

# **Downland Estate Plan**

## **Report by Rottingdean Parish Council**

*'No tender-hearted garden crowns,  
No bosomed woods adorn  
Our blunt, bow-headed, whale-backed Downs,  
But gnarled and writhen thorn -  
Bare slopes where chasing shadows skim,  
And, through the gaps revealed,  
Belt upon belt, the wooded, dim,  
Blue goodness of the Weald.  
Clean of officious fence or hedge,  
Half-wild and wholly tame ...'*

**Rottingdean Parish Council**

**February 2021**

## Introduction

Rottingdean is situated 3 miles to the east of Brighton and is unique as a parish council within a city boundary. There is therefore close co-operation between Brighton and Hove City Council (BHCC) and Rottingdean Parish Council (RPC), as referenced in RPC Standing Orders – Section 5

Rottingdean is also different in other respects;

- Within South Downs National Park (SDNP), Rottingdean is unique in including a substantial area of accessible shoreline.
- The village is smaller than other settled areas in the City and therefore has easy access to parts of the open Downland Estate and SDNP.
- The parish boundary includes virtually every aspect of the Downland Estate described in the project. We have woods, open grassland, wildflowers and historic buildings and ancient sites in the Beacon Hill Nature Reserve and in other parts of Rottingdean. There is an eco-educational centre at the Beacon Hub with access to the South Downs Way and the chalklands in the hinterland.
- Rottingdean is a historic village with strong cultural ties to artistic communities and well-presented buildings of historical importance. This makes Rottingdean a popular destination for tourists.

The impact of the Downland Estate has, therefore, significant importance to Rottingdean and Rottingdean can, conversely, make a significant impact on the Downland Estate in partnership with BHCC.

Rottingdean has a direct interest as part of the Downland Estate is located in the parish and a wider interest as a gateway for tourists and residents to the hinterland around Rottingdean. Rottingdean also has a broader interest in the entirety of the Downs as part of the interconnectivity that binds natural resources; land management; community culture and engagement; heritage, wellbeing and the built environment.

## Generic Themes and Topics Response

RPC would like to see the Downland Estate Plan being within, and part of, an overarching strategy for natural resources, land management, and culture within the context of climate change.

The Whole Estate Plan should include provision for;

The shoreline. Marine zones and in particular the continued abuse of these conservation areas through light touch monitoring

The considerable contribution of the open spaces in the urban estate

Planning policy

A climate policy

A sustainable economic policy for non-residential areas

The Whole Estate Plan should take account of the Rottingdean Neighbourhood Plan. This plan has been driven by what Rottingdean residents have told us is important to them about living here between the sea and the Downs. It has been developed over a period of time and reflects the principles of the Localism Act. It also takes account of the introduction of the National Planning Policy Framework in 2012, and its updates in 2018 and 2019. There is a correspondence between the Estate Plan and the Neighbourhood Plan because it addresses topics such as;

- Shaping the future of Rottingdean
- Influencing new development
- Protecting our green space

The Downland plan should consider the Estate within an economic and environmental framework that should underpin our social fabric that;

- Places a value on social wellbeing of stakeholders over the long-term and not on short term profitability
- Creates employment in a diverse range of sustainable activity
- Support younger persons into employment
- Preserves and enhances the chalklands by reducing and managing arable farmland activity
- Supports tourism without detriment to the Downland.

## **Whole Estate Plan topics that impact upon Rottingdean**

### **Natural Resources**

RPC recognise that the shoreline and cliff edges are important features and should be included in the Downland Plan because of their aesthetic, economic and leisure contribution.

- That the inclusion of the shoreline will bring into focus the effectiveness, or otherwise, of the Marine Management Zone and the impact of industrial activity on water quality and the animals that inhabit the near sea.
- That consideration be given to the reduction of pollution onto the shoreline
- That activity that impacts upon water and soil quality is resisted

### **Land Use and Management:**

A primary focus for RPC is resisting any encroachment upon the open spaces in the Parish and the boundary of the National Park that lies within our boundary.

### Land Usage

RPC supports sustainable enterprise on the Downland. We believe that this can be achieved by;

- Fully restoring the Estate to chalk grassland that will capture carbon and be returned to a species rich habitat
- Adopting practices that minimise soil erosion and damage to archaeological heritage
- Encouraging small scale rural industry associated with sustainable agriculture, horticulture, arboriculture and market garden enterprise
- Protecting the aquifer for drinking water

The enjoyment of a restored species rich habitat that is accessible to the wider public is being prevented by many aspects intensive agriculture;

- Ploughing that erodes the thin topsoil
- Crop sowing, treatment, harvesting and processing that all release CO2
- Using pesticides, herbicides and fertilisers
- Preventing access to the Down and our cultural heritage

It is our assertion that an intensive agricultural model is only superficially viable;

- If a full life cost economic model were applied to intensive agriculture the additional carbon cost, food miles and pollution impact would have to be included and chalk grassland would become a viable economic alternative
- Because the subsidies provided to intensive agriculture are taxes on urban populations that are then returned to them as lower cost food that, again, does not employ a full life cycle cost base and corrupts their buying habits.

There is a considerable area of arable farming in Rottingdean Parish and RPC would therefore support a Plan that reduces the impact of intensive agriculture;

- That the plan includes a consideration of the potential adverse impact of developments in land management that may be in conflict with grassland agriculture such as viticulture and solar farms. Rottingdean would not welcome intensive use of agricultural land where there would be physical and visible detriment when proposed as an alternative to arable farming.
- That the plan considers ways to regulate the use of fertilisers, pesticides and insecticides
- That the plan pays regard to the Government Countryside Stewardship Scheme and the financial benefits of conservation, amenity, access etc.

Economic modelling of proposals for land use and management should take account of funding available for improvements to:

- Hedgerows and boundaries
- Historic buildings restoration
- Woodland support
- Concreting of farmyards
- Livestock Handling Facilities
- Manure Storage
- Yard drainage
- Fencing
- Sprayer Wash-down areas
- Slurry & Silage Store Roofing

Rottingdean Parish has within its boundary a range of assets that make a valuable contribution to the environment. The principle asset is the Beacon Hill Nature Reserve. These assets benefit from a system of Stewardship that integrates RPC, volunteer organisations and the general public with BHCC. RPC would wish to see the system of Stewardship continued and strengthened.

RPC would welcome opportunities in the Downland to provide employment in small scale industry that chimes with the restoration of a diversified agrarian economy. RPC consider that this approach should be widened to include sustainable commercial and craft industry that should form part of a living environment e.g. small scale furniture manufacture, agricultural fencing, small horticultural business, nut farms, honey production, wellbeing, hospitality etc.

- That in the lower dip slopes, in the coombe bottoms, with the deeper, more nutritious soils, adjacent to the accessible urban fringe, could be for local food growing, community involvement and co-operatives
- That economic activity takes account of the other demands for amenity, access, aesthetic enjoyment and fully recognises the true value that they bring

Volunteer organisations provide a vital role in supporting the part of the Downland Estate and other open spaces in Rottingdean. Examples are the Friends of Beacon Hill Nature Reserve and the Beacon Hub Eco Educational Charity both located in Rottingdean.

- That the strategy considers the role of volunteers and other interested parties in land management.
- That the strategy recognises the role of experts who act as monitors of flora, wildlife, bird, butterfly and moth populations.
- That the Plan engenders policies and frameworks for the involvement of volunteers such as the Friends of Beacon Hill, Grab, Surfers against Sewage and other interested parties such as Sussex Wildlife Trust

### Buildings and car parks

RPC strongly support policies for encouraging sustainable tourism, wellbeing, safe and sustainable enjoyment of the outdoors within the Parish and in the wider Downland. Encouragement should be given to enable these activities always provided they are not in conflict with the vista and preservation of the land and heritage.

- That leisure facilities and the car parks within or adjacent to the Downland are provided to facilitate access but within the overall plan for wellbeing, climate, culture and environment and interpretation. A key feature must be accessibility for all;

Electric charge points

Bicycle racks

Wide disability parking

Bus stop facility

Barriers to prevent paths being destroyed

Information points with Q codes to give access to information, routes, and emergency

That the Beacon Hub Eco Educational Centre at Rottingdean and other existing educational facilities be identified and supported to create a network of accessible points to attract people from urban areas. It is the only eco-educational school in the area that has direct access to both the Downs and the shoreline.

- That re-provision of redundant buildings to the above be encouraged

## Woodland

RPC recognise that chalk grassland is very successful in capturing carbon and supporting a species rich environment but it may also be tempting to complement that with woodland to encourage wildlife and a wider range of species. If we dip, however, into Rottingdean's history and the evidence of the sheep walks, Downland shepherds and that rolling pastoral scene we note that it has gone and so we believe that we must maximize the amount of grassland to compensate for this loss.

RPC would support some selective planting, if needed, which could be targeted at the least sensitive (in landscape terms) urban fringe areas that could do with some screening / breaking up of their hard edge. Provided always that;

- The planting was of native species. We would not support, for example; conifers.
- Long views from current vantage points and from roads were not obscured
- An undercroft of native ground planting was provided
- There was access for amenity use

A necessary condition of such planting should be that there is community support that could be sustained long-term. Early years: watering and weeding, cleaning out and readjusting / replacing rabbit guards etc. Later: thinning, to encourage spreading healthy crowns and sturdy trunks (no matchstick-thin density with spindly trees all trying to get up into the light), coppicing, selection and nurturing of standards etc.

## Built Environment

Rottingdean is a mixture of a settled area within which there is a Conservation Area and wider areas within the Parish boundary that include grassland, intensively farmed land and a Nature Reserve. Policy S1 of the Neighbourhood Plan sets out the conditions relating to development within and beyond the Settlement Boundary of the Parish. In particular we would wish to keep Rottingdean within its developed area and stop the incremental creep of any development out over the Downs. RPS supports the PSS7 – Sustainable Development in Rural Areas policy but strongly opposes any attempt to convert agricultural facilities to residential dwellings in a sequential manner that creates small estates in rural areas. We support strict definition and critical application of the definition of redundancy. We would wish the planning authority to;

- Be concerned that conversion to residential often leads to gentrification, urbanisation, modernisation and at some stage expansion;
  - Considers and imposes a holistic approach to additions to the built environment (planning, culture, climate, tourism etc.)
  - Observes the conditions attached to agricultural tied properties and is particularly careful when farms are merged
  - Is mindful of agricultural enterprise stone-skipping into rural areas leaving a trail of residential conversions behind them
  - Considers legal opportunities to add covenants to freeholds and clauses to BHCC tenancies that would support the Downland Plan. In particular such covenants should prevent the creation of agricultural holdings that are then converted to dwellings

- That the plan will pay attention to the draft National Design code and develop a checklist of design principles for new and amended buildings to include such things as;
  - Street character
  - Building type
  - Façade
  - Requirements for wellbeing and environmental impact including light pollution
- That particular attention be paid to the encroachment of the settled environment into open spaces
- That the Plan supports Dark Skies and addresses light pollution in the settled environment

### Litter

Litter, fly tipping and discarded commercial waste, especially from fishing activities, find their way into the Downland and have a negative impact on wildlife in addition to the detrimental aesthetic impact. Of particular concern is the litter introduced via the A27

RPC supports all initiatives to eliminate this scourge including;

- Considering schemes such as Littercam on the A27 where the keepers of litter can be identified and fined
- More camera surveillance of fly tipping spots and vigorous pursuit of offenders
- Consultation with the fishing industry to encourage recycling of net ties and boxes
- Encouragement to retail vendors who supply product in boxes to support return, reuse and repurpose their packaging

### **Climate Change**

RPC would welcome BHCC coming urgently forward with a Climate Plan

- That the Downland Plan is not a stand-alone strategy but is integrated with the wider Climate Plan that addresses
  - carbon storage
  - renewable energy (wind, solar and ground heat sources) By including the shoreline wave power could be included.
  - extreme weather events (storms, floods, heat-waves, drought)
  - disease
  - habitat or wildlife loss
  - disease
- That the Downland Plan encourages volunteers to monitor adjustments in natural and human/land management systems in response to actual or expected climatic stimuli or their events.
- That 'climate change improvement' is a test applied to all activity within the Downland Estate

### **Cultural**

Rottingdean is an historical village and attracts many visitors to the beach and the village. Its position makes it an ideal gateway to the Downland Estate and the east end of the South

Downs National Park. We would wish to see the Downland Estate Plan incorporate proposals to make access as easy as possible, particularly for persons of limited mobility.

We wish to emphasise the role of understanding and enjoyment.

- That the Plan includes using Rottingdean and Beacon Hub as an information centre and car park along with other buildings in the Estate that are not in use but are adjacent to the Estate
- That the Estate provide appropriate signage to support access
- That the Estate provides increasing opportunities for community engagement and use of this big resource
- That the principle of Right to Roam is implemented as much as is practically possible. There should be a presumption to wander anywhere on our public downland. Currently, the perception is of a private out-of-bounds estate, with "private" signs on some of the public land gates and a firm resistance to any public "trespass".
- That the principle is pursued that the Downland Estate is a living organism that will develop over time and evolve to restore and protect its characteristics in a sustainable way but create spaces for the following;
  - spirituality
  - tranquillity
  - heritage
  - views
  - recreation - kite flying, para-gliding, picnics
  - tourism
  - access, like walking, cycling, horse-riding
  - employment

## Summary

Rottingdean is a village of the Downs. We are a gateway for tourists, residents and workers. The opening up of a Downland that is reverting to a historic self-sustaining land will contribute to health and wellbeing, an improved environment and the long term viability of a way of life for those working in the Downland.

The Plan as envisioned does not include the shoreline and the urban open spaces. RPC would like to see that contribution be taken into account.

We would encourage authorities, planners and land managers to abandon a short term return approach and adopt a life cycle approach to Downland economics. In order to mitigate the short term contraction in income we would support appropriate enterprise and tourism that would bring income to the area. The governments shift from 'subsidy to production' to 'payment for stewardship' must assist this trend.

We have placed great emphasis on accessibility. The Downland Estate incorporates a cultural heritage that should not be denied to the general public. We have argued for better and more facilities that will enhance the landscape and the environment but also make us healthier and contribute to our wellbeing.