

Report to	Policy & Resources Committee
Date	24 September 2020
By	Major Projects Lead
Title of Report (Decision)	Eastbourne Downland Estate Whole Estate Plan

Recommendation: The Committee is recommended to:

I. Endorse the Eastbourne Downland Estate Whole Estate Plan.

1. Introduction

1.1 In 2015 the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) introduced the idea of Whole Estate Plans, meeting with numerous Estates with significant land holdings within the National Park area. A Whole Estate Plan (WEP) aims to enable collaboration between individual estates and the National Park Authority to achieve the ambitions of the Estate / Farm / School and the purposes of the National Park, and deliver the Partnership Management Plan. A WEP is a non-statutory plan which demonstrates the overall position and aspirations an organisation has as an estate and plans do not have to cover a specific time period, and may be updated to reflect changes in circumstance or withdrawn if appropriate.

2. Policy Context

2.1 WEPs are a progressive and almost unique approach by a planning authority or National Park Authority in the UK as they look to foster good working relationships with key stakeholders and facilitate better understanding of the issues surrounding sustainable rural estate communities – of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. They are not focused on or to be limited to planning matters but rather the whole husbandry of the Estate – farming, woodland management, conservation, access provision etc. This enables the Estate to demonstrate how they contribute to the policies and outcomes identified in the South Downs National Park Partnership Management Plan.

2.2 An endorsed WEP will be a material consideration in determining planning applications and will provide a solidly understood contextual background to any development proposals. The inclusion of a development proposal within a WEP however does not guarantee that planning permission will be granted and any proposal will still need to comply with relevant development plan policies. A WEP can also be used to help guide and support funding bids, future neighbourhood plan production, agri-environment and forestry schemes and with other Natural Capital projects. Beyond the finished product, the WEP process also provides value in terms of relationship building; between the Estate and the SDNPA, as well as the local community.

3. Review of Whole Estate Plan Process

3.1 An internal evaluation is being conducted to enable an opportunity to improve the Whole Estate Plan (WEP) process. The evaluation will be a desk based exercise as well as providing

opportunity for stakeholder feedback. The evaluation will look into the benefits, the process, resourcing and where improvements can be made to WEPs.

3.2 Updated guidance on producing WEPs is also to be published online shortly following feedback from a WEP session with Members and officers.

4. Issues for consideration

4.1 A WEP is comprised of 4 elements:

- A Vision,
- An Asset Audit,
- Ecosystem Services Analysis, and
- An Action Plan.

Officers look at how all these elements relate to each other, i.e. is the Vision a genuine representation of the actions proposed, and are the actions evidenced by the Asset Audit and Ecosystem Services Analysis? Estates should also be able to demonstrate that they have engaged with the local community during the process of producing the WEP.

4.2 Eastbourne Borough Council (EBC), with support from consultants AECOM, engaged with the WEP process in 2018 following the discussions about the potential sale of the Downland Estate.

4.3 The Downland Estate, located at the easternmost end of the National Park, is approximately 1,689 hectares (4,174 acres), of which 1,199 hectares (2,963 acres) is predominately farmland and 490 hectares (1,211 acres) is open access land and includes the Beachy Head beauty spot.

4.4 It should be noted that the preparation of this WEP, has been different to any other WEP to date, as it has been written and agreed by another Local Authority with its own procedural requirements and scrutiny.

4.5 EBC held a number of initial consultation events with key stakeholders and interested groups to define the overall Vision for the Downland Estate. The draft vision was approved by EBC's Cabinet in June 2019.

4.6 There were further consultation events and discussions with stakeholders and interested groups in 2019, which led to formal public consultation on the draft WEP in Feb – April 2020. Further details of the consultation process and how it has shaped the WEP are set out in the 'developing the vision' section of the WEP (see **Appendix I**, pages 4-7).

4.7 Since 2018, officers from across the SDNPA have also had meetings with officers and representatives of EBC to discuss issues and both officers and Members were provided with opportunities to comment on earlier drafts of the WEP (this also included a Member site visit in January 2020).

4.8 The WEP for the Eastbourne Downland Estate (see **Appendix I**) was formally adopted by EBC on 15 July 2020 and then subsequently submitted to the Authority for endorsement.

4.9 The WEP follows the structure suggested in the SDNPA guidance and it is considered that the whole process of producing the WEP has helped to bring the importance of the Downland Estate to Eastbourne up the agenda so that its true value is understood more fully and it has ensured that the aspirations for the Downland Estate, by both EBC and the SDNPA, are increasingly aligned and there is a good, shared understanding of this part of the National Park.

4.10 The WEP has been well received by officers across the SDNPA, and officers are encouraged by how comments / issues raised throughout the process have been taken on board and the WEP amended accordingly. Overall, the WEP fits well with our Partnership Management Plan and other strategies, such as the Sustainable Tourism Strategy.

4.11 For context, it is also worth noting that the WEP is just one of the many work streams the Authority is engaging with EBC on. Others include the Heritage Coast Strategy, Changing Chalk project and a Woodland Management Plan, and due to the WEP process, the Authority also has representation on the Beachyhead Countryside Centre Group (one of the priority projects coming out of the WEP).

4.12 The following provides a summary assessment of each of the 4 elements that make up the WEP.

Vision

4.13 The vision is focused on the conservation and presentation of the Estate and its 'natural capital', supporting tenant farmers and enabling a self-sustaining, financially resilient Estate. Recent changes to the vision also highlight the importance of the 'Heritage Coast' (and the Sussex Heritage Coast: A Strategy and Action Plan).

4.14 Officers are encouraged that the way the Vision is presented provides a clear understanding of what the WEP is intended to be and what can be achieved. In addition, it is encouraging to see that the vision and 25yr WEP timeframe mirrors the Government's 25yr plan for the environment.

Asset Audit

4.15 The Asset Audit provides a thorough account of all the features, activities and services on the Estate. This is well evidenced and supported by maps, which are successful in explaining and demonstrating how the Estate fits in the SDNP context, its heritage and cultural assets, and how diverse the Estate is (including key facts about the Estates properties). Recent changes to earlier versions of the WEP also strengthens the 'accessibility' of the Estate (a PROW and Access section has been added) and the importance the Estate has to the health and well-being of the local, and wider, community.

4.16 It is considered that the Audit provides a comprehensive review of the assets and provides a solid foundation for expanding or developing the projects within the Action Plan.

Ecosystem Services Analysis

4.17 A considerable amount of work has been done on the ecosystem services analysis, which includes 'natural capital accounting'. This approach, which has been developed by DEFRA, allows for the calculating of the total stocks of natural resources and links to and between ecosystems services. It measures the changes in the stock of natural capital, and the ecosystem services it provides, in monetary terms and integrates the value of ecosystem services into accounting and reporting systems.

4.18 EBC have used this approach to provide a structured and transparent way of recording the extent and condition of habitats within the Downland Estate, the value of the ecosystem services that flow from these and the impact of how habitats are managed.

4.19 It is considered that this approach has been a helpful way of engaging key stakeholders and the wider community about the 'value' of the Estate.

4.20 This section also provides a detailed SWOT analysis. Officers are pleased to see that the text has been amended from earlier versions to provide greater 'connectivity' between the landscape, education and health and well-being, and recognises the opportunity for a permanent venue for 'Heritage Eastbourne' and the weaknesses / challenges of the transport links to Eastbourne, the Estate's visitor profile and visitor management issues.

4.21 It is considered that EBC have demonstrated a comprehensive understanding of what they have and opportunities and challenges facing the Estate.

Action Plan and Priority Projects

4.22 The Action Plan provides projects / actions and identifies outcomes EBC hopes to achieve in respect of issues identified through the eco-systems services analysis.

- 4.23 In addition to adopting the WEP, EBC's Cabinet on 15 July 2020 also agreed to a prioritisation of the projects within the WEP with changes to the Beachyhead Countryside Centre and the re-purposing of redundant farm buildings at Black Robin Farm given the highest priority.
- 4.24 It is important to note, that this prioritisation does not mean that the other projects / actions identified in the WEP are not important but that the prioritisation enables Officers and Councillors at EBC to manage the various projects (albeit some of the other projects are being undertaken as part of the general management of the Estate) and focus resources in the short to medium term.
- 4.25 It is considered that there is a clear link between the analysis work and prioritisation of the projects and the action plan evidences the understanding the Estate has in its relationship with the SDNP and the ability to contribute to the National Park Authority's purposes and duty. For example, the Beachyhead Countryside Centre has a central role to play in promoting the Downland Estate and supporting education and volunteering initiatives and it is welcomed that the Authority has been invited to have officer representation on the strategic panel which is being set up, by EBC's lead member on sustainability, to take the Countryside Centre proposals forward.
- 4.26 For the reasons set out above, the Eastbourne Downland Estate Whole Estate Plan is recommended for endorsement.

5. Options & cost implications

- 5.1 There are no direct cost implications associated with the consideration of the endorsement of the WEP.
- 5.2 Once endorsed, the Authority will continue to work with EBC to realise some of the projects identified. As already stated, this work has already started and includes officer representation on the Beachyhead Countryside Centre Group.

6. Next steps

- 6.1 If the WEP is endorsed, it will be placed on the SDNPA website and officers will be made aware that is now a material consideration in the assessment of planning applications.

7. Other Implications

Implication	Yes/No
Will further decisions be required by another committee/full authority?	No, although applications for grant funds or planning permission may be submitted for consideration relating to actions highlighted within the WEP.
Does the proposal raise any Resource implications?	No. If endorsed, the WEP will be included on the SDNPA website, however update and review of the document is the responsibility of the Estate. If the WEP is amended, it will need to be considered again by Officers and Members.
How does the proposal represent Value for Money?	N/A
Are there any Social Value implications arising from the proposal?	No
Have you taken regard of the South Downs National Park Authority's equality duty as contained within the Equality Act 2010?	This decision has no direct equalities implications. This document will be used to inform future decisions by the Authority, which will be subject to their own equalities impact assessments.

Are there any Human Rights implications arising from the proposal?	No
Are there any Crime & Disorder implications arising from the proposal?	No
Are there any Health & Safety implications arising from the proposal?	No
Are there any Data Protection implications?	None
Are there any Sustainability implications based on the 5 principles set out in the SDNPA Sustainability Strategy.	The WEP has principles 1-3 at its core, which is evidenced by the Plan being set within the context of the SDNP Partnership Management Plan and to support the delivery of the Local Plan.

8. Risks Associated with the Proposed Decision

- 8.1 There is the potential for a reputational risk for the SDNPA through failure to endorse the WEP, without substantive reasons, after an Estate has gone through the process of producing a WEP that meets the criteria for endorsement. This risk is mutated through the committee process and the requirement for the committee to give appropriate reasons for its decisions in public. There is also a risk of WEPs being misunderstood and considered as planning documents only, or being interpreted as a 'green light' for development. Both of these risks are mitigated by providing continued support to Estates, case officers and other interested parties and providing guidance on the SDNPA website.

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Appendices	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Eastbourne Downland Estate Whole Estate Plan (Main Document) – Separate Pack 2. Eastbourne Downland Estate Whole Estate Plan (Appendices) – available on SDNPA website
SDNPA Consultees	Director of Countryside Policy and Management; Monitoring Officer; Legal Services
External Consultees	None
Background Documents	SDNPA Whole Estate Plan Guidelines Producing a Whole Estate Plan - South Downs National Park Authority SDNP Partnership Management Plan Eastbourne Borough Council – Cabinet adoption of the WEP 15 July 2020

