their product.
- 3.6.6 Cattle grazing is generally considered to be more beneficial for the restoration and maintenance of downland habitats than sheep grazing. Sheep have a reputation for over-grazing, and are much more selective grazers than cattle, targeting flowering plants which can have a negative impact on species diversity; they also find it harder to graze longer, coarser vegetation. Over-stocking with sheep can replace the rich mosaic of downland plants with a uniform covering of tight swards with close-cropped, densely tillered grasses. Grazing by cattle in the early spring and late summer can reduce the cover of coarser, more unpalatable grasses or scrub encroachment, as cattle are less discriminating in their grazing than sheep. The farmers are keen to emphasise the role that livestock play in maintaining the ecology of the Estate.
- 3.6.7 **Encouraging visitors to act responsibly.** This was a theme that came up time and again. Irresponsible dog walkers often stray beyond the public rights of way or open access land. Dog fouling, sheep worrying, and gates being left open are all concerns. The public does not generally understand or properly appreciate the farmer's work, and they should be encouraged to actively care for the Estate and its farmed landscape.

3.7 Public Stakeholders

- 3.7.1 **Maintaining and enhancing the heritage assets on the Estate.** Public stakeholders emphasised that all of the downland should be treated as archaeologically sensitive, and that the Estate forms an integral part of the wider downland landscape. There was a strong consensus for conserving the Estate "as it is". Suggestions included:
- Using phone apps to educate visitors about the special characteristics of the Estate, such as historical field systems, to direct them away from the tourist 'honeypots', improve the historical interpretation of the land, and expand their knowledge and appreciation of the Estate.
 - Preserving dew ponds and historical buildings that tell the story of historical farm practices, and the potential to build a visitor experience around traditional farming skills and crafts.
 - Ensuring all vernacular buildings are maintained and preserved, not just those that are scheduled / registered / listed.
 - Emphasising the war-time heritage of the Estate, and the connection to famous authors such as Kipling and Orwell.
- 3.7.2 **Improving transport links and accessibility.** Many stakeholders felt that public transport links between Eastbourne and the Estate were not adequate, and this particularly penalises the young and the least well-off who do not have the use of a private vehicle. Car parking space was also deemed to be insufficient. Public rights of way and access land are seen as a priority for investment, with the aim of greater accessibility for all to the downland for walking and quiet enjoyment. We note that Eastbourne's Disability Champion has been in discussion with other stakeholders about what

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should be put in place to make the experience of visiting the downs achievable for the most profoundly disabled people and their carers.

- 3.7.3 **Nature conservation.** The biodiversity of the Estate was clearly understood and valued by those who attended the public workshop, and nature conservation was a clear priority. Many people referred to the various statutory and non-statutory designations on the Estate as a testament to its special qualities. Chalk grassland habitat was specifically identified as a priority for protection and enhancement, with some people noting the potential for arable reversion to increase the extent of chalk grassland on the Estate. Many attendees recognised the role that habitats play in the provision of ecosystem services, particularly public amenity and water filtration. The chalk aquifer underneath the Downland Estate was specifically referred to on numerous occasions, and many people were aware of the links between artificial chemicals applications, diffuse pollution, and water quality, and the role that natural systems play in filtering and protecting water sources.
- 3.7.4 **Educational resource.** The potential of the Estate as a learning resource was widely recognised, and improving the links with schools and colleges was seen as a priority.
- 3.7.5 **Encouraging visitors to act responsibly.** This was a recurring theme. There is concern that many dog owners do not keep their animals under close control, and do not pick up after them. Walkers often stray beyond the public rights of way or open access land, but do not observe the Countryside Code; this is linked to education. The very large number of day visitors, particularly from overseas, puts pressure on the ecology of the honeypot locations, and it is felt that many of these benefit from the public amenity of the downland without contributing anything towards its upkeep. Information boards or mobile phone apps were suggested as means of educating visitors and encouraging them to care for the Estate, potentially including the opportunity to make voluntary financial contributions.
- 3.7.6 **Rebuilding public trust.** Many of the public stakeholders who attended the workshop came with a degree of cynicism and scepticism about the Council's objectives for the Estate. The WEP should provide an opportunity to build a more collaborative approach between the Council and local stakeholders, so that the public feel they have a real stake in the management of the Estate, harness the considerable goodwill there is towards maintaining and enhancing the Estate, and instil a strong sense of public stewardship.

3.8 Visitors

- 3.8.1 ORVal estimates that 940,911 visits are made to the Eastbourne Downland Estate each year, and that these visits are associated with recreational values of £2.3 million per year. Analysis of visitors walking routes across the Estate suggest a very strong link with the National Trust owned Birling Gap and the Seven Sisters, via the South Downs Way. This testifies the place the Estate has as a gateway for recreational walkers in the South Downs National Park. Far fewer visitors explore the rest of the Estate, and those that do tend to be local Eastbourne residents.

4. Draft Vision Statement

- 4.1 The SDNPA Whole Estate Plans Preparation Guidelines provide the following brief example of a Vision statement:
- 4.1.1 *"It is our vision to create a visitor focused destination, which integrates heathland management with strong links to the South Downs Way whilst maintaining and enhancing the estates historic assets and continuing to support those who live and work on the Estate".*
- 4.2 We have also had regard to the Vision statements from WEPs that have already been endorsed and published. We reproduce these, by way of example, below:
- 4.2.1 **Highfield Estate Vision**, approved by the South Downs National Park Authority's Policy and Resource Committee on 29 March 2018:

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- *Continue to enhance the landscape, amenity and wildlife value of the Estate through the sustainable management of our arable land, grazing and woodlands and by implementing our Ecological & Woodland Management Plans.*
- *Create an environment and facilities that enable the Schools to meet their objectives and vision.*

4.2.2 **Iford Estate Vision**, approved by the South Downs National Park Authority's Policy and Resource Committee on 29 March 2018:

By 2033 the Iford Estate will be a place where:

- *a sustainable and resilient farming enterprise continues to flourish and innovate, having met and overcome the challenges faced by the sector, and which is well placed to continue for many years to come*
- *the special landscapes that make up the Estate are secured for future generations, with many opportunities having been taken to enhance the landscape setting of the Estate – both for its own sake and to continue to provide an inspirational backdrop to people's lives*
- *biodiversity is improved across the Estate, through continued innovations in environmentally-focused farming practices, the creation of new habitat features on previously farmed land, with every opportunity having been taken to improve existing areas*
- *the local rural economy thrives, with high quality holiday accommodation, land-based recreation and a rural creative industries hub having been provided. As well as supporting the estate financially, these businesses have provided rural employment and start-up opportunities to many local people*
- *the quality of life for our community of residents and workers is enhanced through maintaining community facilities, improved access and communications, and the protection and enhancement of our cultural heritage assets*
- *Ecosystem Services is embedded into our management principles so that all decision making takes place in the context of its influence on our Natural Capital*

4.2.3 **Newton Valence Estate Vision**, approved by the South Downs National Park Authority's Policy and Resource Committee on 19 September 2017.

- *The vision of Newton Valence Estate is to create a socially, financially and environmentally sustainable, robust and diversified farming business, with a core group of associated businesses contributing to and enhancing the primary farming activities.*
- *These 'associated businesses' will include a mix of sporting, leisure & tourism facilities, residential and commercial property lets which together provide a secure and viable future for the estate, its employees and the local economy.*
- *A vibrant and secure Estate business will seek to contribute to local employment, community needs and the conservation & enhancement of the natural environment.*

4.2.3.1 **Wiston Estate Vision**, approved by the South Downs National Park Authority's Policy and Resource Committee on 20 July 2017.

Our vision is that by 2030 Wiston will be:

- *A place for people: with housing and facilities that meet the needs of those of all ages and backgrounds, where all can enjoy and develop relationships with each other, their neighbours, their community and the land on which they live.*
- *A place for nature: where careful stewardship enables and enhances networks of habitat set within valued landscape and heritage.*
- *A place for productivity, craftsmanship and business: where people can come together to add value, create the products and services that people want and generate the income required to support a good quality of life for themselves and their families.*
- *A place without waste: where everything matters and the potential of people, the land and our built environment is optimised*

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- *A place for learning and exploration: where people benefit from time to think, to develop and exchange ideas and learn from each other, their shared experiences, history and the (built and natural) world around them.*
- 4.3 We suggest that the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan, which is based around an ambition to "leave our environment in a better state than we found it", provides a sensible timeframe for the Vision to materialise; 25 years is generally taken to be length of one generation.

4.3.1 **"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".**

5. Conclusions

- 5.1 We have dissected the Vision statement below to show where the various themes, priorities and objectives have been incorporated:

5.1.1 **"Our Vision for the Eastbourne Downland Estate over the next 25 years is to:..."**

- 25 years is generally taken to be the span of a generation, and this timeframe aligns with the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan.

5.1.2 **"Conserve the iconic downland landscape and cultural heritage of the Estate..."**

- Public consultation showed what a strong consensus there is for conserving the Estate "as it is". The reality is that natural systems are dynamic, and we cannot preserve the natural environment in aspic. Furthermore, there is a general recognition that business-as-usual in the way we manage land is not going to reverse the downwards trends we have seen in key indicators of biodiversity over the last 50 years, and the Vision statement should be aspirational. However, we think it is sensible to allay concerns that any future management might result in changes to the special characteristics and iconic landscape that the public cherish.
- Sheep-grazed downland is the iconic habitat of the chalk landscape, and this 'special quality' as recognised by the National Park was emphasised during public consultation. Well-conserved historical features and a rich cultural heritage is also seen as a special quality of the National Park as a whole, but particularly here on the Estate with its dew ponds, association with well-known writers, and landmarks of the two World Wars. The Estate is itself a legacy of the early 20th century conservation movements to protect the iconic cliffs and Downs, giving it a special place in history.

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5.1.3 **“...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;...”**

- Makes specific reference to those ‘special qualities’ of the National Park that are most relevant to the plan.
- ‘enjoyed, understood and valued by the public’ again reflects wording in the SDNPA’s Vision
- Helping the public to understand and value the Estate can make it an important educational resource, especially for local children. This reflects the Government’s aim of ‘encouraging children to be close to nature, in and out of school’.
- ‘Access for all’ is a priority for Eastbourne’s Disability Champion, who we understand has been advising the Downland Forum about what should be put in place to make the experience of visiting the downs achievable for the most profoundly disabled people (and their carers).
- ‘Contributing to Eastbourne’s sense of community, wellbeing and belonging’ reflects the Council’s Corporate Vision of ‘Thriving Communities’; it reflects the SDNPA’s priorities; it reflects Member’s wishes to maximise the social value of the Estate; and it reflects the Government’s commitment to connect people with the environment to improve health and wellbeing.

5.1.4 **“...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.”**

- Public consultation has shown that there is enormous interest in safeguarding the future of the Downland Estate, and the early proposals to sell the Estate mobilised significant opposition; the Council can harness this public interest and should try to encourage a sense of public stewardship.
- ‘A sense of public stewardship’ reflects the Government’s aim of improving connections between people and their environment, and the SDNPA’s vision that ‘the relationship between people and landscape will enhance their lives and inspire them to become actively involved in caring for it and using its resources more responsibly’.
- Caring for the Estate, and investing in it, reflects the Government’s commitment to help people ‘from all backgrounds to engage with nature and improve the environment’.
- This also reflects the reality of securing funding for the maintenance and conservation of the Estate, and one of the key over-arching corporate objectives that the Council has set for its property portfolio: ensuring assets are not a drain on the Council’s resources, and can be self-sustaining. This might include, for example, some form of visitor payback scheme or opportunities to make voluntary contributions.

5.1.5 **“Maintain and enhance the ‘natural capital’ of the Estate...”**

- This reflects the SDNPA’s guidance that recommends the concept of ecosystem services and natural capital should be the core focus of the approach.
- The natural capital approach is a central tenet of the Government’s 25 Year Environment Plan. It is extremely important in public policy terms, and it is a phrase that the public are becoming more familiar with.
- It is important that the Vision goes beyond ‘business-as-usual’ and is aspirational about *enhancing* natural capital, rather than just conserving or maintaining it.
- Enhancing natural capital and delivering ‘net gains’ for biodiversity is embedded in the National Planning Policy Framework and the 25 Year Environment Plan.
- ‘*Recovering nature and enhancing the beauty of landscapes*’ is one of the priorities in the 25 Year Environment Plan, and the Government advocated ‘natural capital investment plans’ as part of their strategy for nature. These plans will be aligned with the 25 Year Environment Plan (ensuring a clear line of sight to national government) but be particularly relevant to the local area or geographies within them.

5.1.6 **“...so that high-quality, well-managed habitats are resilient and adaptable to climate change, pests or disease”**

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- There is growing recognition that the quality or condition of habitat is critically important for biodiversity, rather than just the extent of that habitat.
- The SDNPA Vision refers to *'large areas of high-quality and well-managed habitat'*
- Resilience to climate change is important and is referred to in the 2026 'Pride of Place' partnership vision, the SDNPA vision, and is one of the conservation principles that informs where we should invest in strategic habitat restoration and creation.
- Adaptation to pests and diseases, such as Ash Dieback, and the fact that natural systems are dynamic, was emphasised in our consultation with the National Park.
- The stakeholder workshop and further discussions with the Downland Forum have shown that the chalk grassland in particular is a priority for conservation and enhancement. The Downland Forum suggest this is referred to explicitly in the Vision statement, but we suggest the wording around 'high-quality and well-managed habitats' provides for this.

5.1.7 **"...support wildlife networks throughout the landscape,"**

- Ecological networks are a major focus of conservation efforts. The scientific consensus is that 'fortress conservation' does not work effectively, and wildlife need to be able to move throughout the landscape in order to avoid genetic bottlenecks, mitigate the risk of local extinction, and adapt to a changing climate and other pressures.
- The importance of wildlife networks was laid down in Professor Sir John Lawton's 'Making Space for Nature' report – the 'Lawton Review' – which was launched in 2009 to look at England's collection of wildlife areas and whether they were capable of responding and adapting to challenges such as climate change. It concluded that a more coherent and resilient ecological network was needed to help wildlife cope with change: bigger, better, and more joined up.
- The SDNPA refers to *'a network supporting wildlife throughout the landscape'*.
- The 25 Year Environment Plan commits the Government to developing a 'Nature Recovery Network' to 'protect and restore wildlife, and provide opportunities to re-introduce species that we have lost from our countryside'. The aim is to provide 500,000 hectares of additional wildlife habitat, more effectively linking existing protected sites and landscapes, as well as urban green and blue infrastructure. Such a network will deliver on the recommendations from Professor Sir John Lawton: recovering wildlife will require more habitat; in better condition; in bigger patches that are more closely connected.

5.1.8 **"...and continue to deliver the widest range of ecosystem services into the future.**

- As well as helping wildlife thrive, the Government foresees the Nature Recovery Network delivering a wide range of additional benefits: greater public enjoyment; pollination; carbon capture; water quality improvements and flood management.
- This reflects the SDNPA's guidance that recommends the concept of ecosystem services and natural capital should be the core focus of the WEP approach.
- It also reflects the wording of the SDNPA's own Vision: *"People will understand, value, and look after the vital natural services that the National Park provides"*.
- Members of the Downland Forum suggest that the need to protect the town's aquifer and water supply from pollution should be a management priority; however, we suggest this does not need to be referred to specifically in the Vision, but will instead be a focus of the Ecosystem Services Analysis section in the WEP. Water filtration is exactly the sort of ecosystem service that the Downland habitats provide.
- The SDNPA encouraged us to 'stress test' the Vision statement for longevity and ensure that all aspects will remain relevant, ambitious and sustainable for the timeframe in mind. Pledging to deliver the 'widest range of ecosystem services into the future' is a critical aspect of future-proofing, and helps to contribute to inter-generational equity and fairness.

5.1.9 **"...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.**

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- This emphasises the public benefits that the Estate provides for everyone, including those who don't visit but who are still beneficiaries of (for example) its clean water, biodiversity or iconic landscape.
- 5.1.10 There may be Eastbourne residents who do not feel able to visit the Estate regularly, for reasons of poor mental health, anxiety, or cultural or social barriers, and who need extra encouragement or support enjoy, value and understand the ecosystem services it provides. **“...Ensure that our farmers are supported and valued as stewards of our land...”**
- This reflects the input of the Estate's agricultural tenants, who are motivated at least in part by a strong conservation and stewardship ethic, and who take pride in their responsibilities as stewards of the farmed environment.
 - 'Support and value' should come from both the Council, as landlord, and members of the public, who should be encouraged to understand how the Estate is managed and the role that farming plays in that.
 - This also reflects the Government's ambition in the 25 Year Environment Plan to improve how we manage and incentivise good land management.
 - The SDNPA sees farming as an integral part of the South Downs landscape, with successful farming businesses actively contributing to its unique identity and special qualities.
- 5.1.11 **“...Its soils and wildlife...”**
- 'Improving soil health' is one of the priorities set down in the 25 Year Environment Plan. The Government wants to ensure healthier soils by addressing factors in soil degradation such as erosion, compaction and the decline in organic matter, and it wants to work with farmers to achieve good soil management practices, including appropriate tillage choices, reintroducing grass leys into arable rotations and the use of cover crops.
 - Wildlife-friendly farming is a priority for the Government and the SDNPA, and it is something that the Estate's farm tenants take pride in.
- 5.1.12 **“...with sustainable and profitable businesses that can continue to flourish and innovate.”**
- This reflects the issues around business succession / routes into farming / opportunities for new entrants that were particularly salient in the minds of the Estate's tenants.
 - It reflects the SDNPA vision of successful farming business activities within the National Park actively contributing to, and deriving economic benefit from, its unique identity and special qualities.
 - It also reflects the Council's corporate objectives for the let agricultural portfolio, which should at least 'break-even' and pay for itself, ensuring assets are not a drain on the Council's resources or those of local tax-payers. Profitable farm businesses will sustain higher rental yields for the Council.
 - It recognises that farming will need to innovate to remain profitable, anticipating significant changes in the industry once the UK leaves the Common Agricultural Policy, with the Agriculture Bill likely to usher in a new era in the rural economy, challenging everything from tenancy arrangements to supply contracts.
- 5.1.13 **“Protect the Estate for future generations, ensuring that it is self-sustaining and financially resilient...”**
- Reflects the Government's overriding objective of “leaving our environment in a better state than we found it” over the course of a generation.
 - Reflects the Council's corporate objectives in the Asset Management Plan
 - Members of the Downland Forum have suggested the Estate should be protected 'in perpetuity' rather than simply for 'future generations'. They feel this better reflects the original intentions of the people who campaigned for its purchase between 1926 and 1929. However, 'perpetuity' is a very long time indeed, and places an encumbrance on the Council that extends far beyond the

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25 year time frame of the WEP. As a general rule, it is sensible to avoid making commitments in perpetuity. There are too many variables to make a truly permanent restriction on land use realistic. We should be cautious about binding future generations with 'dead hand' control in perpetuity. This caution is based on the principle that each subsequent generation should be free to decide how the land is used. We therefore suggest that 'future generations' is preferable to 'in perpetuity'.

5.1.14 **"...built on diversified income streams, promoting innovation, craftsmanship, rural creative industries, and high-quality visitor experiences"**

- Reflects Asset Management Strategy theme 4, *'Seek opportunities where key strategic assets could realise significant capital and/or revenue returns in order to reinvest in the retained operational portfolio'*.
- Reflects Members' aspirations explore income opportunities beyond agricultural rental income, and to work with the farm tenants to capitalise on other potential opportunities – including different farming systems (such as viticulture), renewables, leisure, and tourism enterprises.
- It reflects the Council's Corporate Vision for a prosperous economy: "Eastbourne will continue to be an outstanding destination for tourism, arts, heritage and culture", a gateway to the South Downs National Park, a transformed and a place for improving skills, employment, learning, and participation for residents and tourists.
- It reflects the SDNPA's Vision of successful farming, forestry, tourism and other business activities within the National Park.

