

ENVIRONMENT CABINET MEMBER MEETING

Agenda Item 49

Brighton & Hove City Council

Subject:	Cityparks Downland Management		
Date of Meeting:	24 September 2009		
Report of:	Director of Environment		
Contact Officer:	Name:	Hugo Blomfield	Tel: 29 2401
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Key Decision:	No		
Wards Affected:	East Brighton; Hangleton & Knoll; Hollingdean & Stanmer; Moulsecoomb & Bevendean, North Portslade; Patcham; Rottingdean Coastal; Withdean and Woodingdean		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

- 1.1 This report provides information about the proposed plan to increase the grazed area of council land managed by Cityparks.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the Cabinet Member for Environment approves the grazing plans for each site subject to full consultation with ward councillors and residents.
- 2.2 That the Cabinet Member for Environment approves the implementation of the grazing plans for key chalk downland sites and where feasible, subject to the above consultation being completed successfully.

3. RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION / CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS:

- 3.1 The downs around the city were grazed by sheep for many hundreds, probably thousands, of years. This traditional management technique was instrumental in creating and maintaining the species-rich turf. Chalk grassland supports up to 40 species of plant in one square metre and many of these are chalk specialists, which require a 'high stress' environment (very low soil fertility and regular browsing) to survive.
- 3.2 Today chalk grassland is internationally rare and local authorities are expected to prioritise its management as part of their duty to further biodiversity, set out in Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006.
- 3.3 About 20 years ago Brighton Borough Council introduced grass cutting and baling on some chalk grassland sites under its control. This 'emergency management' was a reaction to the serious decline in the quality of the remaining chalk grassland, most of which had received little or no grazing for many years. However cutting is an inferior management technique to grazing.

- 3.4 Reintroducing sheep grazing on the council's chalk grassland sites was therefore always desirable and 10 years ago Brighton & Hove Council reintroduced sheep to a few key sites, working with a local grazier and in close liaison with the local community. Publicity is needed to generate support and ensure people understand the reasons for change.
- 3.5 Cityparks Rangers have trained over 65 volunteer 'lookers' (to help check on the sheep) and has a further 30 people on a waiting list for the next training course. The project has also received national and international press coverage and it is clear we are amongst the lead local authorities in this important area of work. No serious issues of concern have been encountered with the reintroduction of grazing to date and the educational and community benefits of reintroducing grazing on the urban fringe are now being recognised.

Recommendations

- 3.6 The following proposals are in addition to, or to improve, sites where grazing and/or conservation mowing currently takes place. Conservation mowing will continue until grazing is introduced.
- 3.7 Winter 2009/2010:

Site	Grazing plan (Appendix 1 Site maps)
Beacon Hill Local Nature Reserve (LNR)	Increase the limited area currently grazed with sheep to include most of the chalk grassland. Permanent perimeter fencing with accessible gates. Grazing by rotation around several compartments with temporary internal fencing.
Bevendean Down LNR	Small extension to north of existing grazed area.
Hollingbury Wild Park LNR	Triple the small area of chalk grassland first grazed with sheep last winter. Permanent perimeter fencing with accessible gates and clear a large area of scrub for grazing.
Sheepcote Valley	Triple the area grazed with sheep in 2008/2009 to include most of the chalk grassland slopes (also now in the National Park) with temporary fencing.
Waterhall	Increase sheep grazing to include all the meadow area with permanent fencing and accessible gates.
Whitehawk Hill LNR	Introduce sheep grazing to a small area for the first time with temporary fencing.

- 3.8 Winter 2010/2011:

Site	Grazing plan
Bevendean Down Local Nature Reserve (LNR)	Negotiate with existing farm tenant to increase the area currently grazed with sheep.
Hollingbury Wild Park LNR	Assess the feasibility of extensively grazing both sides of Ditchling Road from Hollingbury golf course to the A27, including "39 acres" and land along west side of Ditchling Road currently mown by Cityparks. To include open

	access on foot across the entire area with accessible gates located where appropriate and dog owners encouraged to keep dogs under close control. Clear a further area of scrub for grazing and permanent fencing with accessible gates.
Ladies Mile LNR	Introduce sheep grazing to a small area for the first time with temporary fencing.
Sheepcote Valley	Increase the area grazed by sheep to include most of the grassland with permanent fencing.
Whitehawk Hill LNR	Double or triple the area first grazed with sheep in 2009/2010 depending on the success of 2009/2010.

3.9 Winter 2011/2012

Site	Grazing plan
Green Ridge	Introduce sheep grazing to a small area for the first time with temporary fencing.
Hollingbury Wild Park LNR	Clear a further area of scrub for grazing and permanent fencing with accessible gates.
Ladies Mile LNR	Double or triple the area first grazed with sheep in 2010/2011 depending on the success of 2010/2011.
Stanmer Park LNR	Introduce sheep grazing to "Marquee Brow" (small area of chalk downland north east of main entrance at Lower Lodges) for the first time with temporary fencing.
Whitehawk Hill LNR	Assess the feasibility of extensively grazing both sides of Manor Hill. To include open access with accessible gates located where appropriate and dog owners encouraged to keep dogs under close control.

- 3.10 Sheep grazing will continue at Benfield Hill LNR (currently managed by the South Downs Joint Committee), the sheep holding field at Stanmer and Dorothy Stringer School where sheep grazed their chalk grassland re-creation site for the first time last winter.
- 3.11 Conservation mowing will continue at the following sites until grazing can be introduced where possible: 19 acres (between Devil's Dyke Road and Waterhall golf course), Bexhill Road open space, Braeside Avenue open space, Chattri (small area adjacent to Chattri grounds), Devil's Dyke Road strip, Happy Valley, Hollingbury hill fort, Hollingbury Park reservoir surrounds, and Tenantry Down.
- 3.12 The following sites are not considered practical to graze and will continue to be mown: Clifftop (narrow strip from Marina to Saltdean producing little grass), Roedean Golf (small area mown for Ladies Tresses), Roedean Way (small area adjacent to car park) and Withdean woods.
- 3.13 The extensive grazing plans for Hollingbury Wild Park (2010/2011) and Whitehawk Hill (2011/2012) will require further feasibility studies. Initial meetings have been held with officers in Property Services and Sustainable Transport to agree the principle of extensive grazing.
- 3.14 Consultation and publicity for each grazing site will include ward councillors, community conservation groups, site users, local residents, recruitment of

“lookerers” to assist with checking sheep, and up to ten access point information boards located at strategic locations and particularly focusing on where the above sites are gateways to the new South Downs National Park.

- 3.15 Implementation of these proposals would ensure sustainable management is reinstated onto the most important chalk grassland sites under council control. The declaration of the new National Park and the proposed creation of a green network as part of the Local Development Framework could create additional opportunities to extend grazing management to other areas. This wider grazing potential will be assessed at a later date.

4. CONSULTATION

- 4.1 Property Services and Sustainable Transport teams have been consulted.

5. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 5.1 Funding for grazing has been identified from existing budgets.
- 5.2 With their support and advice an application has been submitted to Natural England for Higher Level Scheme (HLS) agricultural funding for ten years from 2010 to fund site improvements and facilitate grazing, such as scrub clearance, fences and accessible gates. Natural England has given the application full support and is currently funding full environment plans to accompany the application.

Finance Officer consulted: Derek Mansfield Date: 19/08/09

Legal Implications:

- 5.3 None identified at this stage.

Lawyer consulted: Alison Gatherer Date: 19/08/09

Equalities Implications:

- 5.4 Consultation is underway with existing conservation community groups, as well as developing new relationships with “lookerers”, particularly local dog walkers. All fences will have accessible gates, not stiles. Natural England “access to nature” project funding has recently been secured, in partnership with Sussex Wildlife Trust, to improve access to green spaces in the city by under represented groups and from areas of deprivation.

Sustainability Implications:

- 5.5 Appropriate grazing is the most sustainable method of managing most areas of chalk grassland, as well as providing open access for people to enjoy green spaces. This is an important element of the council commitment to sustainability, reducing our carbon footprint, increasing biodiversity and moving towards Urban Biosphere status.

Crime & Disorder Implications:

- 5.6 Positive management in itself will deter anti social behaviour such as vehicle incursions. The recruitment of “lookers” will develop a community of people who understand and care for the area. Scrambler and quad bikes are particular problems on “39 acres” which experience demonstrates will be deterred by grazing.

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

- 5.7 There is an opportunity for further linking local food production (ie. meat) with local markets (eg. restaurants, butchers, schools).

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

- 5.8 The project has already received national and international press coverage and it is understood the council is amongst the lead local authorities in approaching this area of work.

6. EVALUATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTION(S):

6.1 Mowing is inferior to grazing:

- it can cause severe disruption to grassland invertebrates and ground nesting birds;
- it cannot be used on the steeper slopes (where much of the remaining chalk grassland is found);
- it is uniform in its application and therefore prevents the establishment of swards of varying height, which are favoured by some chalk grassland species; and
- it damages chalk grassland features such as ant hills and some archaeology.

The cost comparisons of continuing to mow our chalk grassland sites vary due to soil type and from year to year due to the weather. In total in 2007 it cost £16,000 to cut, clear and compost. In 2008 it is estimated this would have increased to between £28,000 and £48,000 - depending on the weather - due to increased fuel and composting costs (as a result sites were cut but not cleared or composted).

7. REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 To implement a more sustainable method of managing Cityparks chalk grassland sites.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices

1. Individual site grazing plans for 2009/2010, Appendix 1.

Documents In Members' Rooms

None

Background Documents

1. Downland Initiative Feasibility Study.