



2nd stage of public consultation on the future management of Ditchling Beacon Nature Reserve – a report for the Sussex Wildlife Trust

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Summary

This report summarises the 2nd stage of consultation on the future management of common land within the Ditchling Beacon Nature Reserve, a site managed by the Sussex Wildlife Trust (SWT), following the guidance set out in A Common Purpose (Natural England, 2012). The consultation centred upon four options for managing areas of important chalk grassland on site, including the extension of the fence line within an existing southern grazing compartment and the creation of a new grazing compartment in the north of the site.

- The consultation ran from 18th July to 30th September 2022, but was ultimately extended until 14th October 2022 (i.e. 12 weeks in total);
- 56 consultation letters/e-mails were sent to a wide range of statutory and non-statutory consultees, including Ditchling Beacon and Commons (the site owners) and neighbouring properties and landowners;
- 16 posters were erected around the Nature Reserve and Ditchling Village, providing details on consultation events and links to information held on the SWT website;
- An onsite drop-in (including two guided walks), a village hall drop-in in Ditchling, and two online webinars were also run as part of the consultation;
- Following the above activities, written responses were received from 25 individuals/organisations;
- All of the responses were supportive of the SWT's aim to conserve and increase the area of chalk grassland within Ditchling Beacon Nature Reserve;
- There was general consensus amongst respondents on the extension of the existing southern grazing compartment, the use of No Fence technology (where/when suitable), making sure that gates conform to appropriate standards, and the removal of any unnecessary fencing on site;
- Consensus was not however achieved on how to proceed with the fencing of the proposed northern grazing compartment, and SWT will therefore need to decide how best to balance opposing viewpoints to move forward with the project.

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Acknowledgements

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Cover photo © Phil Saunders (Footprint Ecology)

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report summarises the 2nd stage of consultation on the future management of common land within the Ditchling Beacon Nature Reserve, a site managed by the Sussex Wildlife Trust (SWT). SWT are concerned about the condition of the site in terms of nature conservation, and the extent and quality of its important chalk grassland habitat in particular. As with the initial stage of the consultation, SWT is following the guidance set out in A Common Purpose (Natural England, 2012) to ensure a structured and inclusive approach is adopted, and has commissioned Footprint Ecology to support the process.

Summary of the 1st stage of consultation

- 1.2 The 1st stage of consultation ran from Wednesday 14th October to Friday 18th December 2020, and was then extended to Friday 15th January 2021 due to Covid restrictions during the previous November. It gathered information from, and engaged with, landowners, the local community, other site users, local representatives of relevant statutory agencies, and other stakeholders.
- 1.3 The views of stakeholders on what was important to them about the site, and how they felt it should be managed going forwards, were collected through a range of media. These comprised an online questionnaire, a site-based face-to-face event, three webinars, a presentation made available online, and information disseminated across a range of social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, etc). The results of the 1st stage of the consultation were discussed at length in the initial consultation report (Lake & Saunders, 2021) and a number of recommendations were made following analysis of the collated feedback.
- 1.4 The recommendations for future site management comprised:
- Continue targeted scrub management;
 - Carry out ongoing selective tree-felling to ensure the health and safety of visitors to the site;
 - Mow as necessary (and where practical) to reduce the dominance of bulky, ruderal species;
 - Continue with existing livestock grazing to maintain and improve the quality of existing areas of chalk grassland and to help restore those where coarse grasses and scrub have been developing;

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- Carry out further public consultation about extending grazing in carefully targeted areas;
- Promote the use of public transport to access the site;
- Work with East Sussex County Council and the South Downs National Park (SDNP) to improve the Underhill Lane informal car park;
- Review the condition of the Public Rights of Way on the site;
- Review pre-visit interpretation, plus point of entry and within site interpretation with the aim of increasing peoples' understanding and appreciation of the site;
- Work with the National Trust and SDNP Authority to explore a means of indicating the location of the damaged area of the earthworks;
- Take measures to improve the awareness of the importance of removing dog mess from site;
- Consider the request for more benches in conjunction with the SDNP Authority; and,
- SWT staff should take steps to keep in touch with the local community, for example through the Ditchling Beacon Commons and other local community groups.

Options for consideration during the 2nd stage of consultation

1.5 The recommendations continue with existing livestock grazing, and to carry out further public consultation about extending grazing in carefully targeted areas of the site, underpin the 2nd stage of the consultation. SWT have used the information collated in the 1st stage consultation report to develop a range of options as to how grazing at Ditchling Beacon Nature Reserve could be managed in the future to maintain and enhance the site's key biodiversity features whilst also maintaining access. It is important to note that no single option is preferred, and all could potentially be enacted on site alongside one another.

1.6 The options comprise the following:

1. Movement of the existing fence line (located close to the edge of the plateau) down the slope to make it less conspicuous and to allow important areas of species rich grassland on the steep slopes to be grazed (see Map 1);
2. Creation of a grazing enclosure north of the Bostall Road to allow an area of species-rich grassland within the woodland to be grazed (see Map 2). This area will continue to deteriorate unless grazed, and repeated cutting is unsustainable in the long-term. Two fencing/gate options have been identified: the first involves fencing

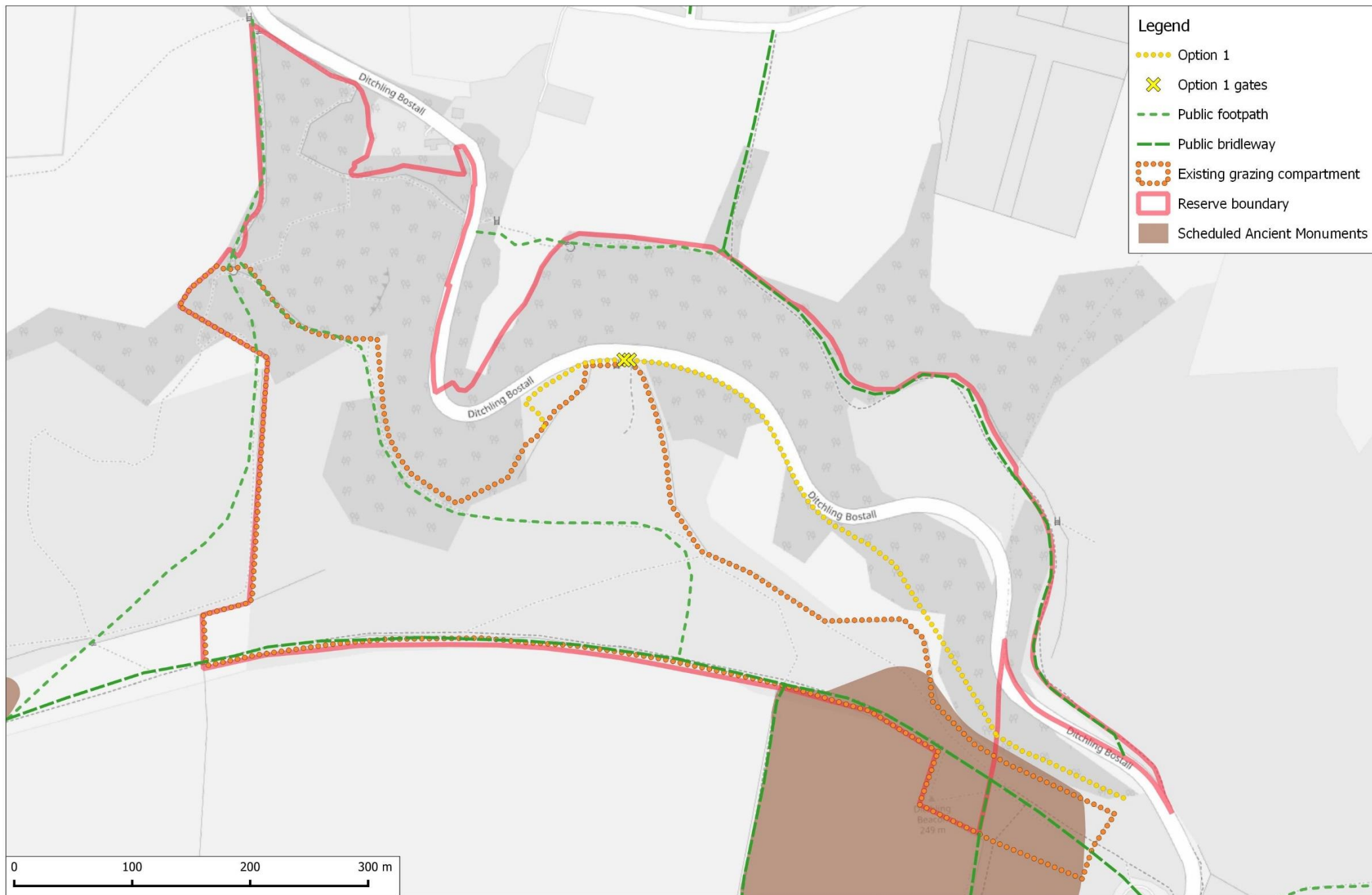
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on the slope above the bridleway, whilst the second would bring the fence line down to the existing boundary fence (with the installation of two appropriate gates to allow access along the bridleway);

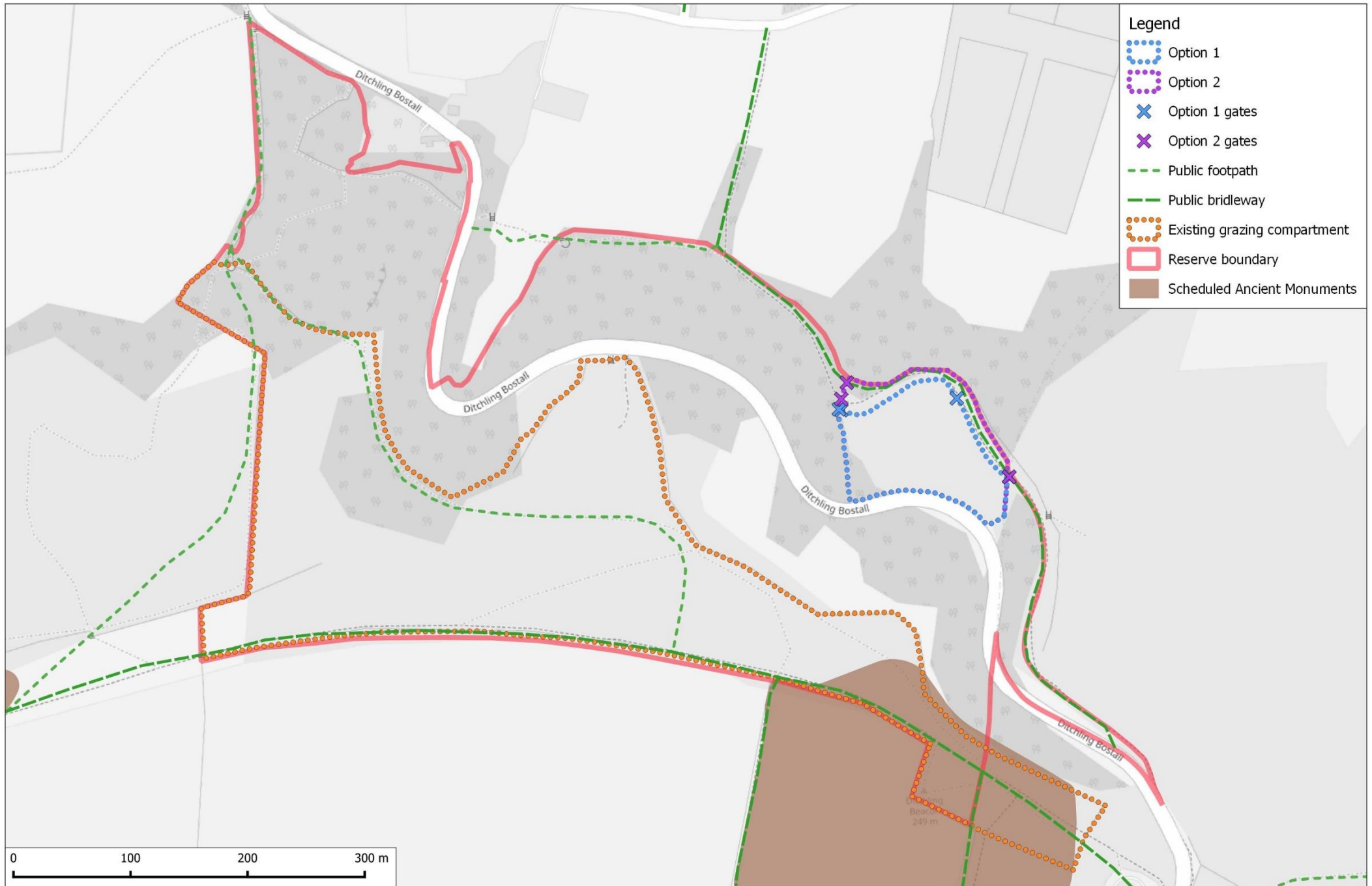
3. Use of “No Fence” GPS controlled virtual fencing to focus sheep grazing, within particular areas of rank grassland on the steeper slopes of the southern grazing compartment, for short periods throughout the year. Note that this does not require consent from the Planning Inspectorate; and,
4. Making sure that gates conform to the appropriate standards and any unnecessary fencing is removed. Some existing fencing may also need replacing. Piped or pumped water would also need to be installed, as there is currently no water supply on site.

1.7 The remainder of this report details how the consultation on these options was undertaken and the responses received over its' course.

Map 1 : Option 1 - the existing fence line located close to the edge of the plateau is moved down the slope



Map 2 : Option2 - a grazing enclosure is created north of the Bostall Road to allow an area of species-rich grassland within the woodland to be grazed (both fencing/gate options shown)



2. The consultation process

- 2.1 The 2nd stage of consultation initially ran from 18th July to 30th September 2022, but was ultimately extended until 14th October 2022 (i.e. 12 weeks in total) to allow as broad a range of stakeholders as possible to respond. It received a similar level of publicity and advertising as the 1st stage of consultation, with information (including a background paper) provided electronically on the SWT website¹ and social media platforms. 16 posters were also erected within the Nature Reserve and at strategic points across Ditchling village, incorporating a QR code which directed readers to the SWT website (see Appendix).
- 2.2 A similar range of stakeholders to those contacted in the 1st stage of consultation were identified. Contact was made via a letter or e-mail drop to the Commoners Association and 10 neighbouring properties/site managers in Ditchling, with letters or emails also sent to 45 local and national organisations. The letters/emails included a link to the relevant pages of the SWT website (see above), summarising the responses and recommendations from the 1st stage of consultation, and explaining the latest proposals illustrated with maps.
- 2.3 A site drop-in was held by SWT, assisted by Footprint Ecology and in partnership with the SDNP Authority, in the Ditchling Beacon car park between 9am and 2pm on 28th July 2022. The event had been widely advertised within all the previously identified media and contact letters/e-mails, including on all posters. In addition to providing verbal and written information about the proposed options to all of those engaging with the drop-in team in the car park, two guided walks were held over the course of the day, during which the location and extent of the proposed grazing options on site were shown and described to those attending.
- 2.4 Following receipt of their consultation letter, a request for a site visit was also made by a representative of the Kennel Club who was unable to make the date of the advertised on-site event. This was facilitated by the SWT Site Manager on 28th September 2022.
- 2.5 A drop-in day was also held in Ditchling Village Hall between 12 noon and 8pm on 31st August 2022. The event incorporated poster boards providing

¹ <https://sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk/Future-management-of-Ditching-Beacon>

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detailed information on the fencing options and the reasoning behind the proposed changes in site management, as well as information on the outputs of the 1st stage of consultation. Take-home information, in the form of handouts and leaflets, was also provided. The event had again been widely advertised across all of the previously identified media and was staffed by representatives from SWT and Footprint Ecology.

- 2.6 Further to the two face-to-face events, two online webinars were hosted by Footprint Ecology; the first between 3pm and 4pm on 6th September 2022, and the second between 7pm and 8pm on 8th September 2022. The webinars had again been widely advertised on all of the previously identified media, including posters. They incorporated a short presentation by Footprint Ecology on the outputs of the 1st stage of consultation and detailing the four proposed options. A representative from SWT was also present at both webinars in order to answer any questions from attendees. The webinars were also recorded, with one of the recordings subsequently uploaded to the SWT website for wider appraisal.

3. Consultation responses

3.1 Table 1 summarises the number of consultation events/activities undertaken, and the number of written responses received for each. More information is provided for each in the remainder of this section.

Table 1: Summary of consultation events/activities and responses received

Activity / event	Date	No. deployed / count	No. attendees	Responses received
Site drop-in	28/07/22	1	7	3
Guided walk	28/07/22	2	7	N/A
Village hall drop-in	31/08/22	1	22	3
Webinar	06 & 08/09/22	2	6	N/A
Posters	First erected 14-27/07/22	16	N/A	N/A
Letters / e-mails	14-27/07/22, with reminder sent 20/09/22, & extension letter sent 30/09/22	56	N/A	19

Site drop-in

3.2 Seven individuals engaged with the drop-in team in the Ditchling Beacon car park over the course of the event, with another seven people attending the guided walks. Of the latter group, six were residents of Ditchling Village, with the seventh a regional representative of the British Horse Society.

3.3 Three of the attendees showed interest in the proposals and indicated that they would look at the additional consultation information available online subsequent to the event. Another three attendees provided brief written responses on the day, all indicating support for the continued management and grazing of the site (with one individual specifically mentioning novel fencing) and also noting the Nature Reserve’s ecological value.

Village hall drop-in

3.4 22 individuals attended the event overall, including one child. The majority of those engaged with were local, and most were very supportive of the proposals (although several wanted to leave comments online subsequently, rather than in person). One individual initially suggested that the site should

be afforested but changed their mind (and were in support of the proposals) once the value of the chalk grassland on site had been explained. Two individuals were either unsure about which of the fencing options for the proposed northern grazing compartment was best or had no opinion either way.

- 3.5 Three written responses were provided on the day of the event. One of these was from a local horse rider who was strongly against any proposal to install fencing or gates across the bridleway alongside the proposed northern grazing compartment due to safety concerns. Conversely, another response indicated support for fencing/installing gates across the bridleway due to concerns about its use by cyclists, following improvements made to the bridleway surface. The third response was strongly supportive of conserving the chalk grassland on site, and considered that the proposed options were sensible, but was happy to follow “expert guidance” with respect to the details.

Webinars

- 3.6 Eight individuals in total registered via e-mail to attend the two webinars, although only six people ultimately attended. A recording of the webinar was subsequently made directly available via e-mail to the two people unable to attend, however. The attendees included representatives from the RSPB and Brighton and Hove Archaeological Society, and the East Sussex County Council archaeologist. It should be noted that the second webinar was scheduled to take place immediately after news of the death of Queen Elizabeth II was released, and attendees were therefore asked at the onset whether they were happy to continue with the webinar in light of this event.
- 3.7 Those attendees who commented or asked questions during the webinars were all supportive of the proposals, although no particular preference was identified for fencing/gating the proposed northern grazing compartment. Most of the comments/questions related to concern for the site’s archaeological features, with Steve Tillman (SWT Site Manager) explaining that he wished to avoid impacting any such features where possible. He did however indicate that more invasive digging techniques may be needed at the bottom of the northern scarp slope in order to install water pipes for livestock. The extension of grazing to reduce scrub on site was identified as a positive move for archaeology, and questions were also raised about the current status of the (off site) dew pond.

- 3.8 Additional questions were asked about current stocking densities and the best way to deal with potential problems arising from dog and livestock interactions on site. Steve Tillman described relevant information currently available on the SWT website concerning responsible dog ownership, the issues posed by “sign blindness” on site, and the use of docile breeds for grazing on SWT sites. Suggestions were also made about disseminating information about good dog walking practice on local radio.

Comments by e-mail and letter

- 3.9 A total of 19 consultation responses were received by letter and/or e-mail, of which 12 originated from organisations and 7 from individuals (including a local Member of Parliament). These responses are summarised in Table 2 and Table 3.

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Table 2: Responses to the 2nd stage of consultation on the future management of Ditchling Beacon from organisations (arranged alphabetically)

Organisation	Points made	Comment
British Horse Society	<p>The British Horse Society are keen to assert and protect equestrian rights and, where possible, to increase or make legally enshrined access safer. They highlight that the majority of footpaths Ditchling 56 and 60 are on the common and, as such, it is lawful to ride on them and equestrian access should not be prevented. They are willing to work with SWT or their partners to ensure the best outcome for equestrians from the project and to prevent any loss of amenity or safety for the same. They state that bridleway Westmeston 33 (alongside the proposed northern grazing compartment) should be excluded from the land to be enclosed. They explain that the bridleway is in a deep culvert and has only recently been repaired, having been in a very poor state for some time due to significant erosion. They suggest that it would be very dangerous for horse riders to have to manage gates around sheltering livestock if the bridleway was fenced/gated, with the presence of livestock also potentially causing damage to the bridleway surface. They instead indicate a preference for fencing running parallel to the bridleway, along the top of the adjacent steep bank so as not to fence the bridleway in. They also state that the land forming the proposed northern grazing compartment is s193, meaning horse riders have a right to air and exercise over it and, whilst it is extremely unlikely that any equestrian would wish to exercise their right to do so given the steep topography, it should nevertheless be available via gates accessible to those on horseback. With respect to the proposed extension of the existing southern grazing compartment, they note this would move the fence up against the road. They would therefore wish to see a bridle gate installed at either end of this area to enable equestrians to ride off the road, but parallel to it, benefitting both equestrians and local traffic. They indicate that the gates should be BS5709/2018 compliant and that the Society would be willing to work with the SWT, or other relevant body, to ensure that the gates and their siting are safe for equestrian use.</p>	
Buglife	<p>Buglife understand the need to manage chalk grassland for the benefit of invertebrates, as well as other wildlife. The respondent has known Ditchling Beacon for many years and understands the current difficulties in managing the site to its</p>	

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Organisation	Points made	Comment
	<p>maximum potential for wildlife. They recognise that having the ability to graze more of Ditchling Beacon Nature Reserve is important to maintain and improve the chalk grassland on site and are fully supportive of the proposal to extend the current fence line towards the Bostall Road to allow more of the steep chalk grassland slope to be grazed. They are pleased to see that cattle grazing would be limited in number in the summer but suggest that this should be closely monitored to ensure a continuity of pollen and nectar resources are available during the summer months and good grassland structure is maintained. They suggest that ideally cattle would not graze over the whole compartment every summer, and this may therefore require temporary fencing or the use of 'no fence' collars, so that some areas remain ungrazed. Alternatively, they suggest that cattle could graze in early autumn until the site gets too wet and the risk of poaching becomes an issue. They are pleased to see that sheep would only graze during the winter and they again fully support the use of No Fence as a means to target sheep grazing within areas of rank grassland in the southern compartment for short periods. They also support the creation of a grazing enclosure to the North of the Bostall Road to allow that area of species rich grassland to be grazed. They suggest that the whole compartment should be fenced (i.e. across the adjacent bridleway) to maximise the benefit to wildlife, but appreciate there may be other issues at play in the compartment. They are also supportive of the need for some scrub removal on site to prevent encroachment onto species rich grassland but recommend the retention of a scattering of scrub over the site to benefit invertebrate populations. They suggest that the mowing of ruderal species following tree removal is an integral part of ensuring grassland can recover and it is important that any arisings are removed from the site.</p>	
Ditchling Beacon and Commons	<p>The Trustees are broadly in agreement with the need for additional management of the chalk grassland, with improvements to grazing with both cattle and sheep playing a part. They specify that clematis and bramble encroachment in the large upper chalk pit requires urgent removal, as it is one of the richest chalk grassland areas on site and is currently suffering extensive encroachment on both the lower slope and basal area. With respect to options for fencing the proposed northern</p>	<p>Whilst outside the scope of the 2nd stage of consultation, SWT are aware of the aspiration of Ditchling Beacon and Commons to improve the status of the Underhill Lane car park and SWT will continue to work</p>

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Organisation	Points made	Comment
	<p>grazing compartment, they would prefer the installation of a single fence line around the perimeter, with gates installed along the bridleway, as it would be more economical and, importantly, less intrusive in landscape terms. They do however recognise that such gates could pose a hindrance to equestrians. They highlight the need for a water supply to service the compartment and consider that it must be addressed if cattle are to be introduced. They also provided information on their ongoing discussions with East Sussex County Council concerning upgrades to, and potential funding sources for, the Underhill Lane car park at the bottom of the Beacon.</p>	<p>in partnership with them to explore potential options in the future.</p>
<p>The Ditchling Society</p>	<p>The respondent complimented the Sussex Wildlife Trust on the scope and depth of its consultation on the future of the Ditchling Beacon Nature Reserve. They indicated that they contributed to the first consultation and, as part of the second consultation, representatives attended the site visit on the Beacon and the 'drop in' presentation at Ditchling Village Hall, and viewed the webinar recorded presentation. As stated in its earlier submission, the Society does not feel qualified to comment on the detailed physical management of the site and confined its comments to issues of amenity. They have no comment on three of the four options but recognise that creating a fenced grazing enclosure to the north of the Bostall Road, and the two sub-options contained within it, are contentious. The Society indicate that they have no ability to judge the conservation and amenity trade-offs between a gated and an ungated grazed area. They however ask that ways of mitigating the safety issues associated with mingling fast moving, descending, bikes with other potentially vulnerable users on the recently resurfaced bridleway be considered when judging the merits of gated non-gated access. Reference to the chicanes installed on another nearby bridleway was also made, as well as the suggestion of providing mitigation in the form of separate tracks on site for different activities.</p>	
<p>East Sussex County Council - County Archaeologist</p>	<p>Respondent indicated that as a planning application will ultimately be submitted, it is important that the correct supporting documentation regarding heritage is included, in line with National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 194. This means that in determining applications, local planning authorities should require an</p>	<p>We have confirmed with the Local Planning Authority that the proposed options do not require Planning Consent. We have</p>

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Organisation	Points made	Comment
	<p>applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance. As a minimum the relevant historic environment record should have been consulted and the heritage assets assessed using appropriate expertise where necessary. Where a site on which development is proposed includes, or has the potential to include, heritage assets with archaeological interest, local planning authorities should require developers to submit an appropriate desk-based assessment and, where necessary, a field evaluation. The respondent indicated that the area subject to the proposals lies partially within an Archaeological Notification Area, associated with extensive evidence for prehistoric activity, including the Scheduled Monument of Ditchling Beacon Hill Fort. Extensive evidence of field systems and a number of burial mounds are also present, including a small Scheduled barrow cemetery just west of the site boundary which includes at least one Anglo-Saxon internment. World War 2 activity is also recorded in the vicinity. In the light of the potential archaeological interest of the site, it is the respondent's opinion that it is important to follow the requirements set out within NPPF and ask the SWT to undertake a desk-based heritage impact assessment to clarify the archaeological significance of the site. The assessment should then be submitted with the planning application so that archaeological issues can be fully considered when the planning decision is made. The respondent would expect the report to comply with The Chartered Institute for Archaeologists standards and guidance and the current Sussex Archaeological Standards. They also indicate that they would be happy to initially provide free Historic Environment Records (HER) to enable the SWT to develop options for moving stock fencing, establishing routes for below ground water pipes, and any other proposals that may have an adverse effect on heritage assets.</p>	<p>subsequently consulted with the County Archaeologist concerning precautionary steps with respect to heritage on site. They have indicated that impacts from fence posts and any water pipe can be mitigated via the avoidance of areas with a high risk of encountering significant archaeological evidence or by maintaining an archaeological watching brief where appropriate. Fence posts can probably be excluded from requiring archaeological monitoring unless in proximity to/within the Archaeological Notification Area, but installation of any water pipe (assuming it will need to be buried in an open cut trench) could require archaeological monitoring, and use of a mole plough should be avoided.</p>
<p>East Sussex County Council – Rights of Way Team</p>	<p>Would prefer that the northern grazing compartment excludes the adjacent bridleway (Option 1). Stressed that important and costly improvement works had been carried out on the bridleway following responses collated during the 1st stage of consultation, and that the inclusion of the unsealed surface, and associated</p>	

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Organisation	Points made	Comment
	<p>drainage features, within the grazing compartment could easily lead to damage from livestock. The presence of livestock on a Public Right of Way (PRoW) was also identified as potentially comprising an issue for less confident site users. With respect to gates, they also highlighted their policy of minimising structures across PRoW, identifying problems associated with gate maintenance and the health and safety of site users, as well as the need for Council authorisation for any changes made.</p>	
The Kennel Club	<p>Stated the organisation's aim to conserve the unique amenity of the open landscapes of common land whilst also allowing continued access for dog walkers, and particularly dogs off lead, away from commercial livestock. They recognise the value of conservation grazing and are not intrinsically opposed to it in principle. They however highlight the importance of keeping dog walkers informed about the presence/absence and location of livestock on site, and the ideal use of livestock socialised to people and dogs, alongside the continued availability of rotationally non-grazed, off-lead, compartments. There is a recognition that the topography of the site however makes the latter difficult. Points were also raised concerning the quality and content of current signage on site, including the absence of information on the risks posed to livestock by dog waste. Concern was also raised about the speed of cyclists on the recently reprofiled bridleway north of the Bostall Road. The existence of grazing within the area south of the Bostall Road, combined with the topography and existing fence line, mean that they have no objection to extending the fence line down the scarp slope. They would also support the installation of fencing between the bridleway and the proposed northern grazing compartment so that dogs can be walked along the bridleway without coming into direct contact with grazing animals. Their support is however subject to every grazing compartment entrance point supporting regularly updated signage on livestock type and presence, signage on site providing safety advice for dog walkers around cattle, and clear information on the presence of livestock-free alternative routes (where available).</p>	<p>The representative's concerns regarding the speed of cyclists on the bridleway has been passed on to the Highways Agency by SWT.</p>

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Organisation	Points made	Comment
Mid Sussex Area Bridleways Group ²	<p>Many of their members live and ride in the immediate area and the Committee all agreed that they had no objection to the proposed northern grazing compartment being fenced in order to enable it to be grazed. They are however totally against proposals to stretch any fences or gates across Bridleway Westmeston 33/Ditchling 59. They also indicate that the bridleway is frequently damaged by run-off from the road and car park above and therefore ask that any fencing installed alongside it allows the width of the path to be substantially wider than the legal minimum of 3.5 metres.</p>	
Natural England	<p>Could not comment on whether the bridleway should be fenced or not. Carried out a site visit in October 2022 to evaluate the SSSI features and to inform their response. During the visit it was clear that whilst grazed areas were improving, the SSSI units/areas which were currently outside the grazing enclosure should be considered to be in Unfavourable Declining condition (although there was recognition that the visit was undertaken at an unfavourable time of year). It was however recognised that if grazing is not extended to these areas in the near future then, following further assessment at a suitable time of year, the whole unit would be classified as declining and in an unfavourable condition. Indicated that the area to the north of the Bostall Road is becoming dominated by rank grasses and other non-specialist species, and areas of regenerating scrub urgently require grazing. Suggested that lack of grazing is resulting in the notified feature of the SSSI being lost in this area and that the fencing proposal would help to restore the chalk grassland. Also indicated that the area south of the Bostall Road, adjacent to the current fenced area, is also suffering due to lack of grazing, although it supports fewer invasive species. The presence of some chalk grassland species within the sward, which would strongly benefit from a grazing regime to reduce grass dominance, were however identified. Continued grazing to maintain an open sward and minimise the spread of invasive Cotoneaster was also recommended. Also</p>	

² Note that the individual respondent also completed and submitted the online questionnaire relating to the 1st stage of the consultation during the 2nd consultation period (responses not included in this report).

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Organisation	Points made	Comment
	<p>suggested that cutting and the removal of arisings could be considered in the short-term, but it would be less sustainable than grazing in the long term and would not create the important niches needed for nature recovery.</p>	
<p>Open Spaces Society</p>	<p>Appreciate that some horse-riders might prefer the Common to be fenced off to avoid having to navigate gates, but the view of the Society is that once the area has been fenced, that part of the land will never again form part of the Common in practice. Would likely therefore oppose an application to install fencing parallel to the bridleway in the proposed northern grazing compartment and hope that a fenceless option might prove possible in due course.</p>	
<p>South Downs National Park Authority</p>	<p>The South Downs National Park Authority supports the 13 management recommendations proposed following the phase one consultation although they highlight that although in support of recommendation 12 (to consider requests for more benches), these would need to be carefully designed and located to have minimal impact on the open landscape. Planning permission may be required for new benches and further advice should be sought from Lewes District Council planning department. With respect to the current proposals, the Authority fully supports moving the existing fence line down the scarp slope, which would both increase the grazing compartment (with its associated ecological benefits) and minimise the landscape impact. They also support the proposal to create an additional permanent grazing compartment in the north of the site, with the increased opportunity to graze that area helping to maintain an open landscape that is easier to access. They also recognise that without grazing the development of scrub and woodland would impede public access to that part of the Common. The Authority would prefer fencing across the adjacent bridleway as, although this would require the addition of two new bridleway gates, it would reduce the total amount of fencing required and avoid the creation of a fenced in bridleway corridor. They indicate that Rights of Way that are fenced out of grazing compartments often require additional vegetation control to avoid them becoming overgrown, and that the additional bridleway gates on the Right of Way would require Highway Authority consent for new structures in the highway. They are also fully supportive of the use of “No Fence” GPS controlled virtual fencing, as this can be very effective at focusing</p>	

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Organisation	Points made	Comment
	/ targeting grazing (the Authority have successfully used this technology at Seven Sisters Country Park). They also fully support Proposal 4 but would prefer to see the use of untreated oak gates and posts on landscape and environmental grounds.	
Southern Hang-gliding Club	Indicated that hang gliders and paragliders often launch from a specific point just below the fence at the top of the bowl at Ditchling Beacon and was unclear whether the potential movement of the fence along the edge of the hill would affect that area (asked for clarification). Also indicated that the fence isn't currently in a great place for their activities, and any changes could make it worse or better.	Was informed that the proposed fencing options would not impact the specific location indicated in their response and were directed to SWT for more information about use of the site.
West Weald Fungus Recording Group	Indicated that the Group previously had members who were involved with areas all along the South Downs in Sussex, but that they now restrict themselves to much of Surrey and West Sussex and do not extend their activities as far east as Ditchling Beacon. Indicated that Sussex Fungus Group operates in the area and could advise on its requirements.	Sussex Fungus Group were also invited to consult on the proposals, but no response was received from them.

Table 3: Responses to the 2nd stage of consultation on the future management of Ditchling Beacon from individuals (private individuals have been numbered for data protection purposes).

Individual	Points made	Comment
Maria Caulfield MP	Very supportive of the plans but suggested that many of the residents of Ditchling were unaware of them (although thought that they would nevertheless be broadly supportive).	Due to the large number of posters erected within the village, and the other online/in person events held as part of the consultation process, it is considered unlikely that village residents are unaware of the proposals.
1	Individual lives in Brighton and has known and visited the site all their life (>50 years) and cares very much about the conservation of its landscape, habitats, and wildlife, particularly that of the chalk grassland. Has volunteered on site in the past	

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Individual	Points made	Comment
	<p>and fully supports the aim of conserving as much as possible of the remaining chalk grassland, including scrub and tree removal and the extension of grazing. Has been concerned about the deteriorating condition of the currently ungrazed areas for years. Is fully supportive of all four proposals under consideration and supports fencing/gating across the bridleway in the proposed northern grazing compartment, as the compartment will then take in the full extent of the grassland up to the Public Right of Way (PRoW) and avoid a sense of separation between the PRoW and the grassland. Also highlights that fence lines can be a focus for scrub development, if not managed.</p>	
2	<p>An equestrian who was alerted to the consultation by the British Horse Society. Rides up to the Beacon a couple of times a week via several routes, but their nearest (and favourite) is BW33. Is absolutely delighted with the work that's been done to level and widen the bridleway (it is now a joy to ride), and more so because of the lack of gates. Was concerned by the proposals to potentially gate across the bridleway, as gates have significant accident potential and are a pain to negotiate (particularly on a slope). Highlighted that the actions involved in opening a gate when mounted can lead to a fall and explained that they had suffered two bad falls (and injury to their horse) over the last decade when undertaking such an action. Also raised the issues of gate maintenance and remounting after opening/closing a gate. Would therefore prefer a fence set back from the bridleway, or a virtual fence, with no gates alongside the proposed northern grazing compartment. If the option is taken to fence across the bridleway though, they requested that the gates comprise the lighter metal type, with no spring, and that they open both ways.</p>	
3	<p>A local equestrian who was grateful for the resurfacing of the bridleway and the access that it provided. Explained that gates were an issue for them (especially those requiring dismount and/or not subject to maintenance) and that there seemed to be a preponderance of them in local bridleways, often in situations without livestock. Stated that problems caused by the installation of gates would be compounded by the steepness of the terrain. If gates were to be used a preference for the double hinged variety with easy handles was made, or the use</p>	

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Individual	Points made	Comment
	of low fire track gates to stop cyclists speeding or vehicles from accessing the bridleway.	
4	An equestrian who indicated that the resurfacing works carried out to the bridleway had made access to the Downs much safer away from the road (explaining the dangers posed by roadside riding). They were however against any proposal to install gates across the bridleway, as such gating would make the bridleway less accessible and would mirror the presence of gates across the other 4 local bridleways providing access to the Downs. They also raised concerns about the maintenance of any gates post-installation, and the risk of them causing injury to horses.	
5 ³	A local person who was grateful for the webinar presentation and supportive of the proposals and management activities in order to maintain the beautiful setting and grasslands for walking. Confident that she can trust the SWT to maintain the site for everyone to enjoy.	
6	In support of the proposals to expand the areas of chalk grassland on site and commended the SWT for working to protect that habitat. Also encouraged the SWT to install more signage warning visitors of the dangers to both biodiversity and animal/human health resulting from the failure to pick up after their dog.	

³ Individual also attended one of the webinars.

4. Summary

- 4.1 All of the responses received are supportive of the SWT's aim to conserve and increase the area of chalk grassland within Ditchling Beacon Nature Reserve. Furthermore, Natural England have identified the unsatisfactory nature of the chalk grassland within the areas being consulted upon, and the likelihood that the value of the site will be downgraded if these areas remain ungrazed into the future.
- 4.2 There is general consensus amongst respondents on the extension of the existing southern grazing compartment, the use of No Fence technology (where/when suitable), making sure that gates conform to appropriate standards, and the removal of any unnecessary fencing on site. There is also recognition that the extension of the southern compartment will not only benefit the site's biodiversity, but also move the existing fence line away from the Scheduled Ancient Monument and improve the landscape aspect.
- 4.3 Based upon the responses received it would therefore appear that the extension of the southern grazing compartment has broad approval, subject to certain caveats concerning maintenance of access. It should be noted however that there is currently a 3-4 metre discrepancy in the exact location of the proposed fence line extension on the southern scarp slope. The exact positioning of the fence line on the slope will therefore be confirmed by SWT in due course.
- 4.4 Consensus was not however achieved on how to proceed with the fencing of the proposed northern grazing compartment. There are clearly a range of views concerning the relative merits of fencing/gating across the bridleway or alongside it, and SWT will therefore need to decide how best to balance these opposing viewpoints moving forward with the project.

References

Lake, S., & Saunders, P. (2021). *Public consultation on the future management of Ditchling*

Beacon Nature Reserve (Unpublished Report for Sussex Wildlife Trust No. 607).

Footprint Ecology / Sussex Wildlife Trust.

Natural England. (2012). *A Common Purpose-A guide to community engagement for those*

contemplating management on common land-Revised edition. Natural England.

Appendix: Example poster and poster locations

Welcome to....

Ditchling Beacon



Sussex

Wildlife Trust

The future of Ditchling Beacon

We are undertaking Phase Two of the consultation on the future management of Ditchling Beacon.

A face-to-face meet and greet is planned at the top car park* 9am-2pm on 28th July 2022, with short, guided, walks at 10:30am & 1pm.

*Free parking for the events courtesy of the National Trust.

A drop-in is planned at Ditchling Village Hall 12pm-8pm on 31st August 2022.

Alternatively, join in a webinar with the facility to post questions on 6th September at 3pm or 8th September at 7pm. Register to attend by emailing: commons@footprint-ecology.co.uk

To get involved please scan the QR code or visit: sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk/visit/ditchling-beacon to view the proposals we are consulting on.

For paper or electronic copies of the report or background paper, you can also contact: Fenella Lewin, Footprint Ecology, Forest Office, Cold Harbour, Wareham, BH20 7PA, e-mail: commons@footprint-ecology.co.uk

We are keen to hear from everyone who visits and values this site. Thank you.



2nd stage of public consultation on the future management of Ditchling Beacon Nature Reserve

Site	What3Words location ⁴ / location in village	Date of posting
Ditchling Beacon Nature Reserve	<i>///causes.coping.daytime</i>	14/07/2022
Ditchling Beacon Nature Reserve	<i>///exile.brew.cardinal</i>	14/07/2022
Ditchling Beacon Nature Reserve	<i>///insisting.hunt.shaky</i>	14/07/2022
Ditchling Beacon Nature Reserve	<i>///minus.circular.plums</i>	14/07/2022
Ditchling Beacon Nature Reserve	<i>///climate.diplomas.accent</i>	14/07/2022
Ditchling Beacon Nature Reserve	<i>///built.toys.comedians</i>	14/07/2022
Ditchling Beacon Nature Reserve	<i>///bandstand.pose.overused</i>	14/07/2022
Ditchling Beacon Nature Reserve	<i>///converged.spaceship.airship</i>	14/07/2022
Ditchling Beacon Nature Reserve	<i>///caveman.simulations.rescuer</i>	14/07/2022
Ditchling Beacon Nature Reserve	<i>///sadly.barks.peach</i>	14/07/2022
Ditchling Village	Ditchling Village Hall	18/07/2022
Ditchling Village	White Horse Pub	18/07/2022
Ditchling Village	The Bull Pub	18/07/2022
Ditchling Village	Chatt Estate Agents	18/07/2022
Ditchling Village	Ditchling Society board in Church Lane	22/07/2022
Ditchling Village	Post Office	22/07/2022

⁴ <https://what3words.com/>