

City Downland Estate Plan Summary



Brighton & Hove
City Council

Why a Downland Estate Plan?

Brighton & Hove is part of a unique environment. The city lies at the heart of a world-class area of natural value, recognised by UNESCO as a Biosphere Reserve. The city is also in the unusual and fortunate position of having among its assets the City Downland Estate – nearly 13,000 acres offering breath-taking landscapes stretching from the High Downs to the coast, and a wealth of natural capital. Yet these treasures face serious threats.

They include pollution of the aquifer (groundwater supply), reduced biodiversity and a depleted landscape. Climate change poses myriad challenges and itself contributes to the loss of biodiversity.

Brighton & Hove City Council was one of the first local authorities in the country to declare biodiversity and climate emergencies.

The Downland Estate Plan will play a key role in taking this agenda forward. It is designed to ensure that this vital asset on our doorstep delivers maximum benefit to the whole community for decades to come – spearheading our efforts to restore and rejuvenate our environment, but also enriching the social and cultural lives and physical and mental wellbeing of all who live here.

This is a significant time in the history of the estate. Purchased 100 years ago by our ancestors to protect the aquifer surrounding the city, we are now setting out a vision that will continue to shape the landscape for the next 100 years – and what we need to do over the next decade to turn the vision into reality.



How did we go about it?

To ensure the plan succeeds it was essential to give the community every opportunity to propose and debate the solutions that will deliver our goals.

We therefore embarked on a two year programme of consultation – one of the most far-reaching exercises of its kind in the council’s history. This encompassed live community events and multiple phases of feedback from stakeholders, statutory and interest groups and

individuals who are passionate about the future of the estate.

Our root-and-branch review coincided with the South Down National Park Authority’s own initiative to encourage estates within the park to produce whole estate plans. We have followed the SDNPA’s guidelines in structuring our plan – acknowledging its need to establish some common bases for assessing and co-ordinating initiatives from multiple landowners.

What the plan covers

Vision

A compact statement of what we are committed to achieving

Asset audit

A digest of the estate’s possessions, attributes and capacities

Ecosystem services

Setting out stakeholders’ views of and aspirations for the estate

Actions

Initiatives we propose to pursue to achieve our vision

Management and delivery

The human resources needed to bring our plans to fruition

Next steps

A more specific description of the actions we will be taking over the next two years



Vision

Our community consultations led to the creation of our vision statement – the anchor for all the initiatives we are putting forward in the plan:

“ A rejuvenated City Downland Estate will be carbon negative and climate resilient, its biodiverse grassland landscape fully restored and teeming with wildlife. The estate will be a leader in sustainable farming, where local food production will flourish.

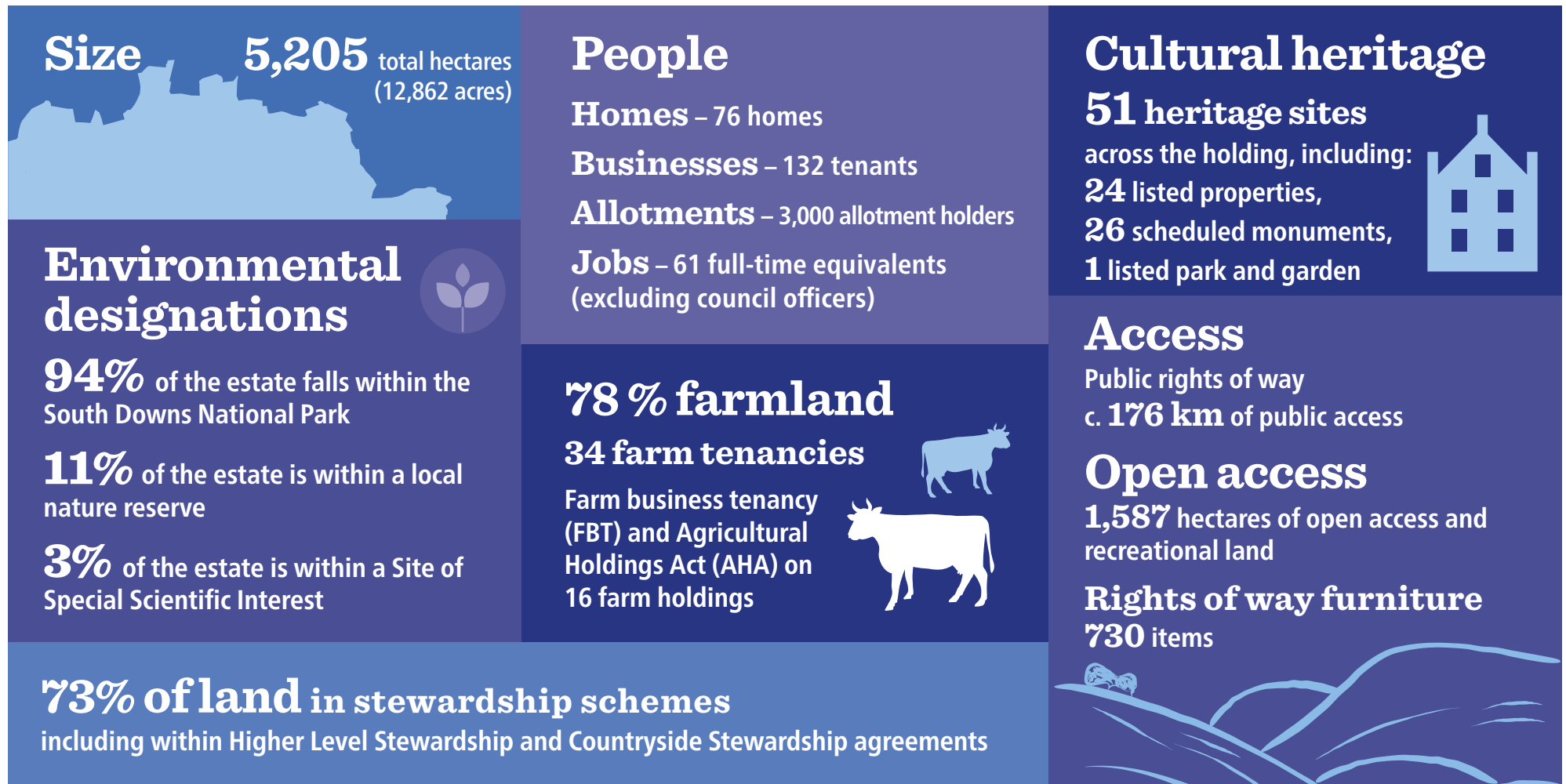
By creating new amenities and opening up more land to the public – and by making it easier for all to visit and enjoy – the estate will fulfil its potential to boost the wellbeing of everyone who experiences it.

Democratic accountability will be the touchstone for all decisions affecting the estate. This land is ours. ”



Asset audit

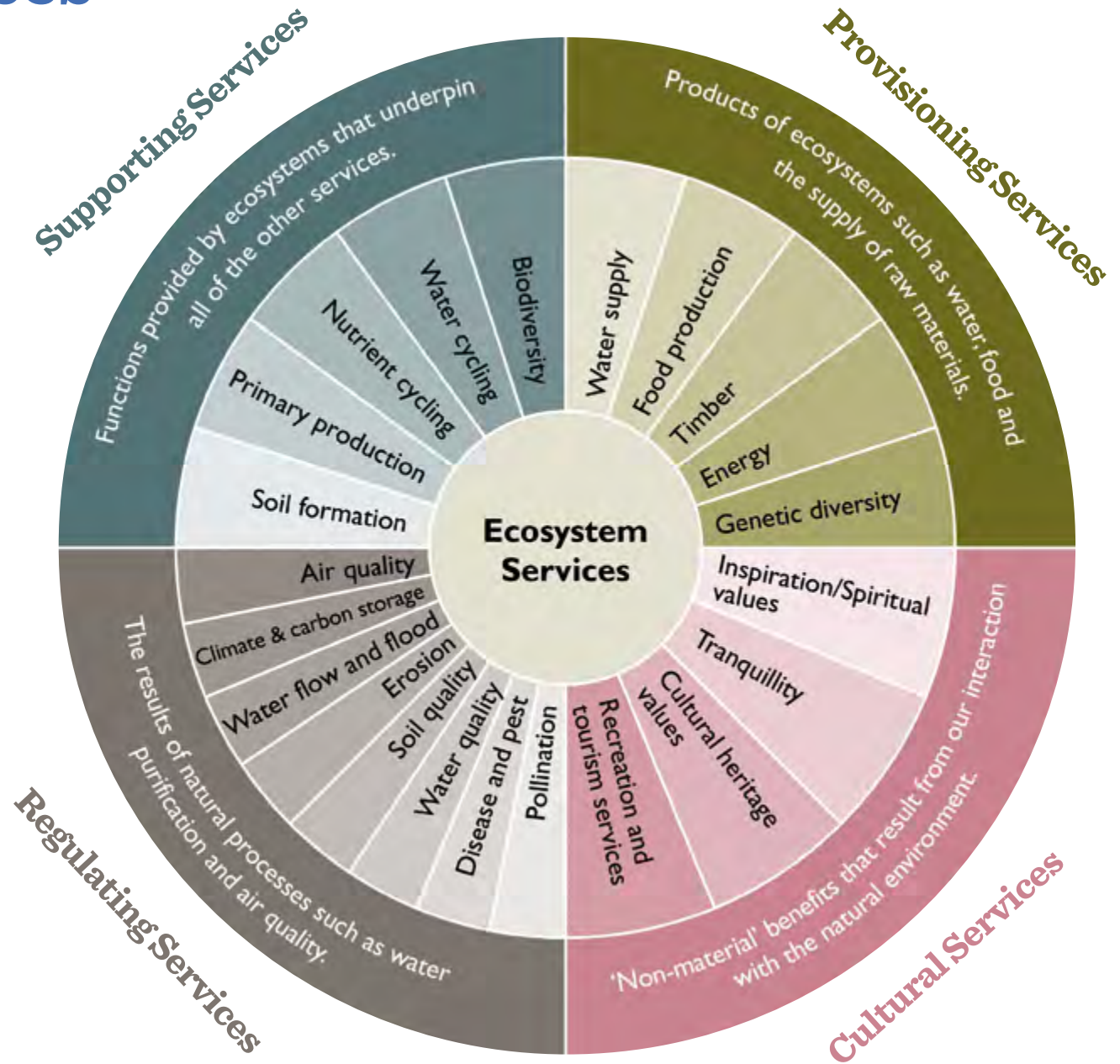
The section includes information on environmental designations, biodiversity, water, chalk grassland, woodland, farmland, community assets, public access, cultural heritage and homes, as highlighted in the table:



Ecosystem services

This went to the heart of the exercise. Through consultations and feedback we captured the views of multiple stakeholders and the wider community, using the SDNPA's framework for assessing ecosystems (see chart).

This also highlighted the estate's strengths and weaknesses, and the opportunities and threats it faces.



Actions

The conclusions from the analysis and debate on ecosystem services created the foundations for our proposed actions.

These actions are grouped under six categories, corresponding to the ecosystem services framework as follows:

An amenity for all	Cultural services
Enabling biodiversity to flourish	Supporting services
The route to carbon net zero - and beyond	Regulating services
Sustainable food & farming	Provisioning services
A connected landscape	All
Identifying new sources of income	All

In deciding which areas to prioritise, we took into account the potential for individual initiatives to benefit multiple ecosystems and the City Downland Estate as a whole. For example, many of our actions will help directly or indirectly to increase biodiversity and achieve our net zero target.





An amenity for all

Cultural services

<p>A new public access and visitor management strategy</p>	<p>Establishing a holistic approach to improving access, identifying the best ways to attract and engage visitors – e.g. circular and marked trails and the development of high quality paths, bridleways, gates and signage. New and improved crossings for pedestrians and cyclists over the A27.</p>
<p>An expanded range of walking routes and overnight accommodation</p>	<p>E.g. creating a Brighton & Hove bunkhouse network. Repurposed from redundant farm buildings, the bunkhouses would offer a staging post and overnight accommodation at key locations along the green highways and other long distance access trials.</p>
<p>A landmark recreational and heritage site</p>	<p>Using the traditional farm buildings at Stanmer Park to encapsulate and project everything that the estate represents.</p>
<p>Celebrating the South Downs</p>	<p>Launching a programme of events and activities to celebrate the South Downs to promote learning and engagement. For example, the Wild Chalk Festival.</p>
<p>Schools and outreach programmes</p>	<p>E.g. facilitating tours of the estate, providing practical guidance to teachers organising the trips. Raising awareness of what the estate has to offer, focusing in particular on excluded groups.</p>



<p>Enabling biodiversity to flourish</p> <p>Supporting services</p>	<p>Local nature recovery networks</p>	<p>Joining with East Sussex County Council to develop a local nature recovery strategy, enabling us to secure funding to help achieve our biodiversity objectives.</p>
	<p>Management plans for all key habitats</p>	<p>Preparing management plans for all key habitats across the estate, e.g. chalk grassland. Publishing our performance against biodiversity and soil health targets; supporting agricultural tenants to apply for environmental schemes.</p>
	<p>Working with others</p>	<p>E.g. collaborating with the SDNPA and other stakeholders such as The Living Coast.</p>
<p>The route to carbon net zero - and beyond</p> <p>Regulating services</p>	<p>Carbon benchmarking</p>	<p>Using Farm Carbon Toolkit reports to help tenant farmers to measure, understand and reduce their carbon footprint.</p>
	<p>Reducing waste and the circular economy</p>	<p>Auditing all estate activities & buildings to define future energy requirements and identify opportunities to reduce waste. Exploring feasibility of establishing grid-scale battery storage, small scale hydrogen generation and a solar farm.</p>



<p>Sustainable food and farming</p> <p>Provisioning services</p>	<p>Farm plans</p>	<p>Helping farmers and land managers to prepare their own plans, setting targets for reducing emissions and achieving other environmental benefits.</p>
	<p>Training and standards</p>	<p>Providing practical help to agricultural tenants in managing the transition to organic, regenerative and carbon zero systems, e.g. in reducing nitrate applications, soil erosion & surface water run-off.</p>
	<p>Financial incentives for tenants</p>	<p>Identifying through the farm plans whether changes can be facilitated through external grants, or where top-up funding may be appropriate.</p>
	<p>Contractual arrangements with tenants</p>	<p>Requiring all new farm leases to adopt organic or regenerative practices and to incorporate targets for improving public access, soil health and biodiversity.</p>
	<p>Promoting local food</p>	<p>Working with the Brighton & Hove Food Partnership and others to develop markets for local produce – e.g. embedding 'buy local' into the council's own procurement procedures and supply chains.</p>
	<p>Reducing food miles</p>	<p>Stipulating that wherever possible food should be sourced from the shortest distance to its destination, helping to cut carbon emissions and support local food producers.</p>



A connected landscape

Cultural, supporting, regulating & provisioning services

Key linkages between the city and the estate

Defining key strategic landscape views to and from the city, safeguarding them in council planning policy and enhancing them through estate management. Taking land under our direct control at sites where we can achieve significant social, environmental or landscape benefits.

Mitigating the effects of climate change

Carrying out a climate change impact assessment, including identifying priority habitats at greatest risk of damage or loss; and species (including trees) most vulnerable to invasive species and disease.

Tree-planting and woodland management

Preparing woodland management plans at all relevant sites to support long term maintenance, improvement and biodiversity and to ensure we qualify for available grants.

Improving water quality

Working with our farmers, commercial tenants and key stakeholders (such as the other members of The Aquifer Partnership and Southern Water) to develop an estate-specific ground water storage and catchment strategy.

Restoring grassland

Expanding chalk grassland to recover the full beauty of the landscape, increasing acreage and wherever possible connecting up sites which are currently fragmented.

Dark skies

Aligning with the SDNPA's policies on dark skies, incorporating these in our own planning policies for developments close to the national park and the estate's urban fringe.



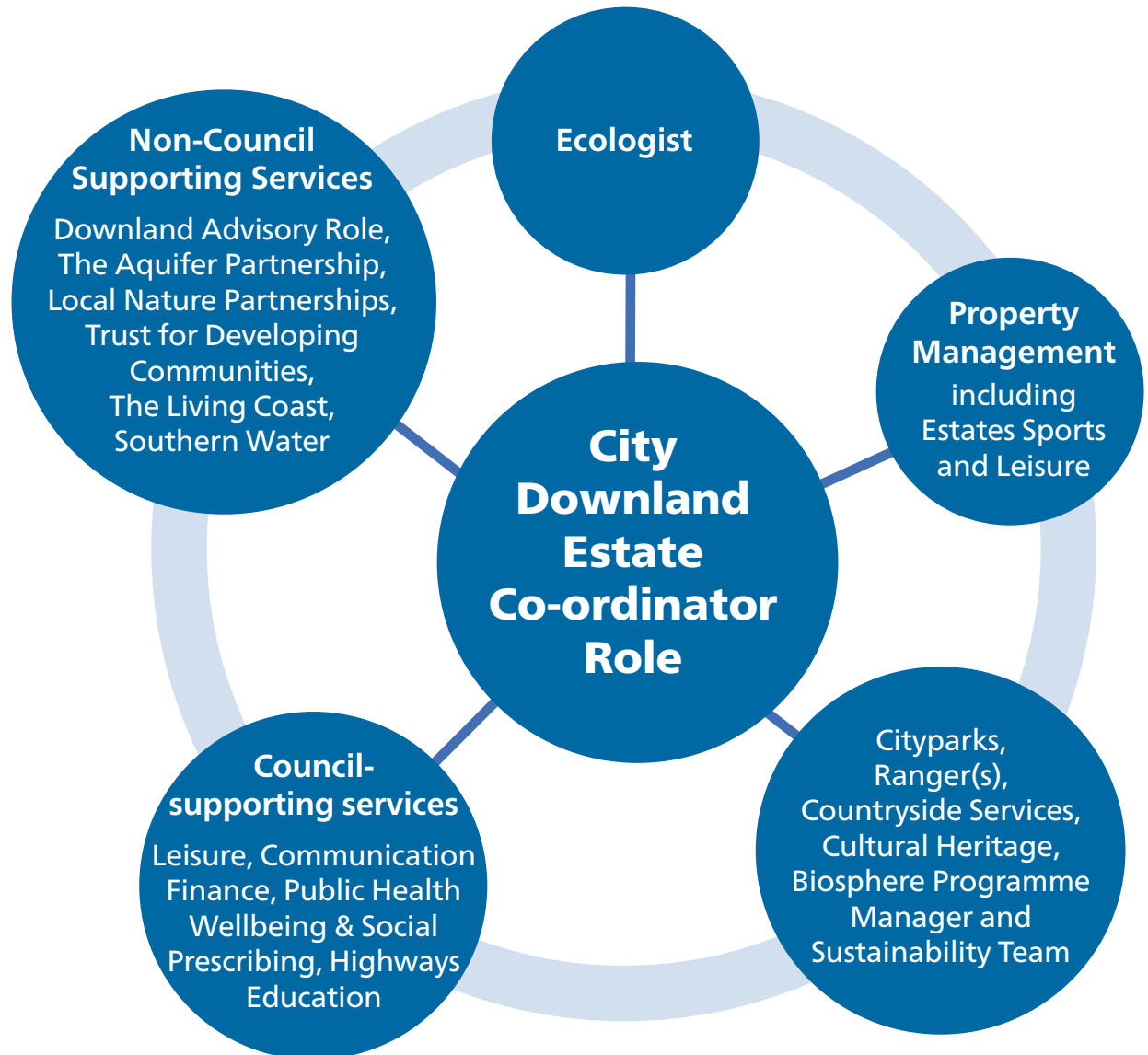
<p>Identifying new sources of income</p> <p>Cultural, supporting, regulating & provisioning services</p>	<p>Public amenities</p>	<p>Identifying the potential for visitor-related facilities to generate income, e.g. opportunities to raise revenue from car parking, EV charging points and food and coffee concessions.</p>
	<p>Grants and funding schemes</p>	<p>Seeking support through the local nature recovery network and landscape recovery; supporting tenants in applying for grants and exploring other potential sources, e.g. seed and grant match funding.</p>
	<p>Renewables income & energy savings</p>	<p>Establishing the feasibility of putting solar panels on the roofs of existing buildings (in addition to installing 500 kW of solar PV at corporate, housing and leisure sites).</p>
	<p>Financial planning</p>	<p>Preparing and maintaining a rolling capital investment budget for a minimum five-year period.</p>

Management and delivery

The section assesses the resources needed to deliver the actions described on the previous pages.

A key priority is to appoint an individual who would have specific responsibility for the estate and for co-ordinating management initiatives which have an impact on it. The postholder will provide a focal point for all stakeholders and drive forward our agenda. Other roles may include expanding the scope of our current ranger service to include countryside management and encompass all aspects of the estate.

The process of preparing the plan showed how much expertise on the estate can be found within the community, and the willingness of so many to help improve it. We intend to harness that enthusiasm, ensuring that everyone who wants to participate in the estate's development has an opportunity to do so.



Next steps

In some cases the scope and timing of implementation of the actions will depend on further preparatory steps. We recognise that all actions must be SMART – that is: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound.

These will be developed over the mobilisation period and beyond, as we collect further data and consult with stakeholders.

With regard to shorter term proposals, however, we can map out now the individual steps we will be taking in more detail. These are set out in the following table. The steps as described assume that we are able to make the relevant appointments within the timeframe.

	In progress at plan launch	Mobilisation 2023	Implementation 2023 – 2024			Implementation 2024 – 2025			
		Jan-Mar	Apr-June	Jul-Sep	Oct-Dec	Jan-Mar	Apr-June	Jul-Sept	Oct-Dec
Management and delivery									
Appoint City Downland Estate co-ordinator									
Create cross departmental Council officer working group									
Appoint countryside ranger(s)									
Appoint consultant ecologist									
Complete terms of reference for Downland Advisory Panel									

CITY DOWNLAND ESTATE PLAN : SUMMARY

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			Jan-Mar	Apr-June	Jul-Sep	Oct-Dec	Jan-Mar	Apr-June	Jul-Sept
Management and delivery (continued)									
Work with officer working group, Downland Advisory Panel and Asset Management Board to develop key performance indicators for the estate									
Organise six-month review meetings with key delivery partners									
Develop communication strategy									
Develop City Downland Estate website									
An amenity for all									
Install visitor/gate counters at key access locations									
Complete condition survey of Rights of Way and open access signage/furniture									
Install replacement access signage/furniture									
Finalise 'amenity for all' task and finish group									

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An amenity for all (continued)									
Agree on permissive and statutory access protocol									
Commission new Public Access and Visitor Management Strategy (PAVM)									
Complete PAVM									
Complete Public Realm Strategy for Stanmer farm buildings									
Agree who will deliver the actions from PAVM									
Develop events programme to celebrate the South Downs									
Finalise 2023 schools/ outreach programme (Changing Chalk Project)									
Finalise minority programme with Trust for Developing Communities									
Provide public access to the traditional farm buildings and yard									

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Enabling biodiversity to flourish									
Establish biodiversity working group to oversee mapping and habitat management plans									
Review existing biodiversity and ecological survey data for gaps									
Complete gap analysis of habitat potential mapping									
Procure field survey work as identified in gap analysis for 2023/2024									
Complete mapping of chalk grassland restoration priority areas									
Complete Local Biodiversity Action Plan update to ensure up to date and fit for purpose									
Join Nature Recovery Network									

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The route to carbon net zero – and beyond									
Ongoing briefing sessions for tenant farmers on Farm Carbon Tool Kit findings and soil health									
Achieve Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES) compliance									
Sustainable food and farming									
Complete farm plan for Patcham Court Farm									
Complete reletting of Patcham Court Farm									
Complete any required preparatory works e.g. fencing to facilitate reletting of South Downs Riding School									
Complete reletting of South Downs Riding School									
Agree farm baseline data									
Commission new baseline surveys where additional data is required									
Complete soil baseline assessment									

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		Jan-Mar	Apr-June	Jul-Sep	Oct-Dec	Jan-Mar	Apr-June	Jul-Sept	Oct-Dec
A connected landscape									
Complete Stanmer Park master plan			■						
Bring Home Farm Moulsecomb back in hand	■								
Repurpose Waterhall Golf Club House				■					
Define key strategic landscape views	■								
Complete estate woodland management plan	■								
Reduce area and frequency of mown public spaces for 2023 season		■							
Plant trees (standards) on urban fringe mown grass areas					■				
Draw on surveys and other evidence to refine the vision of 'A Brighton Landscape' and convert to a practical plan			■						

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		Jan-Mar	Apr-June	Jul-Sep	Oct-Dec	Jan-Mar	Apr-June	Jul-Sept	Oct-Dec
Identifying new sources of income									
Complete business case for repurposing Stanmer traditional farm buildings									
Work with ESCC developing a Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) and identify grant potential									
Complete business case to agree ring-fencing estate income for reinvestment in the estate									
Complete first five-year capital budget, inc. resolution of current cottage disposal programme									
Shortlist of key properties/sites capable of generating new forms of income									
Complete solar farm feasibility study									
Prep and apply for the Environment and Land Management Schemes (ELMS) landscape recovery scheme									
Submit grant application to ELMs landscape recovery scheme									