

# PEBSHAM COUNTRYSIDE PARK PROJECT DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

January 2007



Part funded by the EU INTERREG Fund



## The Vision

*“To create and manage a high quality sustainable, attractive, accessible and multi-functional countryside area to serve the recreational and economic needs of residents and visitors”.*



# **Pebsham Countryside Park Project**

## **Development Strategy**

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## Summary

Pebsham Countryside Park is a part of the regeneration proposals for Bexhill and Hastings. With the help of the European Union INTERREG IIIa Fund, East Sussex County Council, Rother District Council and Hastings Borough Council, in partnership with the local community, has produced this strategy setting out the aspirations for this new major open space.

A superb opportunity now exists for the community to realise its aspirations to secure the green gap between Bexhill and Hastings as a major countryside open space. The closure of the Pebsham Landfill Site and new development of houses and businesses to the North East of Bexhill generates the opportunity for 295 hectares of activity park. This can be complemented by a unique 86 hectare coastal park to its south, a wetland wildlife area to the north of some 230 hectares and an environmental educational centre of 52Ha. New and improved public access routes can enable the whole community to gain safe and controlled access to it all. The scale and attractiveness of the area, associated with the existing attractions of Bexhill and Hastings, generate new commercial opportunities for local landowners and businesses to enhance the local economy. The area can also assume its rightful place as one of the “pearls” of green space strung along the coast of East Sussex.

The Local Authority’s business plan based upon this strategy is a “sister” document to the strategy. It sets out the costs of the project, funding, programme and management organisation. The Local Authorities will then seek ways to implement the project over the next 10 years and arrange for its on going management arrangements.

The first stages will be to start to improve opportunities for public access and informal recreation. It is clear that the new features which will attract significant numbers of additional visitors cannot be developed until the Bexhill/Hastings Link Road is open. If the Link Road is not constructed the park cannot be created in the form envisaged by the community and described here. The completion of the landfill site will be an important milestone in park development and an early release of areas for public access will be welcomed. However, it is recognised that waste activities will be a feature of the park long into the future and opportunities will be taken to embrace aspects of the waste story and resolve conflict between waste activities and recreation.



## “Core” Values

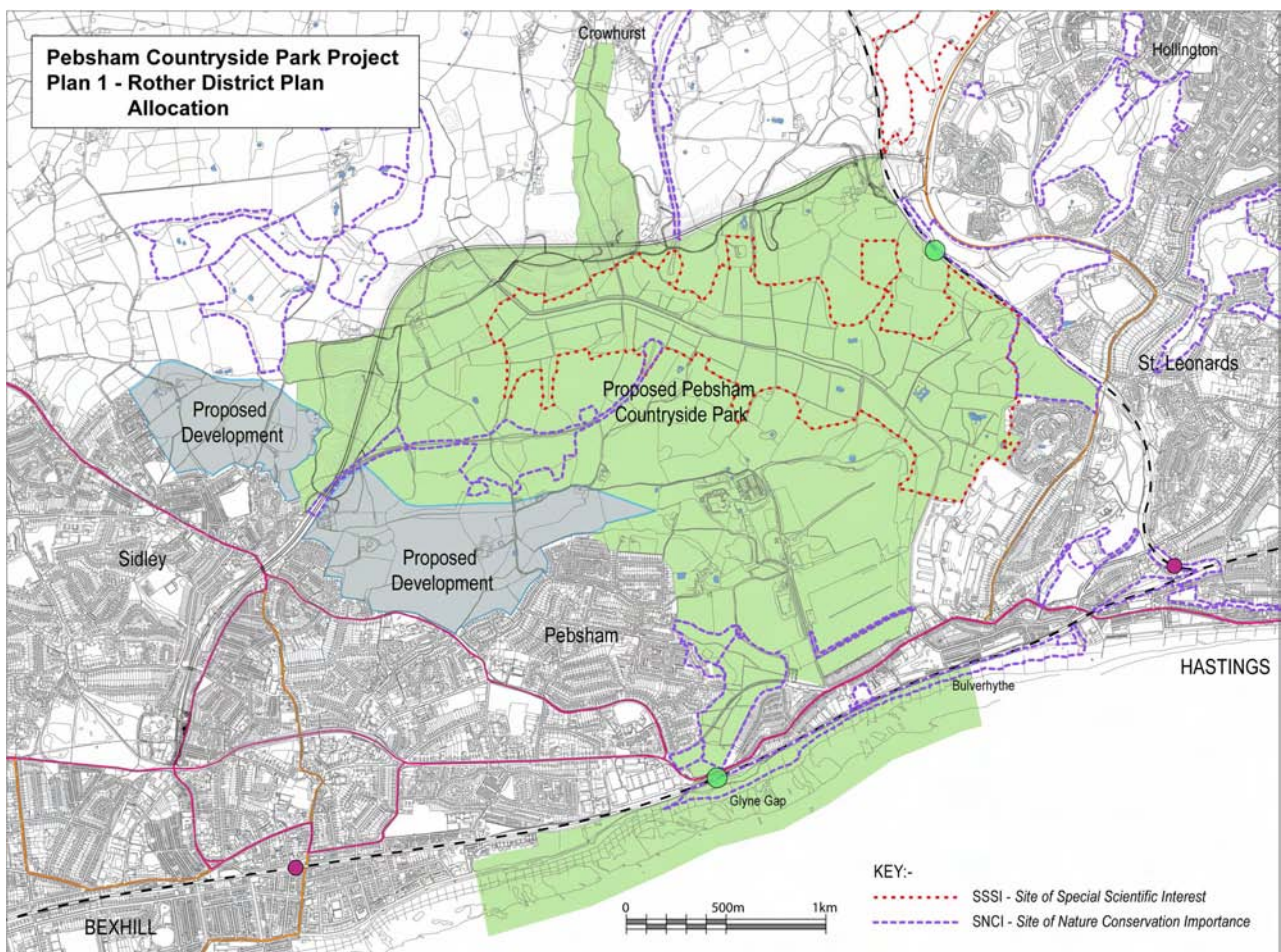
“Core” values for the Development and Management of Pebsham Countryside Park.

- High quality
- Accessibility for all abilities
- Sustainable, in the sense that:
  - Development will be suited to the character of the place.
  - Development will follow natural principles, use local and renewable materials and be carbon an example of low carbon dioxide emissions.
  - Development should become financially self supporting
- Support the local economy – to be a catalyst for investment and partnerships.
- Conserve and enhance the “green gap” between the two towns but strengthen the physical link between them.
- Conserve, enhance and celebrate the biodiversity and historic environment of the area, both land and sea.
- Generate a creative synergy between the arts and the environment.
- Add value to what is there – improve the aesthetic resource of the place.
- Have a clear identity and improve the image of Bexhill and Hastings.
- Be responsive to the needs of the Community.

## 1.0 Background

1.1 In 1993 The North Bexhill Strategic Framework (supplementary Planning Guidance) advocated the creation of 90 hectares of Countryside Park centred around the Landfill site at Pebsham. It also proposed a scheme of countryside management in the countryside to the north of Bexhill.

1.2 The Consultation Draft for Rother District Local Plan identified an area of approximately 600 hectares to be allocated as the Pebsham Countryside Park, refer to plan 1. This area included both the areas from the North Bexhill Strategic Framework. The Inspector's report from the public inquiry, into objections to the Local Plan, supported the allocation in the Plan.



1.3 In 2003 each of the three local authorities concerned with the area, Rother District Council, Hastings Borough Council and East Sussex County Council, appointed 2

council members to form a Pebsham Countryside Park Project Steering Group. The terms of reference of that Group are at Appendix 1.

1.4 This Development Strategy has been prepared by the Steering Group, following major contributions from the community. It builds on the Hastings and Bexhill Task Force 5 point plan and complements the Seafront Strategy.

1.5 The costs of the extensive work leading to the strategy have been supported by the European INTERREG IIIA project, Southern Water Services (as a part of a planning agreement) and East Sussex County Council.

1.6 The strategy document describes the overall master plan for the park and a series of sub-strategies which when achieved will enable the plan to be realised. The master plan and sub-strategies are set out in summary and will be supported by more detailed appendices. The strategy will be reviewed every three years and is supported by a business plan which will be reviewed annually.

## **2.0 What the Community Wants**

2.1 During the Autumn and Winter of 2005/06 a major public consultation was undertaken to identify the level of support for the park project and the aspirations which the community have for it. The report of that consultation is at Appendix 2 – “What Do People Want?” which was prepared by T K Associates.

2.2 The Pebsham Countryside Park project consultation has delivered clear messages from the community. With certain exceptions – mainly Crowhurst village and affected land owners – local people are greatly in support of the project. They want the park to go ahead to preserve the green gap between the towns. They want it for nature conservation, for wildlife watching and for leisure activities – especially walking, cycling and riding. Young people want it for these reasons too, although they are also enthusiastic about sports and play facilities. Certain groups have their own ideas for specific uses for parts of the park – from energy schemes to sports clubs and heritage projects. People with business interests want the park for the commercial benefits it



would bring. Those informed about regeneration believe it will complement the other local regeneration initiatives under way.

2.3 A number of key points have been drawn from the consultation to influence the direction of the master planning.

- 88% of respondents from Bexhill and Hastings and those outside the local area were in favour of the park
- 63% of respondents from Crowhurst were against the park
- 47% of respondents considered Nature Conservation to be the primary purpose of the park (the most frequently suggested primary purpose). 66% wanted to be able to watch wildlife
- “Access for All” was the next most popular primary purpose (22%) and 49% wanted greater walking access in the area.
- Both young and old are keenest on wildlife watching as an activity but the under 30’s favoured sports (42%) over walking (24%)
- Cycling was very popular with all ages although the under 30’s slightly preferred water sports
- Horse riding was a close second to cycling overall
- Some young people want more skateboarding and BMX facilities
- There was significant demand for more angling waters
- A significant number of people, particularly from the Crowhurst area wanted no sports facilities.
- There is considerable concern from farming landowners about likely conflict between farming and park activities
- The need for more play facilities was clearly identified
- A limited amount of more education and public art facilities were requested by all ages.

2.4 At the same time as the consultation was underway, Acorn Consulting Partnership Limited was leading the production of a Recreation Demands Study on behalf of the Steering Group. This was a technical study at the regional scale which involved consultation with specialist groups and initial consideration of the business case for the options proposed. The final report produced from this study is at Appendix 3.

2.5 These key points can be drawn from the study to help inform the master planning, alongside community views and other technical studies:

- Open access recreational facilities would be needed to “drive visitor numbers and support national policy objectives”
- This should be balanced with a multi-functional building which could produce income and stimulate regeneration
- The park would need a “champion” to drive it forward. A manager who “spearheads” the park development.
- It would need financial commitment to support it at least for the first few years, until it becomes self financing.
- An open access multi-sports activity centre would offer sport and outdoor recreation to young local and regional audiences. This could help develop Olympic skills, and offer training and employment opportunities. Not in competition with existing sports facilities; this centre will be offering something different.
- A new iconic building, as a “Pebsham Centre”, must generate income and be used for community activities, education and a ranger centre.
- “Access for All” must be central to the park development and with art, education and the exploration of more sustainable living, will deliver social and commercial regeneration.

- Opportunities exist for individual or groups of landowners to develop a range of farm diversification projects such as:-

- \* Environmentally friendly accommodation
- \* Nature watching and walks
- \* Catering and farm produce
- \* Equestrian activities
- \* Education and learning
- \* Farm attractions
- \* Fishing and worm farming
- \* Outdoor activities

There are opportunities for the project to become a successful social enterprise if achieving this mix of activities but driven commercially.

2.6 The outcomes of these two studies are very compatible and can be interpreted into an overall master plan for the Park Project.

### 3. Park Development Zones

3.1 The range of interest available in the area is probably as diverse as can be found in any similar sized area of countryside in the country. The objective is to:-

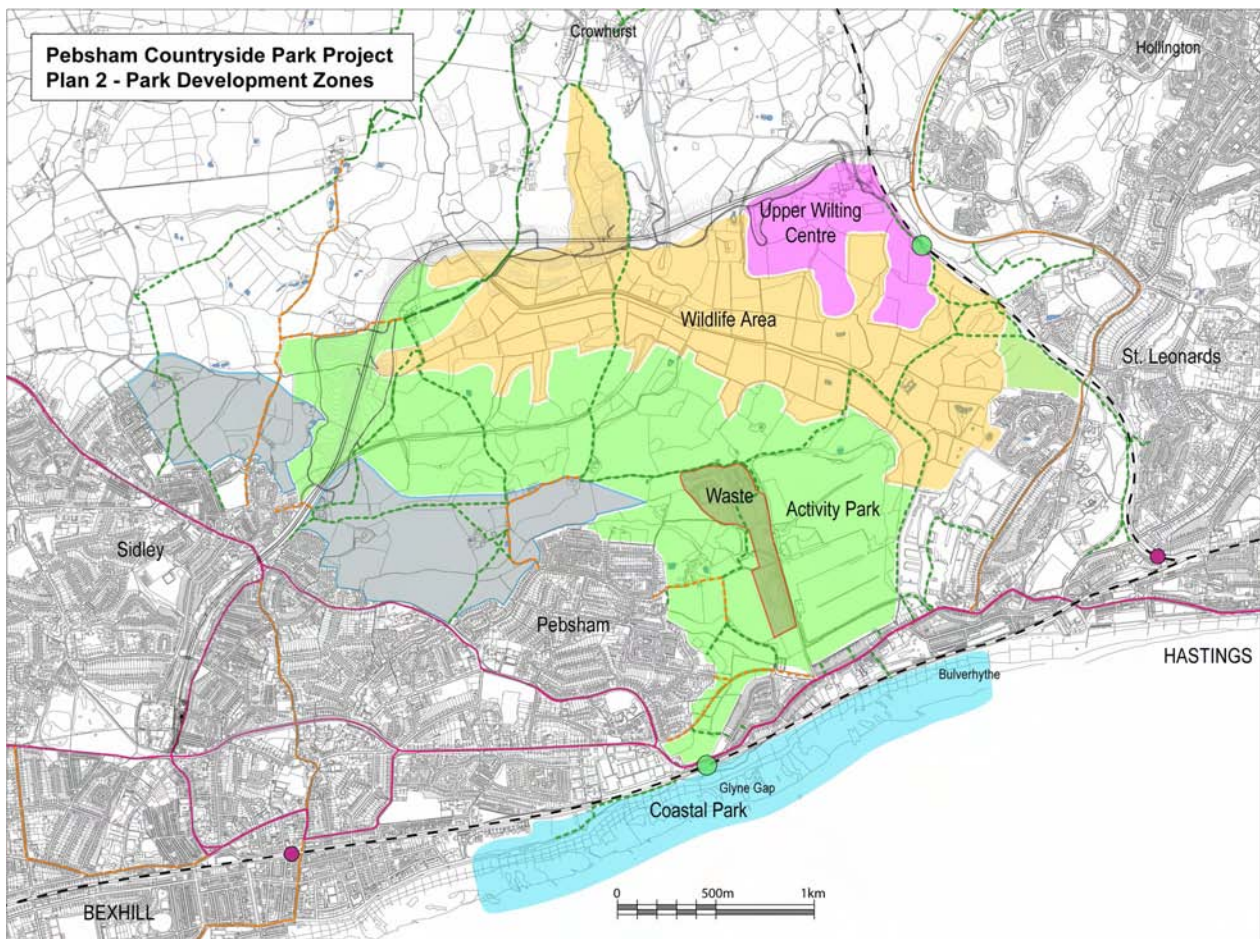
- ***Retain and enhance the “green gap” between Bexhill and St Leonards on Sea.***
- ***Retain and enhance the landscape character and integrity of the Combe Haven Valley***
- ***Retain and enhance the natural characteristics of the Beach at Bulverhythe and Glyne Gap***
- ***Retain and enhance the diversity of natural and cultural interest in the area.***

Clearly the aspirations of the community are also diverse.

3.2 The Countryside Park project area falls into 4 distinct use zones which, whilst ideally managed by the same management body, will require different development and management policies.

- **The Activity Park**
- **Coastal Park**
- **Combe Haven Wildlife Area**
- **Upper Wilting Centre**

Plan 2 indicates these development zones. The zones respond to the results of the public consultation and the natural and cultural interest of the area. The general development and management policies are set out below as they apply to each zone.



- The Activity Park
  - *The main “green gap” between Bexhill and St Leonards.*
  - *The main activity area and “visitor hub” – managed to maximise recreation and educational opportunities.*
  - *Design the landscape to accommodate large numbers of people and recreational users*
  - *Accommodate the multi-sports activity centre*
  - *Accommodate an iconic “Pebsham Centre” and operational hub for the park*
  - *Be the heart of the “access for all” routes.*
  - *Where compatible with recreational users, enhance the wildlife value of the area.*
  - *Provide opportunities for urban/rural edge recreational activities for the whole community*
  - *Provide the main arrival/reception areas and associated vehicle parking spaces*
  - *Provide an area suitable for major events*
  - *Engage the community in understanding the waste story*
  - *Be the area which creates the “branded” core identity for the park*
  
- Coastal Park
  - *Optimise the recreational beach experience*
  - *Conserve and interpret the cultural heritage value of the area.*
  - *Provide good pedestrian and cycle links between Bexhill and Hastings and into the Park to the north*
  - *Interpret issues of coastline conservation and defence*
  
- Combe Haven Wildlife Area
  - *Design, develop and manage this nationally important wildlife area with the primary purpose of nature conservation including raising and controlling water levels in ditches and allowing natural systems to prevail.*



- *Maximise the opportunities to view wildlife from around the area whilst minimising disturbance*
  - *Maximise flood storage capacity of the valley, to reduce the frequency of flooding of Bulverhythe and Crowhurst, subject to the needs of wildlife,*
  - *Plan to manage and minimise shooting in the wildlife area, other than for vermin control*
- Upper Wilting Centre

Upper Wilting Farm is on a long term tenancy from Hastings Borough Council to an Environmental Education Trust, The School Farm and Country Trust (SFCT). Development of the area will rest with the Trust but the Steering Group have identified these opportunities to complement the Activity Park and Wildlife Area.

- *Environmental Education Centre for:*
  - *Rural skills*
  - *Archaeological training & experience*
  - *Farm/countryside experiences*
  - *Further education*
  - *“Field” studies*
- *Children’s Farm*
- *Farm Shop – outlet for local produce*
- *Café*

The opportunity for a new station near Upper Wilting is a major benefit to the farm base activities and for drawing people into the area.

#### **4.0 “Access for All”**

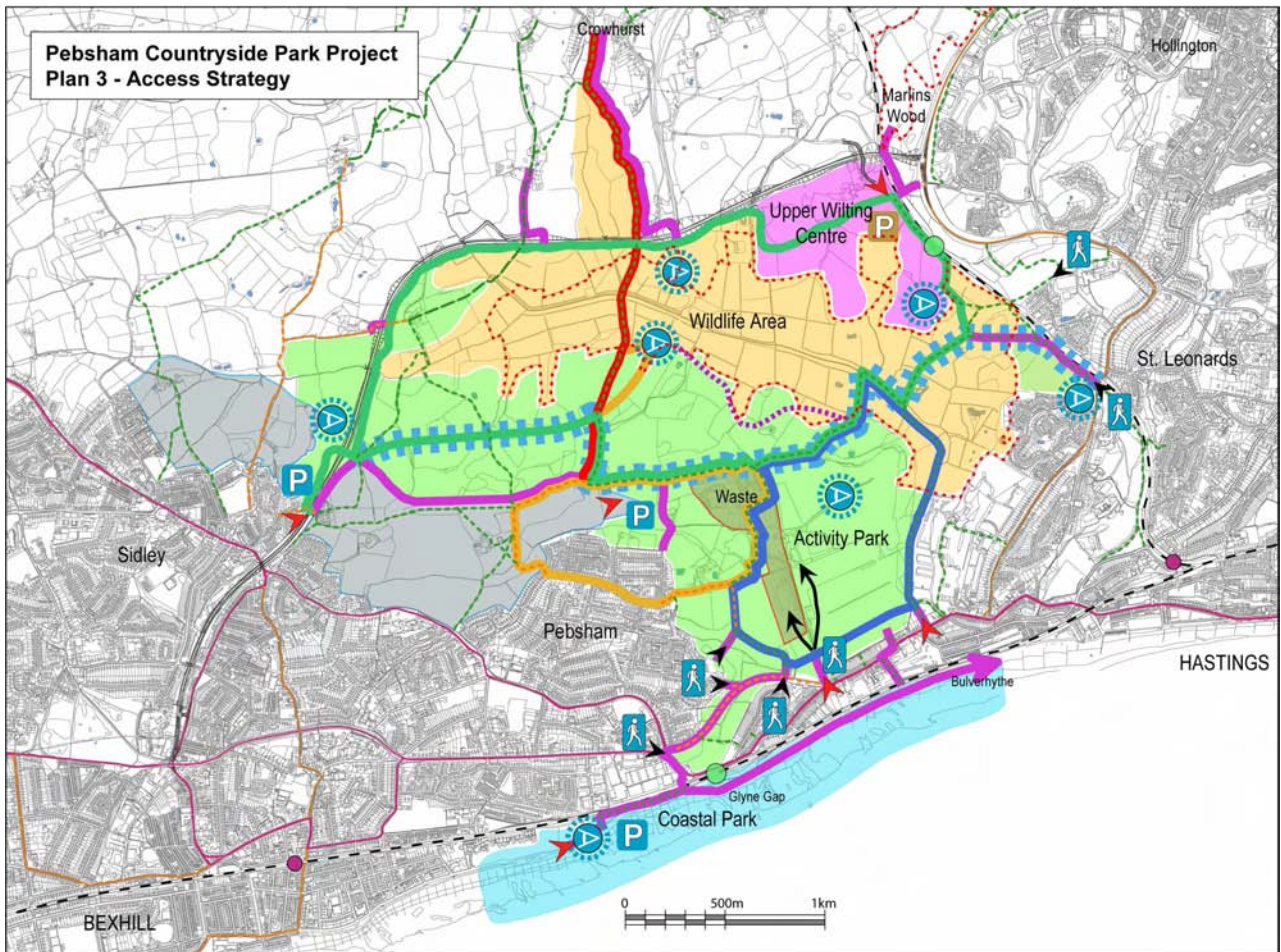
4.1 An opportunity exists to provide exemplary facilities for access for those of all abilities and all non motorised uses. The objective for public access to the area is to:

- ***Maximise opportunities for as wide a range of users as possible, including those with disabilities, to enable them to enjoy the beauty of the coast and countryside and benefit from physical exercise.***

4.2 There is a variety of public footpaths in the area, including links to deeper countryside such as a branch of the 1066 Country Walk and links to the beach, the urban area and the National Cycle Network. Several of these are unattractive at present and some unsurfaced paths become very wet or impassable at times, others involve difficult road crossings and others involve steps. “Access for All” routes should be accessible at all times of the year, be safe, fit for purpose and attractive.

The aim is to consider the network as a whole, improving existing footpaths and supplementing them to create a purpose built network which will be designed with people with disabilities in mind.

4.3 The strategy for access to the area is illustrated on Plan 3.



4.4 Vehicular access, is based upon the following key features:

- *Vehicular parking around the south side of the Activity and Coastal Park and a main arrivals car park central to the Park.*
- *Encourage cycling to and around the Countryside Park.*
- *Support for new railway stations at Wilting and Glyne Gap to serve the recreation facilities.*
- *Charges should be made for car parking from the outset and all income used to develop and manage the park.*

- *Access points to roads must be attractive and immediately instil a sense of the countryside: - Freshfields Road access to the park should to be re-routed and designed to be more rural in character and separated from the route to the waste facilities.*

4.5 It is essential for visitors to be able to find the park, and their way around it, therefore:

- *Information will be available on a website and in interpretation leaflets.*
- *Access by bus and train will be examined and opportunities supported to improve it.*
- *The park should be signed with “brown” tourist road signs at appropriate locations.*
- *Access points to the area and all paths within the area will be indicated with distinctive and “branded” way marking signs.*

4.6 A network of paths will be provided, based upon the following routes:

- *A long countryside park / Combe Haven circuit – circuiting the Wildlife Area.*
- *A Pebsham Park circuit – for those who want the full variety of what the park has to offer, particularly when supplemented with*
- *A coastal circuit – which will guide pedestrians and cyclists along the back of the beach.*
- *A number of short local circuits to encourage local people to walk or cycle around parts of the park or to get to some key view points. These will particularly include routes based upon Pebsham, Sidley, Crowhurst, Hollington and Filsham areas in addition to those from the new development in north Bexhill. They will include a route suitable for people with disabilities, along the disused railway line to the view point over the valley.*

- *A town to town route.*
- *A coast to countryside route in addition to*
- *The 1066 Country Walk which provides a route to Battle, for pedestrians.*
- *A number of minor routes will provide access to bird watching locations on the south side of the nature reserve.*
- *Key path links into communities, neighbourhoods and the National Cycle Network to help reduce the dependence upon motor cars and bring the park closer” to the people.*

There is a particular issue with an access link from Hollington, with an “at grade” crossing of the live railway line. This is not shown as a local link on the strategy plan but it is a public footpath and would be a desirable link. The park should therefore

- *seek to achieve a grade separated crossing of the railway as a link to Hollington.*

4.7 The path routes will lead to:

- *Picnic areas*
- *View points*
- *Resting places*

4.8 Existing licensed paths along the river banks of the Combe Haven, Watermill Stream and Powdermill Stream will be extinguished in preference to new path circuits, in order to reduce disturbance to wildlife and conflict with other objectives.

4.9 The paths will be based upon a desire to see:-

- *Equestrians being separated from pedestrians and cyclists but*



- *Where this is not possible, paths will be in the order of 3.5m wide.*
- *Where there is a large number of cyclists and pedestrians, it may be desirable to separate these uses.*
- *Main pedestrian and cycling routes will be 3m wide with 1m grass strip on either side. They will be constructed in bitmacadam with a stone dressing. Fencing will be provided where necessary. Where ever possible the paths will be built to meet the needs of people with disabilities.*
- *Equestrian paths will be 3m wide with 1m grass strip on either side and fencing will be provided where necessary. They will be constructed in a resilient surface to be agreed with the British Horse Society (e.g. gravel stabilised soils, rolled stone, bitmac or woodchip.*

4.10 *Leaflets will be produced to help guide visitors around the park, to indicate local places of interest, including pubs, restaurants, etc. which will enhance their visits. Modern technology could be used to provide up to date information using mobile phones. These new technologies will be considered by the Park Management organisation.*

4.11 The establishment of the path network is seen as a prerequisite of opening areas of the park to the public. Substantial parts of the park are privately owned and establishing routes will be subject to the landowners' agreement. The Link road will provide the north and western sections of the Combe Haven circuit. Land exchanges associated with the North Bexhill development will enable some other sections to be built but most other paths will be on land owned by the Hastings Borough Council and Rother District Council.

4.12 A fuller Access Strategy for the area will be developed and agreed in due course and appended at appendix 4.

4.13 Some types of access are considered undesirable in the park and action will be taken to control them. In particular, there is a clear but very limited demand for use by motorcycles and four wheel drive vehicles but it is considered that they do not have a place in the public access areas of the park.

## **5.0 Wildlife Strategy**

5.1 The biodiversity of the Countryside Park is already important at national level and is set within a wider coastal area of international importance (Rye Bay and Pevensey Levels) and is one of the string of green space “pearls” along the East Sussex coast. The valley floor of the Combe Haven is a Site of Special Scientific Interest for its wetland habitats. Within it is the Filsham Reedbeds Local Nature Reserve, which is managed by the Sussex Wildlife Trust. The remainder of the valley floor is either owned by Hastings Borough Council and let to farmers or in various private ownerships. Just beyond the Countryside Park boundaries lie a RSPB nature reserve (Fore Wood) and another Sussex Wildlife Trust Reserve (Marline Woods).

5.2 Discussions with various wildlife organisations together with the strong public support for wildlife conservation and the ability to view it, has drawn the following measures which will be objectives of this strategy:-

- ***To identify the valley of the Combe Haven within the Countryside Park, its SSSI and some surrounding low laying land as a Wildlife Area in which wildlife conservation will be the primary purpose and the ability to view wildlife as a secondary purpose.***
- ***Wherever it is compatible with primary purposes elsewhere in the park area, carryout works and management to conserve and enhance wildlife in the medium to long term.***

5.3 The objectives for the Combe Haven Wildlife Area in section 3.0 will be achieved by a mixture of:

- *Management agreements with landowners.*
- *Land acquisition.*
- *Working with DEFRA with agricultural grant schemes.*
- *Working in partnership with various wildlife organisations, including English Nature, Sussex Wildlife Trust and the Environment Agency.*
- *Discussions with the local community.*

5.4 Appropriate management prescriptions will be developed by a specialist management group but the favoured approach is to allow the valley floor to return to minimum intervention both in respect to water and wildlife management. This would accord with the Environment Agencies Catchment Flood Management Plan consultation proposals of March 2006.

5.5 Modern technology will allow wildlife to be viewed as never before. Opportunities to view wildlife will therefore be:

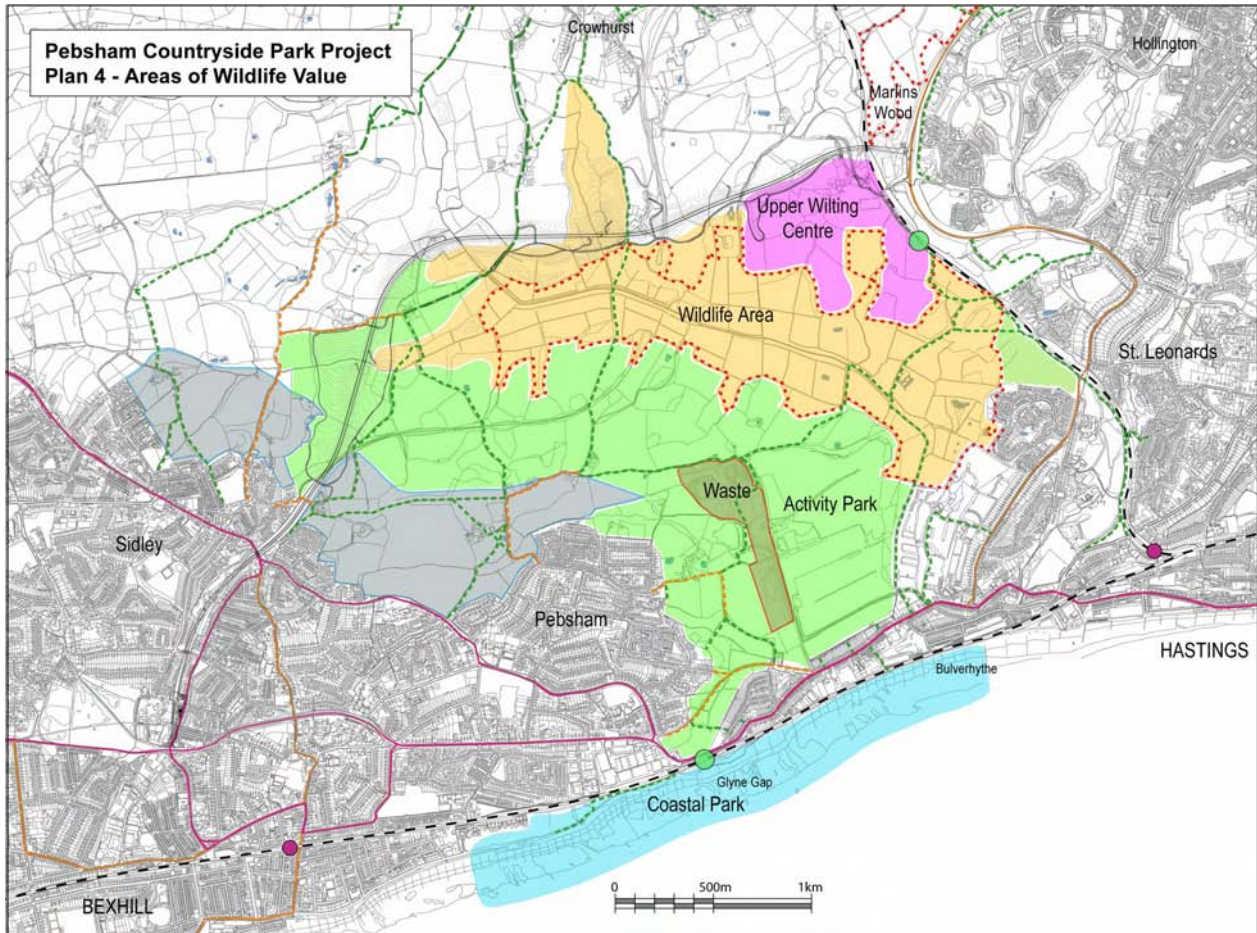
- *From viewing hides close to the southern edge of the nature reserve and possibly a visitor centre.*

5.6 Within the countryside park area are additional areas of wildlife value:-

- *Glyne Gap reedbeds (Site of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI)).*
- *Combe Wood and disused railway track (SNCI).*
- *Pebsham Wood.*
- *Various ponds.*

- *Grassland off Harley Shute Road (SNCI).*

These areas are shown on Plan 4.



It is important to consider improvements to links with other important natural sites and communities in the area, such as Marline Valley SSSI.

5.7 The management prescriptions for the Wildlife Area and other parts of the Park will be kept under regular review by a specialist wildlife management group. A Wildlife Management Plan will be produced and form appendix 5 to the Strategy in due course.

## 6.0 Water

6.1 The Park serves important drainage functions for the Combe Haven Catchment area. As generally low lying land it is a gathering ground for water from higher ground

before it finds its way to sea at appropriate times in the tides. Large areas of the Combe Haven Valley floor are flood plains. This both adds to the visual attractions of the area and its importance for wildlife. The objective for the Combe Haven Valley is to:-

- ***Retain and maximise function of the valley floor as flood storage area and maximise opportunities to reduce the frequency of flooding of urban areas, in as far as it is compatible with the wildlife importance of the area and interests of land owners.***

6.2 The development of land raising over many decades has reduced the flood storage capacity of the valley. This, coupled with increased development on the higher ground has increased the importance of the valley for flood storage. Some low laying developed areas, particularly at Bulverhythe report regular flooding of property. Parts of Crowhurst village also experience periodic flooding of property. It would be possible to reduce the frequency of flooding in Bulverhythe with specific measures in the Combe Haven Valley including a control structure in the Combe Haven River itself. As the Park is a key part of regeneration proposals for Bexhill and Hastings, it is right that it achieves benefits for those areas where it can. Any changes within the Park, would have no effect upon Crowhurst village but recent studies suggest that the construction of flood walls around development in the village, could ease the flooding problems upon properties.

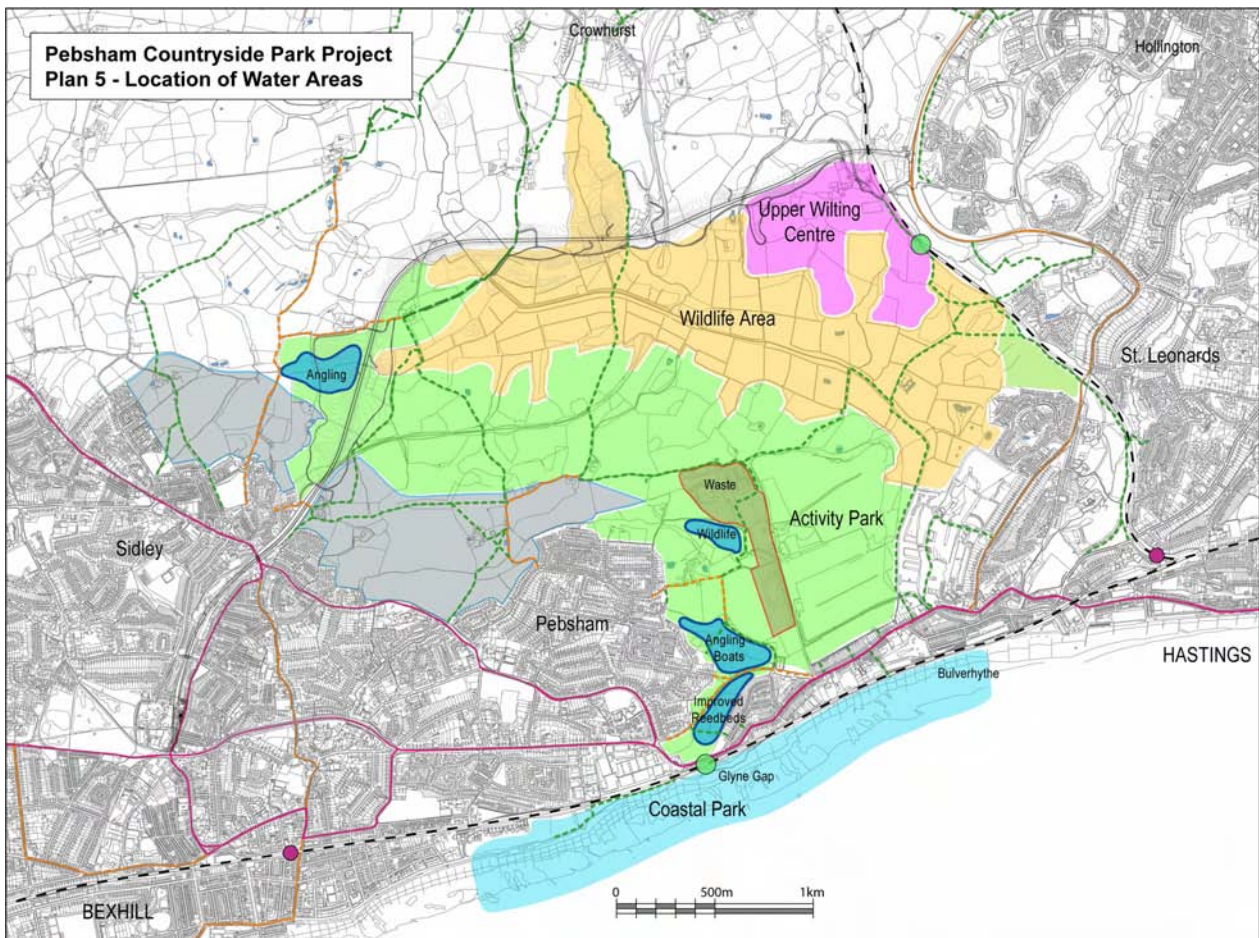
6.3 The effect of a balanced approach would be to install a control structure in the river which would reduce the outflow rate from the valley into the urban part of the river and to the outfall. It would also be used to retain water in the ditches at a slightly higher level and reduce tidal fluctuations and would result in over site flood water being retained in the valley for longer than at present, when flood events happen.

6.4 The Environment Agency's draft Catchment Flood Management Plan proposes that removing flood defences on the rivers in the valley would be justified and beneficial. It also suggests that there could be flood risk management benefits for Bulverhythe and St Leonards from measures in the valley. The technical work undertaken as part of the Park project and the Link Road has demonstrated that there can be both benefits to the



community at Bulverhythe and wildlife in the valley. There may be both benefits and disbenefits to agriculture in the valley floor. There may also be flood relief benefits from removing the control structure at the confluence of the Powdermill Stream and Combe Haven but because of wildlife dis-benefits to the stream fauna, this is not proposed. There is support for the overall proposals in the Consultation Draft Catchment Flood Management Plan published by the Environment Agency in March 2006.

6.5 There is significant support from the community for the recreational use of water in the area. There have been proposals to create a major rowing lake in the Combe Haven Valley. This cannot be supported by the Steering Group because of impact upon wildlife of national significance and the character of the landscape and countryside. However, there are some opportunities to create modest open water areas. Such areas must be upstream of the Pebsham landfill site because of the possible pollution risk, albeit small.



Plan 5 indicates the location of water areas which the Steering Group seeks to develop for informal recreation and wildlife. These include:-

- *Improving the wildlife Lake and wetland to the east of Pebsham Farm.*
- *Create angling, boating lakes and improve the reed beds near Glyne Gap.*
- *Create angling ponds on the Combe Haven to the west of the proposed Bexhill – Hastings Link Road.*
- *Various, unidentified ponds to wildlife conservation throughout the Park and Nature Reserve.*
- *Improved access to the beach at Glyne Gap.*

6.6 The excavation of lakes and ponds clearly generates significant quantities of soils. These are to be used for landscape enhancement as appropriate throughout the Park and Nature Reserve. Excavated soils could be used to form:-

- *Earthworks to help “contain” the waste processing facilities, including raising the hill to the west of the WDF plant.*
- *Earthworks to enable the completion and restoration of the landfill site.*
- *Earthworks to help mitigate and accommodate new park buildings on the area.*
- *Earthworks to help mitigate the impact of the Bexhill-Hastings Link Road upon the Park and Nature Reserve.*

## 7.0 Visitor Attractions

7.1 The Recreation Demands Study identified a range of facilities for which there was demand and capacity to accommodate in the Park. These facilities tend to fall into either urban fringe or rural fringe in character. The zoning of the area allows for accommodating both types of facilities. The visitor attractions are planned to be located:-

- *Within the Activity Park and*
- *Within the Upper Wilting Centre.*

In addition there is some scope for landowners around the Park to develop attractions which complement the Park.

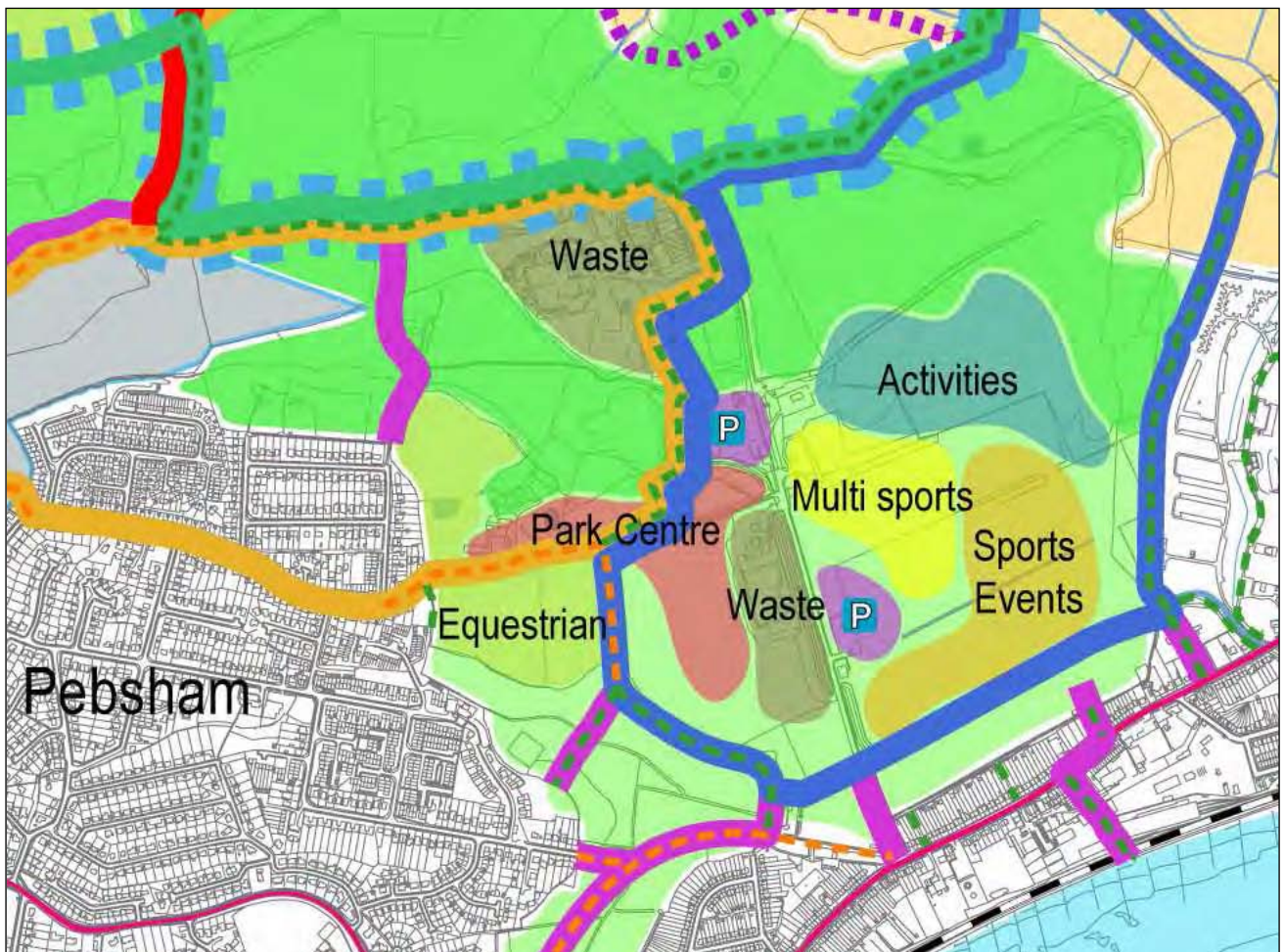
7.2 Regeneration proposals for Bexhill and Hastings identify the significance of the countryside park project to making the most of the relationship of the two towns to the surrounding countryside and creating an environment that will attract new business and tourism. The opportunities for any significant development of visitor attractions cannot take place until the Bexhill-Hastings Link Road is open. It is therefore clear that:-

- *The full visitor benefits of the Countryside Park cannot be realised until the Bexhill-Hastings Link Road is open.*

7.3 The development of new houses and businesses at North East Bexhill also relies upon the opening of the Link Road. Parts of the Park adjacent to the new development cannot be created until that is in place.

7.4 The strategy is to create a visitor “hub” on the area to the south of the new hill off a redesigned Freshfields Road within the Countryside Park area. This “hub” will be based upon the activities of an urban fringe character and have a strong physical relationship with each other. The Plan 6 indicates a diagrammatic layout of the facilities.





*Plan 6 Diagrammatic Visitor 'hub'.*

At this stage no architectural design or planning concept has been commissioned. The Steering Group intends to promote an architectural design competition for the buildings closer to the time when they can be built. The objective is:-

- ***to create a visitor hub of at least regional significance, to attract both specialist and family visitors and serve the local community, which complements existing facilities in Hastings and Bexhill and includes:-***
  - *A multi-sports centre with events area.*
  - *A sustainable iconic building(s) as a Peabsham Centre which would include:-*
    - *Education facilities – including a wildlife Centre and*

*waste interpretation centre.*

- *Arts centre.*
  - *Conference facilities.*
  - *Restaurant/café.*
  - *Community facilities.*
  - *Administrative centre for the Park.*
  - *Related commercial activity.*
- 
- *A link to a new railway station at Glyne Gap and access routes.*

7.5 The physical linkage between the waste handling facilities and the sports, education, recreation and social facilities is seen as essential to help tell the waste story as one of many important environmental stories and demonstrate better ways of managing our environment and our lives.

7.6 **The multi-sports centre** is seen as a partly indoor and partly open air facility with mainly open access which caters for a wide range of facilities, particularly for younger people, including:-

- *Cycle sports including BMX.*
- *Skateboarding.*
- *Bouldering and climbing.*
- *Adventure play.*
- *Indoor facilities such as table tennis and*
- *Possibly snow sports*

The emphasis should be upon flexible facilities and enough space to respond to new trends and activities.

7.7 The associated Events Arena may partly be dual use with sports pitches but there is the ability to accommodate large events such as:-

- *Model aircraft events.*
- *Musical events.*
- *Equestrian events.*
- *Rallies.*
- *Shows & exhibitions.*

7.8 The Park visitor hub will be the centre of arrival and access to the wider area of the Park and circular access for all routes to more rural fringe based facilities. In particular the Park will provide:-

- *High quality equestrian activities which are available to all levels of ability.*

The Park can already boast a Riding for the Disabled Centre near Pebsham Farm and the recent addition of an Olympic sized dressage area is worthy of any equestrian centre in the country. The Steering Group wishes to support the development of the riding for the Disabled Centre charity and the stables close to the visitor hub to enable more people to have access to animals and horse riding as a healthy outdoor activity. The Steering Group wishes to enable the centre to consolidate and develop its activities as a long term feature in the Park.

7.9 The objective is to create:-

- *A network of horse trails around the Park which will assist livery yards and riding stables to thrive and provide diversification opportunities for farming landowners.*
- *Horse trails which will link to existing bridleways to give access to the wider countryside.*
- *Improvements to equestrian links into the Park's paths from the surrounding countryside, particularly along the disused railway line on the north side of the valley.*



- *Horse trails which can provide opportunities for horse drawn carriages for visitors and less physically able to get around the Park.*

7.10 The Steering Group has a vision of a different type of visitor attraction at the **Upper Wilting Centre**. The objective is to:-

- ***Support the renewal of activities of the Upper Wilting School Farm and Country Trust and welcome a partnership between the Trust and the management organisation for the Park to explore ways of achieving community facilities and services which might include:-***

- *Education facilities – for schools, colleges and universities with a focus upon:-*
  - *Rural activities and industries.*
  - *Cultural Heritage.*
  - *Wildlife conservation and watching.*
  - *Field studies.*
- *Farm based family activities.*

- *Farm local produce shop/café for local produce.*

The Steering Group supports the creation of a Wilting Station in such a way that it, and any associated development, is complementary to the role of the Upper Wilting Centre and the Countryside Park.

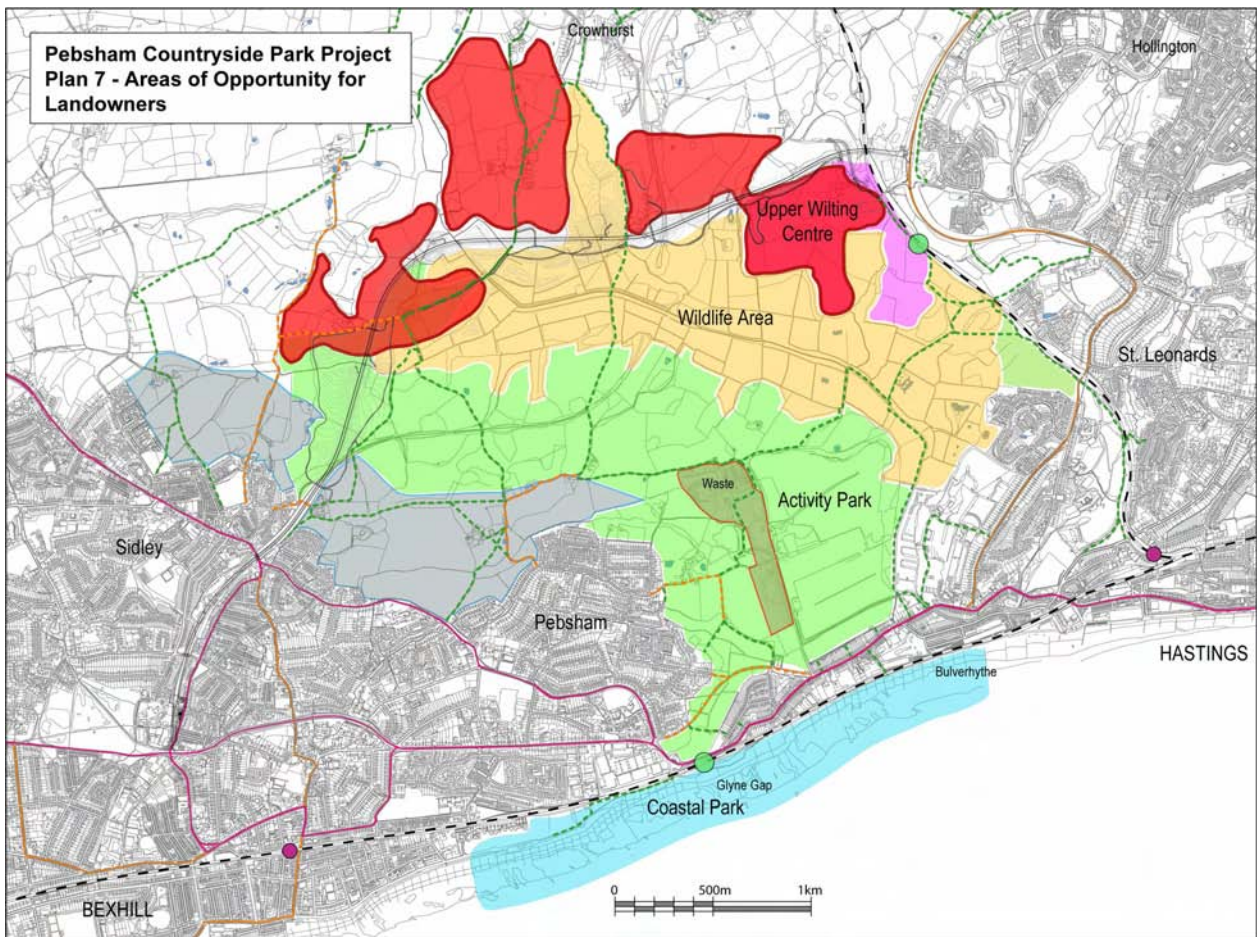
7.11 The Park has a contribution to make to the local economy not only through the direct employment on the new facilities but in bringing new business to existing shops, pubs, cafes and restaurants. There is an objective to:-

- ***support new businesses both in and close to the Park, where they complement the objectives of the Park and do not conflict with other environmental interests. Such new businesses might include:-***

- *High quality refreshment facilities at or near arrival points to the Park.*
- *Small numbers of self catering holiday accommodation units, built to sustainable principles.*
- *Small camping areas.*
- *Outdoor activity centres.*

Such uses would be particularly welcomed if they enabled the reuse of notable rural buildings in such a way as to retain the rural character.

Plan 7 indicates areas where opportunities may exist for landowners.



7.12 It is the clear requirement that the visitor facilities in Pebsham Countryside Park should:-

- *Provide a high quality and varied visitor experience.*
- *Be a sustainable development in that it should:-*
  - *Be suited to the character of the area.*
  - *Aim for zero net carbon impact.*
  - *Be financially sustainable.*
- *Support the local economy.*
- *Extend the tourist season for Bexhill and Hastings.*
- *Have a distinctive image throughout the region.*
- *Act as a catalyst to new investment and local partnerships.*
- *Form part of an eco-tourism “package” to other significant environmental/conservation locations, (such as Rye Harbour Nature Reserve and Hastings Country Park).*

## 8.0 Education and the Arts

8.1 Hastings and Bexhill is an educational growth area. The Park has a significant contribution to make to formal and informal learning at all levels throughout the community. The objective is to:-

- ***Promote the Park as a centre of environmental learning.***

8.2 The opportunities for “formal” learning are both in the academic and vocational field. The Steering Group will promote links with:-

- *Schools.*
- *Colleges – particularly Plumpton College and its permanent out centre at the Netherfield centre, as a regional college connected with land based subjects.*
- *Universities – particularly the Hastings University Centre.*
- *Other organisations – such as the East Sussex Archaeology and Museums Partnership (ESAMP) which have both learning and teaching objectives.*
- *Organisations catering for particular social groups which can benefit from outdoor experiences.*
- *Conservation organisations providing environmental conservation training and experiences, such as British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) and the Sussex Wildlife Trust (SWT).*
- *The Shipwreck Heritage Centre and similar museum projects.*

8.3 The opportunities for informal/recreational learning are wide ranging and will need regular review. The Steering Group envisages providing long term education and interpretation themes covering:-

- *Wildlife and its conservation.*
- *Waste – how we can reduce it and reuse it.*
- *Rural & countryside crafts, skills and sports.*

The creation of a well organised voluntary ranger service to support permanent rangers is seen as important to the Park and the volunteers.

An education and interpretation strategy will be developed and be appended to future revisions of this strategy. This will include:-

- *Distribution of up to date information about the Park.*
- *Guides to walks in the Park.*
- *Use of new technology.*
- *On site information, boards and signage.*
- *Exhibitions.*
- *Branding.*

8.4 The primary focus for education activities are to be based upon:-

- *The Pebsham Centre – to attract large numbers of visitors, particularly for recreational learning. Also to include a centre for the volunteer ranger service. The conference facility could be used by schools, colleges and universities. Arts centre for the community arts activities.*
- *Upper Wilting Centre – to attract modest numbers of visitors such as schools and families with specific objectives. Also to include some regular learners and those for field studies. The site could accommodate permanent outdoor and indoor specialist exhibitions e.g. archaeological reconstructions.*
- *Pebsham Riding Stables – to attract limited numbers for vocational equestrian learners linked to Plumpton College and local schools and colleges.*
- *Pebsham Farm– a possible location for an environmental education satellite for a local college or the University Centre.*

8.5 The Park enjoys a special link with the Shipwreck Heritage Centre in Hastings. The Centre actively promotes the marine archaeological value of the Coastal Park. The Steering Group looks forward to exploring ways that the Park and Heritage Centre can

work together in the future in both formal and recreational education and interpretation of this unique section of coast.

8.6 There are major opportunities to engage professional artists and community art in the life of the park. Well designed art can both dramatise and interpret the natural and cultural knowledge of places. However, Hastings and Bexhill are already rich in art and it is the intention to generate artistic enterprise which complements existing resources in the towns by doing something different which builds upon what the park has to offer. The objective is therefore to:-

- ***Maximise opportunities for artistic expression within the park, particularly sculpture and “land art”.***
- ***Produce an arts strategy to encourage both professional and community art and arts events within the Countryside Park, to complement the primary purpose of the zones of the area.***

## **9.0 Landscape Conservation and Enhancement**

9.1 A primary purpose of the Countryside Park is to conserve the “green gap” between Bexhill and St Leonards on Sea, whilst also providing a link between the two towns. It also acts as a buffer between the urban area and nationally important countryside to the north. It is considered that the valley is one of the finest lowland valleys in the south-east, outside of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

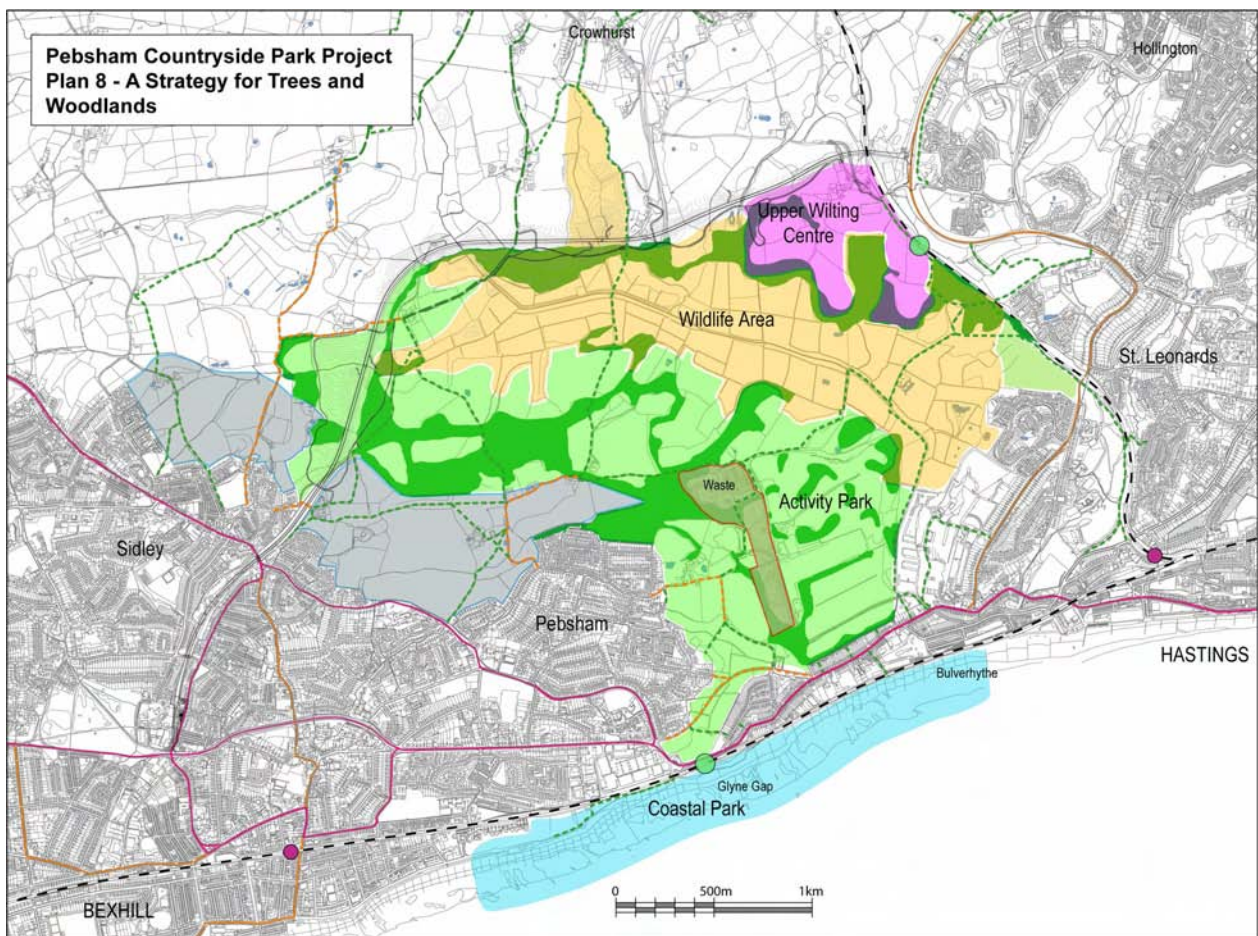
9.2 The case has been made that because of overriding economic need, it is necessary to build the Bexhill-Hastings Link Road and that it will have impact upon the character and quality of the Combe Haven Valley. It is considered that, given the design of the preferred route the most significant local impact will be the change to the noise environment but that the integrity of the valley will be retained. The creation of the Pebsham Countryside Park is a part of the strategy for conserving and enhancing the integrity of the countryside and valley to the north of Bexhill, whether or not the Link



Road is built. A strategy for Trees and Woodland conservation in the Park will be developed and will form Appendix 6. It will set out to:-

- *Help absorb the large numbers of visitors, particularly to the south side of the valley.*
- *Strengthen the wildlife linkages between areas of woodland, shaws and hedgerows.*
- *Increase the woodland cover in accordance with the objectives of the County Trees & Woodland Strategy.*
- *Help strengthen the landscape integrity of the valley.*
- *Pilot new approaches to the establishment of new or replacement woodlands.*
- *Detract from and where possible absorb noise and contribute to carbon sequestration.*

The strategy is indicated on Plan 8.



## 10.0 Historic Environment

10.1 The background work for the Park Project and Bexhill-Hastings Link Road has carried out extensive study of the historic value of the area. It is clear that it is rich in archaeological remains, albeit that there is no single feature which causes it to be outstanding. Save for exceptionally disturbed areas, such as the landfill, the area offers significant opportunities to:-

- *Interpret the historic environment, both on the coast and in the countryside.*
- *Create a centre of knowledge in the Park which can be used to “bring history to life”.*
- *Undertake structured desk top and field research to increase local knowledge*  
*– particularly an area where works are proposed.*
- *Develop the link between the Park and Shipwreck Heritage Centre.*

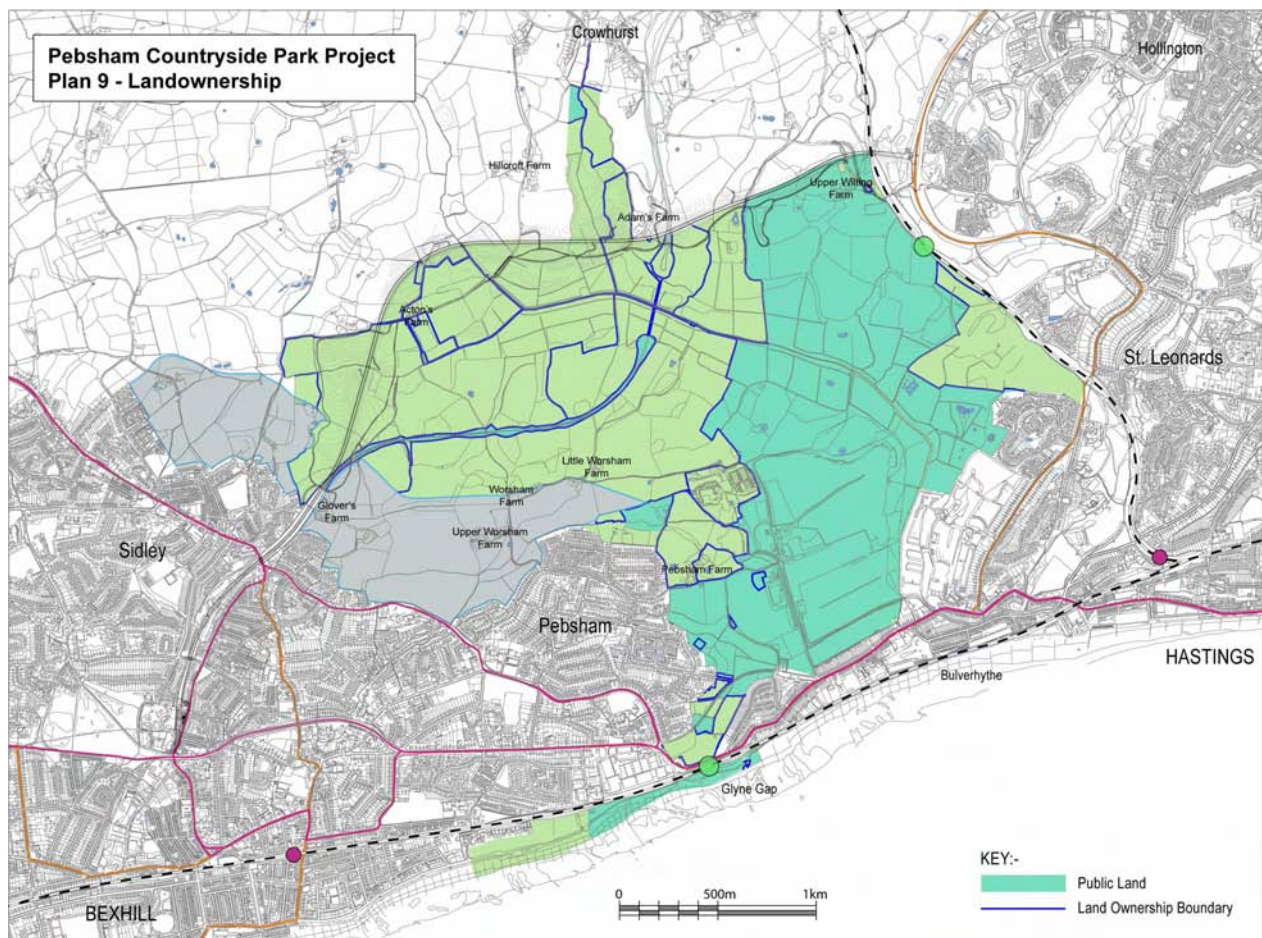
## 11.0 Land Ownership and Farming

11.1 It is the objective to:-

- ***Seek working partnerships with private landowners to help achieve the objectives of the Countryside Park.***
- ***Keep farmers managing the farm land.***
- ***Seek to minimise detrimental impact upon landowners farming activities which might be the result of the Countryside Park and to work with them to resolve any conflicts.***

11.2 It is not the intention of the Steering Group that the local authorities set out to bring all the land within the Park boundaries, into public ownership. However, some land may be acquired as the result of other developments.

11.3 Plan 9 shows the extent of land in public ownership and the boundaries of the farms in the Park as at January 2007.



11.4 Plan 7 and section 7.12 indicate areas of opportunity for landowners to develop activities complementary to the Park. It is clear, however, that it is entirely in the gift of the landowners whether to rise to the challenge of these opportunities.

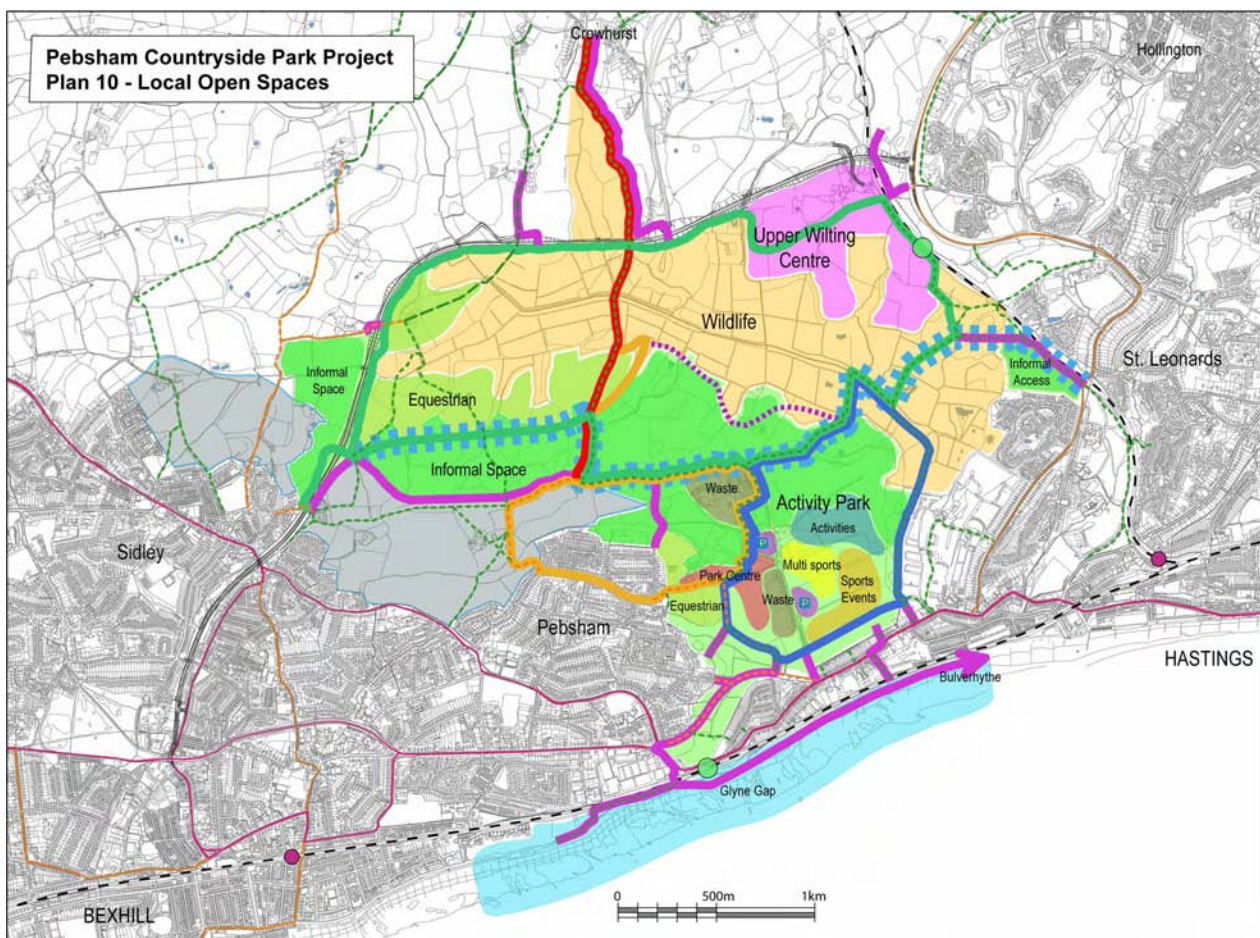


## 12.0 Local Open Spaces

12.1 The Park has 9.3km of urban edge and most of that is adjacent to residential areas. To help meet the needs of these local communities the objective will be to:-

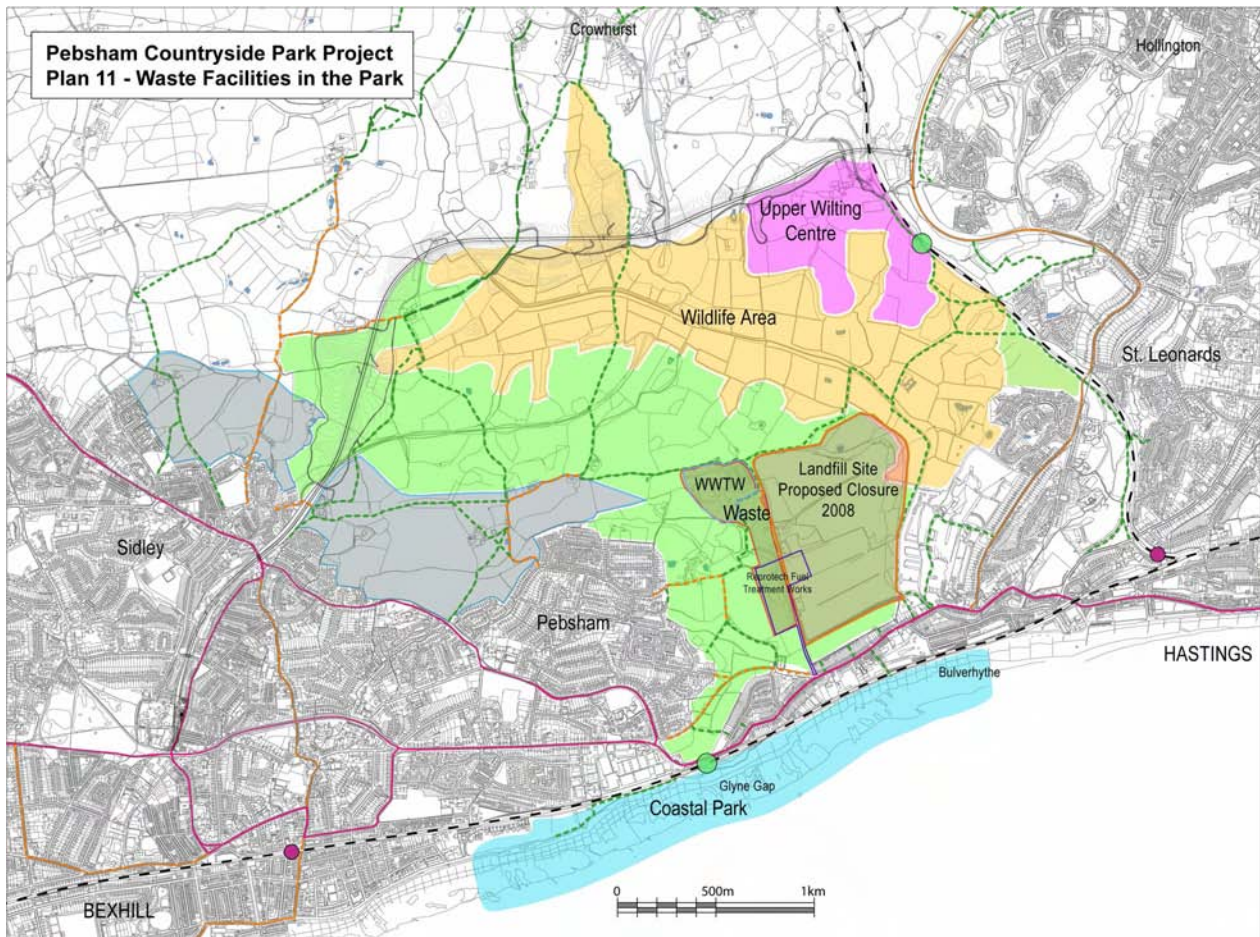
- **Create local open spaces, to include areas for mainly informal play and recreation.**
- **Safe spaces for children and young people in particular.**
- **Ensure that there are good physical access routes from the neighbourhoods to the open spaces.**

Plan 10 shows the areas within which local open spaces and facilities will be sought.



## 13.0 Waste Facilities in the Park

13.1 The Waste Local Plan has identified an area shown on Plan 11.



1. The Waste Water Treatment works
2. Materials Recovery Facility (MRF) and Waste Transfer Station (WTS) – an and around the location of the former Waste Derived Fuel Plant.
3. Household Waste site (Civic Amenity and recycling centre) – to be relocated from its current position to within the WRF and WTS complex.
4. Waste Landfill Site which is due for completion and restoration by 2008.

It is anticipated that 2 & 3 will require planning consent in part, or their entirety. There has been a suggestion that an extension to the landfill operation may be sought. It is understood that planning consent would be required for any such extension.

13.2 The Steering Group accepts that, given the need for some waste handling facilities and that Pebsham has been adopted as the location, they are considered to be a part of the Park and the objective for them should be to:-

- ***Ensure that they become a worthy part of the Countryside Park in their:-***

- ***Setting***
- ***Design***
- ***Vehicular access arrangements and***
- ***Integration into the “visitor hub” of the Park by***
- ***Helping to tell the “story of waste” and other key “environmental stories” and***
- ***Encourage social responsibility for our waste***

- ***They contribute to modifications to the park to strengthen the countryside character and reduce the industrial character of the waste facilities and access to them by:-***

- ***Earthworks and planting around the facilities.***
- ***Separation of waste traffic from park visitors.***

## **14.0 The Master Plan and Phased Implementation**

14.1 An overall Master Plan of proposals for the Park is shown on Plan 12. At this stage the Plan is conceptual but creates a framework within which an exciting future emerges for the area. The objective is therefore:-

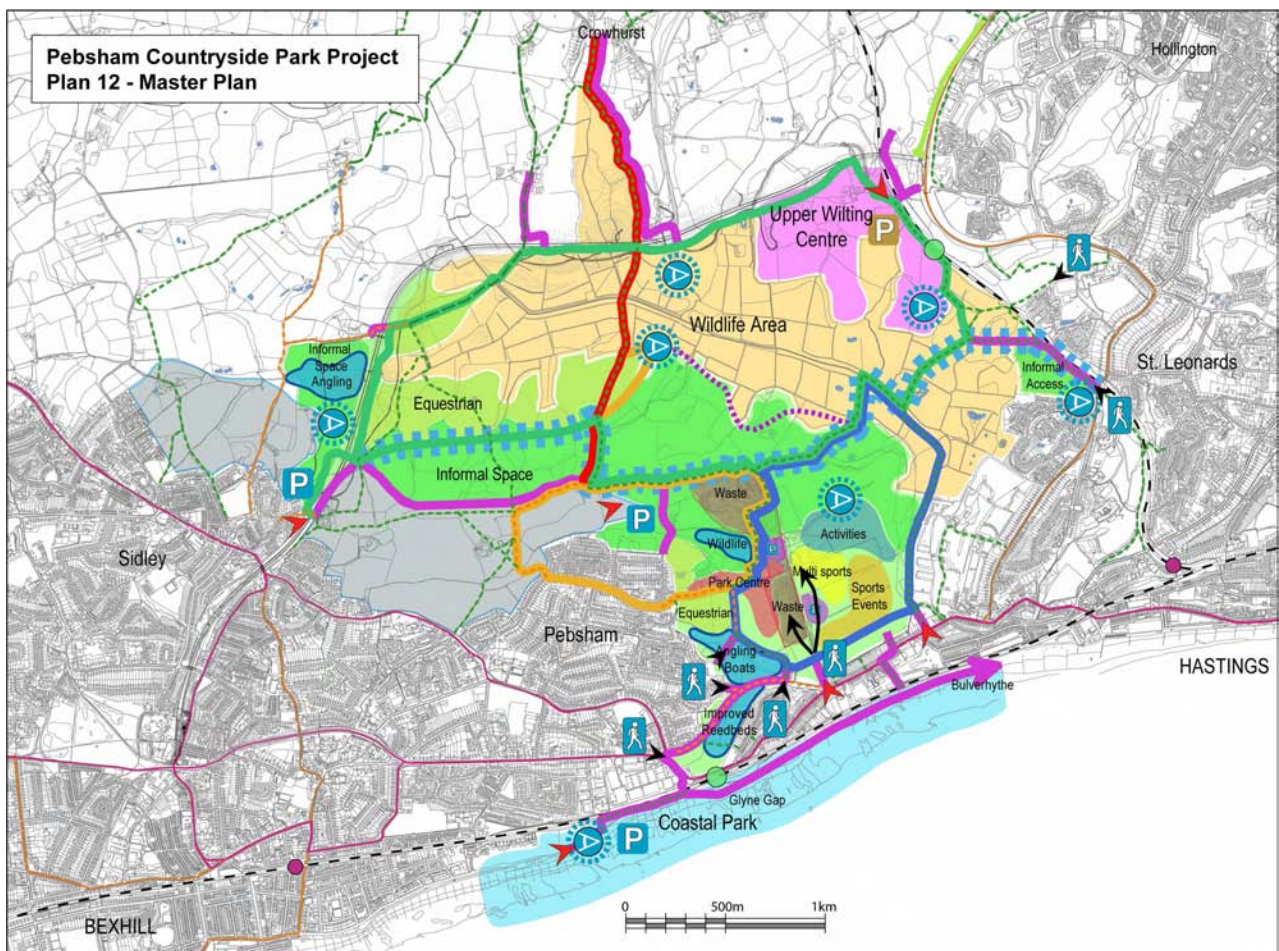


- *To work towards the development concepts shown on the Master Plan for the area but*
- *To identify key development phases related to different levels of investment and management*

14.2 The Master Plan and background work have generated some broad phases which will be developed into an implementation strategy within the business plan. There are some key external milestones which influence the implementation strategy:-

- *Completion of the landfill – 2008*
- *Opening of the Bexhill-Hastings Link Road – 2009/10*
- *Planning consent for residential and business development at NE Bexhill – when land will be released – 2009/10.*

These determine the earliest opportunities to implement particular elements of the Master Plan.



14.3 In order to enable people to start using the area, early implementation of access routes will be sought, particularly on publicly owned land. New signage of public rights of way has been carried out, along with some improvements to access to the former railway line.

14.4 Implementation of the basic infrastructure of the area will be managed through the extensive expertise within the local authorities, with some specialist support. This will be funded through the implementation budgets.

14.5 What has become clear, through the Development Strategy and Business planning, is that significant community benefits can be realised in all phases of the Park development and it is not necessary to commit to the complete master-plan proposals from the outset.

## 15.0 Consultation & Community Involvement

15.1 Community consultation has been a major foundation for this strategy. It is the objective to:-

- ***Engage with the community and continue to use the views of the community as the Countryside Park, develops***

15.2 Farming landowners both within the Countryside Park and close to it will be important partners in taking these projects forward and managing them. The objective is to:-

- ***Maintain regular contact between landowners and Countryside Park ranger staff with a view to dealing with practical issues as they arise.***

15.3 The relationship between the Countryside Park and the local business community is important for mutual benefit. This particularly applies to local pubs, stables, holiday sites and other recreational centres. The objective will therefore be to:-

***Maintain liaison with the business community to discuss issues of mutual concern and in the interest of business growth.***

15.4 The Countryside Park offers major opportunities for community groups and individual members of the community to become directly involved in physical work and action in the area. Organisations such as BTCV and volunteer rangers can provide qualified supervision of countryside conservation activities for the enhancement of the Park with positive benefits to health. There is therefore an objective to:-

- ***Promote opportunities for the involvement of supervised groups and individuals in physical improvement***

## **16.0 Management and Funding of Countryside Park**

16.1 Options for management, funding and implementation programme and strategy are addressed through the Park Business Plan. As time moves on there will be a need for revision and updating of aspects of the plan and as funding opportunities change, it will be necessary to modify the funding strategy.

16.2 It is clear that there will still be the need for financial input from the three Local Authorities for the foreseeable future at least at the level currently being provided.

16.3 One of the “core” values in this strategy is that the area should become financially self supporting. This remains the target but the Business Plan addresses this issue.



# Business Plan for Pebsham Countryside Park: Final Draft Business Plan

for East Sussex County Council, Hastings Borough Council and Rother District Council



PLB Consulting Ltd with  
Acorn Consulting Partnership Ltd



January 2007



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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Purpose of this Document

This Final Draft Business Plan has been prepared by PLB Consulting Ltd, working with Acorn Consulting Partnership Ltd, to advise East Sussex Council (ESCC) and its partners (Hastings Borough Council - HBC and Rother District Council - RDC) on some of the key financial and organisational implications associated with the detailed planning and delivery of the Pebsham Countryside Park project. The report was produced over a four-month period from September to December 2006.

This business plan explores opportunities for securing the funding necessary to develop and then run Pebsham Countryside Park. Issues explored in the document include strategies for covering both the initial capital costs but also longer-term revenue-based activities such as the maintenance of a rights of way network, habitat and landscape improvements and the promotion of a wide range of recreational activities.

The contents of this business plan have been informed by an extensive programme of consultations, including two workshops with elected members and officers of the three local authorities and other stakeholder organisations and a best practice review. Issues raised by the best practice review have been reported separately<sup>1</sup>.

## 1.2 Document Structure

This document is structured as follows:

- Section 2 provides an overview of the project including its aims and objectives, as well as the actual physical developments that are proposed
- Section 3 summarises the findings of a market appraisal previously carried out for the project in 2005<sup>2</sup>
- Section 4 considers the various options open to the project partners in terms of ownership and management and presents a recommended strategy for both the period up to implementation and then post-implementation
- Section 5 considers the various options open to the project partners in terms of staffing the Park and presents a recommended strategy for both the period up to implementation and then post-implementation
- Section 6 reviews the project phasing and identifies those external drivers which will affect the pace of change at Pebsham in the years to come
- Section 7 summarises the likely costs associated with implementation and presents an indicative funding strategy based on our current understanding of the UK funding landscape for countryside heritage projects
- Section 8 looks at the revenue costs that will be incurred in managing the site and in promoting public access to the Park, and reviews the potential to generate income from

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<sup>1</sup> PLB Consulting Ltd with Acorn Consulting Partnership Ltd (November 2006) *Business Plan for Pebsham Countryside Park: Issues Paper*

<sup>2</sup> PLB Consulting Ltd with Acorn Consulting Partnership Ltd (November 2005) *Pebsham Countryside Project Recreational Demands Study Stage 2 Market Analysis Report*



different sources to defray all or some of these costs

- The concluding section identifies the next steps to be undertaken by the partners progressing this initiative.

### 1.3 Memorandum of Risk

This business plan represents the best current estimate of the future direction and potential of the proposed Pebsham Countryside Park. It must be recognised that no business is free from major risks and that few business plans are free from errors of omission or commission.

The proposals put forward in the document for the development and aspirations of the Countryside Park have been developed by taking into account the outcomes of discussions with councillors and officers of the three local authorities.

The findings, recommendations and conclusions detailed in this document are based on a review undertaken from September to December 2006. All illustrative or projected financial estimates contained in this document are indicative and depend on the explicit understanding that no significant changes will occur in the competitive environment, except where noted in this report.

It is expressly understood that the scope of this study and the report excludes the possible impact of planning policy or development control legislation and any other statutory restrictions, rules or regulations that may affect this or other projects of relevance, except where such matters have been brought to our attention and are set out in this document.

The research for this report, which underpins the estimates of future performance of the project, has been undertaken conscientiously and in line with industry norms for studies of this nature. We have taken all reasonable steps to ensure that the assumptions underlying the estimates included in the document are fair and reasonable (and generally conservative) in the light of information made available to the consultancy team. However, we must emphasise that the realisation of the estimates is dependent upon the continuing validity of the assumptions upon which they are based and the quality of the ongoing / future management of the Pebsham Countryside Park project.

In addition, as is normal in engagements of this kind, it is expressly understood that we have not undertaken any assessment of the impact of any major external issues such as political change or upheaval, civil strife, wars and other incidents which may (or may not) occur and which could affect the performance of the project. Accordingly, therefore, we can give no guarantees or warranties (express or implied) that the estimates set out in this report will be achieved.



## 2 Pebsham Countryside Park – An Overview

### 2.1 Background to the Project

In 1993 the North Bexhill Strategic Framework (Supplementary Planning Guidance) advocated the creation of 90 hectares of Countryside Park centred on the landfill site at Pebsham. It also proposed a scheme of countryside management in the urban fringe area to the north of Bexhill. The Consultation Draft for Rother District Local Plan identified an area of approximately 600 hectares in the east of the District to be developed as Pebsham Countryside Park. This area included both the areas from the North Bexhill Strategic Framework.

In 2003 each of the three local authorities concerned with the area (Rother District Council, Hastings Borough Council and East Sussex County Council) appointed two representatives to form the Pebsham Countryside Park Project Steering Group. For the last three years, representatives from the three authorities have been working together to create a vision, masterplan and Development Strategy<sup>3</sup> to secure and oversee the development of the project, which will create a new green space for local residents, visitors to the area and other potential audiences. The Development Strategy was produced following major contributions from the community<sup>4</sup>. There has been widespread support for the project in almost every quarter and as a result the three local authorities have decided to investigate in detail the financial viability of the project.

Pebsham Countryside Park will secure a green gap between Bexhill and Hastings and will function as a major public open space. The vision for the Countryside Park is:

*To create and manage a high quality, sustainable, attractive, accessible and multi-functional countryside area to serve the recreational and economic needs of residents and visitors*

The future Pebsham Countryside Park will significantly enhance public access to an area of more than 600 hectares (1,480 acres) of green space between Bexhill, Hastings and Crowhurst in East Sussex. The aim of the Countryside Park project is to increase provision for a wide range of informal and formal recreational activities across the area, while at the same time as protecting and enhancing the special qualities of this landscape.

The site consists largely of countryside, recreation grounds, the Combe Haven Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and the soon to be restored Pebsham Landfill Site. The area also contains working farmland, mainly pasture and rough grazing on the rural fringes of Bexhill and Hastings. It is traversed by a number of public rights of way and visitors are already welcomed to the Filsham Reedbeds Local Nature Reserve, managed on behalf of the Council by Sussex Wildlife Trust. Large parts of the Combe Haven valley floor function as flood plains, adding to the area's importance for wildlife. Indeed, the biodiversity of the Countryside Park is important at a national level.

The results of public consultation on the project<sup>5</sup> showed that, with the exception of Crowhurst villagers and affected landowners, local people are generally in full support of the Pebsham Countryside Park project, with 88% of respondents from Bexhill and Hastings and those outside the local area saying that they were in favour of the Park. They placed a high

<sup>3</sup> Pebsham Countryside Park Project Steering Group (June 2006) *Development Strategy: Revised Draft*

<sup>4</sup> TK Associates (2006) *What do people want? Community Consultation Report*

<sup>5</sup> TK Associates (2006) *What do people want? Community Consultation Report*



value on making this area a place for nature conservation, wildlife watching and recreational activities, particularly walking, cycling and riding. Younger people (i.e. under-30s) were also keen on these activities but also play facilities and more active sports such as water sports, BMX and skate boarding.

Concerns that were raised during the public consultation exercise included the need for access, parking and traffic to be properly managed. Safety, signage and disabled access would also need to be addressed. It was also felt that the Park must be created and managed for everyone's benefit, without any particular interest or user group being allowed to dominate.

## 2.2 Core Values

At the current time (January 2007) a final decision remains to be agreed on the aims and objectives for the Countryside Park, although the Revised Draft Development Strategy lists the "core" values that will drive the development and management of Pebsham Countryside Park. These are:

- High quality
- Accessibility for all abilities
- Sustainable, in the sense that:
  - Development will be suited to the character of the place
  - Development will follow natural principles, use local and renewable materials and be an example of low carbon dioxide emissions
  - Development should become financially self supporting
- Support the local economy – to be a catalyst for investment and partnerships
- Conserve and enhance the "green gap" between the two towns but strengthen the physical link between them
- Conserve, enhance and celebrate the biodiversity and historic environment of the area, both land and sea
- Generate a creative synergy between the arts and the environment
- Add value to what is currently there – improve the aesthetic resource of the place
- Have a clear identity and improve the image of Bexhill and Hastings
- Be responsive to the needs of the community

During two workshops held with Members and Officers of the three local authorities, it became clear that there remains considerable debate as to the relative priorities of each of these values. What is also evident, however, is the widespread support for emphasis to be placed on delivering significant public benefit and the need to demonstrate value for money, in terms of spending public funds.

## 2.3 Project Description

### 2.3.1 Introduction

This section summarises the description of the proposed project presented in the Revised Draft Development Strategy for the Park, prepared in June 2006. The Development Strategy identifies the following objectives:

- *Retain and enhance the "green gap" between Bexhill and St Leonards on Sea*
- *Retain and enhance the landscape character and integrity of the Combe Haven Valley*
- *Retain and enhance the natural characteristics of the beach at Bulverhythe and Glyne Gap*



- *Retain and enhance the diversity of natural and cultural interest in the area*

The Countryside Park project area falls into four distinct use zones, which, respond to the results of the public consultation and the natural and cultural interest of the area. Whilst ideally managed by the same management body, they will require different development and management policies:

- The Activity Park
- Coastal Park
- Combe Haven Wildlife Area
- Upper Wilting Centre

The Activity Park forms the main “green gap” between Bexhill and St Leonards and this is where recreation and educational opportunities will be maximised. Proposals include a multi-sports activity centre and a “Pebsham Centre” to act as the operational hub for the Park. The main arrival / reception areas and car parking spaces will be provided in this zone.

The Coastal Park is located to the south of the proposed Countryside Park area, covering Glyne Gap and Bulverhythe. Within the Coastal Park, the cultural heritage value of the area will be conserved and interpreted, particularly issues of coastline conservation and defence. Pedestrian and cycle links will be provided between Bexhill and Hastings and into the Activity Park to the north.

The Combe Haven Wildlife Area is a nationally important wildlife area whose primary purpose is nature conservation, including raising and controlling water levels in ditches and allowing natural systems to prevail. Opportunities to view wildlife will be provided, while also ensuring that disturbance is kept to a minimum.

Upper Wilting Farm is on a long-term tenancy from Hastings Borough Council to an Environmental Education Trust, the School Farm and Country Trust (SFCT). Development of the area will rest with the Trust but the Steering Group has identified a number of opportunities to complement the Activity Park and Wildlife Sanctuary.

Future proposed developments in the area that will inevitably impact on the development of the Countryside Park are the Bexhill to Hastings Link Road and a new housing development on land at north Bexhill on the fringes of the Park. There may also be an opportunity to establish a new parkway station at Upper Wilting Farm, which would provide increased opportunities for drawing people into the area and would be constructed after 2016. A feasibility study to test the viability of the proposed station at Upper Wilting to be carried out during 2007. The potential for a station at Glyne Gap, near the Ravenside Retail Park between Bexhill and Hastings, is currently under investigation and may be implemented pre-2016<sup>6</sup> assuming that funding becomes available for the necessary capital works.

### **2.3.2 Access for All**

The objective for public access to the area is to:

- *Maximise opportunities for as wide a range of users as possible, including those with disabilities, to enable them to enjoy the beauty of the coast and countryside and benefit from physical exercise.*

There are a variety of public footpaths in the area, including a branch of the 1066 Country

<sup>6</sup> East Sussex County Council Local Transport Plan 2006-2011





Walk. The aim is to consider the network as a whole, improving existing footpaths and supplementing them to create a purpose built network, which will be designed with people with disabilities in mind. A separate Access Strategy<sup>7</sup> has been produced for the Countryside Park.

### **2.3.3 Water**

According to the Revised Draft Development Strategy for the Project, there is significant support from the community for the recreational use of water in the area. Water areas, which the Steering Group seek to develop for informal recreation and wildlife, include:

- *Improving the wildlife lake and wetland to the east of Pebsham Farm*
- *Create angling, boating lakes and improve the reed beds near Glyne Gap*
- *Create angling ponds on the Combe Haven to the west of the proposed Bexhill-Hastings Link Road*
- *Various unidentified ponds for wildlife conservation throughout the Park and Nature Reserve*
- *Flood management of Combe Haven to benefit wildlife*
- *Improved access to the beach at Glyne Gap*

### **2.3.4 Visitor Attractions**

The strategy is to create a visitor “hub” on the area to the south of the new hill off a redesigned Freshfields Road within the Countryside Park area. This “hub” will be based upon the activities of an urban fringe character and have a strong physical relationship with each other. The objective is:

- *To create a visitor hub of at least regional significance, to attract both specialist and family visitors and serve the local community, which complements existing facilities in Hastings and Bexhill and includes:*
  - *A multi-sports centre with events area*
  - *A sustainable iconic building(s) as a Pebsham Centre*
  - *A link to a new railway station at Glyne Gap*

The Park visitor hub will be the centre of arrival and access to the wider area of the Park and circular access for all routes to more rural fringe based facilities. In particular the Park will provide high quality equestrian activities which are suitable for all levels of ability

### **2.3.5 Education and the Arts**

The Park has a significant contribution to make to formal and informal learning at all levels throughout the Community. The objective is to:

- *Promote the Park, Coastal Park and Wildlife Sanctuary as a centre for environmental learning*

The creation of a well-organised voluntary ranger service to support permanent rangers is seen as important to the Park and the volunteers.

There are major opportunities to engage professional artists and community art in the life of the Park and sanctuary. The objectives are to:

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<sup>7</sup> East Sussex County Council (March 2005) *Pebsham Countryside Park Access Strategy*



- *Maximise opportunities for artistic expression within the Park, particularly sculpture and “land art”*
- *Produce an arts strategy to encourage both professional and community art and arts events within the Countryside Park, Coastal Park and Wildlife Sanctuary to complement the primary purpose of the zones of the area*

### **2.3.6 Local Open Spaces**

The Park has 9.3km of urban edge, most of which is adjacent to residential areas. To help meet the needs of local communities the objectives will be to:

- *Create local open spaces, to include areas for mainly informal play and recreation*
- *Safe spaces for children and young people in particular*
- *Ensure that there are good physical access routes from the neighbourhoods to the open spaces*

## **2.4 Current Land Use**

There are diverse land uses and characteristics within the proposed Park area including privately owned farmland, private businesses, publicly owned recreational spaces, a landfill site (due for closure), a Southern Water wastewater treatment works, a recycling centre (former civic amenities site), a waste transfer facility (formerly a waste-derived fuel plant) and a number of designated protected areas and historical landscapes.

Much of the land to the north of the current landfill site is active agricultural land and access to these areas will have to be strictly managed to minimise negative impacts on the viability of farming.

The southern part of the defined Park area is primarily urban fringe with a number of under-used soccer pitches on land immediately to the north of the main Bexhill – St Leonards road. Once the landfill site has been reclaimed, this and current land to the south will be available for open access recreational provision. The Recreational Demands Study conducted by PLB and Acorn<sup>8</sup> explored scenarios for development.

Protected areas within the proposed Park area include Combe Haven SSSI, comprising extensive areas of wet alluvial meadows and reedbeds, particularly important for wetland wildlife, one of the largest unimproved tracts of this habitat type in the county<sup>9</sup>. Filsham Reedbeds Local Nature Reserve (LNR) is also within the proposed Park area. The LNR is owned by Hastings Borough Council, with the Sussex Wildlife Trust responsible for management work including reed cutting, dredging and control of water levels in the reedbed area<sup>10</sup>. The proposed Park area also contains several Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI) – a non-statutory designation applying to a site of Borough-wide importance.

## **2.5 Current Ownership**

Approximately a third of the land is already owned and managed by the three Local Authorities. Hastings Borough Council owns much of the land in the eastern part of the

<sup>8</sup> Acorn Consulting Partnership Ltd & PLB Consulting Ltd (2005) *Pebsham Countryside Park Project: Recreational Demands Study*

<sup>9</sup> Hastings Borough Council (2004) *Local Plan*

<sup>10</sup> Hastings Borough Council (2004) *Local Plan*



proposed Park. This includes the Activity Park zone and the Upper Wilting Centre zone referred to above. However, representatives of the local authority advise us that it cannot be assumed that any land owned by HBC will be handed over to the Park.

Rother District Council owns a relatively small area of land in the western part of the proposed Park, the majority of which is the route of a disused railway line. The remainder is in private ownership, much of it used as grazing land.

## 2.6 Corporate Strategic Objectives influencing the Project

The following table highlights the key issues and priorities that are relevant to the future development of Pebsham Countryside Park arising from a review of relevant local and regional strategies:

Strategy	Key issues / priorities
<b>Hastings Borough Council</b>	
Parks & Open Spaces Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Borough-wide and neighbourhood provision: green spaces and recreation facilities should be high quality, accessible to all and serve a Borough-wide function in terms of overall image, engendering pride and supporting biodiversity</li> <li>• Community involvement: local spaces should meet local needs</li> <li>• Management and maintenance: green spaces and sport and recreation facilities should be adequately resourced</li> </ul>
Community Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic success: need for improvements to transport links and transport facilities</li> <li>• Health: encouraging exercise</li> <li>• Creating an environment that is a pleasure to live in and visit: achieving long-term waste management by re-using, recycling and composting / providing everyone with access to open space / improving access to, and involvement in, culture and leisure activities / conserving green space</li> </ul>
Local Performance Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Making the town cleaner, greener and healthier, and managing traffic, transport and parking for the benefit of everyone</li> <li>• Increasing opportunities for participation in culture, arts, sports, play, heritage and the natural environment</li> <li>• Increasing opportunities for young people</li> </ul>
Cultural Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protection and good management of open spaces and the individual features which collectively define their character</li> </ul>
Local Development Framework	<p>Work for the core strategy highlighted the following key issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transport</li> <li>• Business and economy (including employment, education, skills and training)</li> <li>• Community safety</li> <li>• Housing</li> <li>• Image of the town</li> <li>• Tourism</li> </ul>
Hastings Local Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic Regeneration – Employment / Town Centres</li> </ul>



Strategy	Key issues / priorities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social Regeneration - Housing</li> <li>• Physical Regeneration – Environment               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Protecting and linking the town's main green spaces to provide an accessible network of recreation, amenity and nature conservation areas</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Integrated Transport               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Continuing to lobby for the improvement of the primary road and rail network</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Working with the Community</li> </ul>
<b>Rother District Council</b>	
Rother District Local Plan	Priorities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing a safe and healthy District</li> <li>• Providing opportunities to meet the social, leisure and cultural needs of the community</li> <li>• Providing for economic growth and employment</li> <li>• Protecting and enhancing the built and natural environment</li> </ul> Key issues: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Major housing development is called for in the area</li> <li>• Poor transport communications inhibit the provision of employment opportunities</li> </ul>
Rother Community Plan	Priorities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community safety</li> <li>• Children and young people</li> <li>• Education and skills</li> <li>• Culture and leisure – the provision of year-round opportunities for both local people and visitors to access and participate in a wide range of culture, sport and leisure activity</li> <li>• Waste and Recycling - to reduce drastically the amount of waste going to landfill across the area. Pebsham landfill site closes in 2007. Increasing recycling and green waste initiatives will be essential</li> <li>• Health – including a reduction in health inequalities across the area</li> <li>• Housing – meeting housing needs and providing affordable housing</li> <li>• Jobs - creating an economic climate with fairly paid jobs for everyone, which will help to improve the quality of people's lives.</li> <li>• Transport – providing improvements to the strategic rail and road networks as well as better access to public transport – especially for education, job opportunities and health services.</li> </ul>
<b>East Sussex County Council</b>	
Council Plan 2006/07	Key objectives include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Raise the prosperity of East Sussex through improved work force skills, enterprise creation, access to funding and increased investment in infrastructure</li> <li>• Create sustainable communities by providing strategic leadership, empowering people and delivering locally</li> </ul>



Strategy	Key issues / priorities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve the way we work with others to improve the quality of life for residents in East Sussex</li> <li>• Improve the health of children and young people</li> <li>• Enhance the enjoyment and improve the achievement of children and young people</li> <li>• Improve the road network</li> <li>• Manage waste in a sustainable way</li> <li>• Make our natural and built environment more pleasurable for the public and support tourism</li> <li>• Use the planning process to achieve sustainable development meeting the needs of people and the economy whilst respecting the environment</li> </ul>
Cultural Strategy	Priorities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promotion, including promoting and celebrating the County's heritage, townscapes and landscapes</li> <li>• Conservation</li> <li>• Employment</li> <li>• Participation in cultural activities</li> <li>• Life long Learning</li> <li>• Infrastructure for cultural development</li> </ul>
<b>SEEDA</b>	
Seafront Strategy	Priorities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attract investment and new employment opportunities</li> <li>• Advance economic and social development</li> <li>• Support a unique, inviting urban and seafront environment</li> </ul>

Clearly these policy documents share many of the same agendas in terms of:

- Improving access to adequately resourced, well managed green spaces and recreational facilities
- Supporting biodiversity
- Encouraging exercise to support healthy communities
- Achieving long-term waste management – by informally educating people about recycling, composting and other green waste initiatives
- Meeting the needs of local people and young people

To maximise opportunities in future funding bids, the Pebsham Countryside Project will need to be able to show that it addresses these key priorities for the sub-region. Creating a good product and service mix at the Countryside Park may be able to help the partners do this. However, evidence from green space projects elsewhere in the UK and overseas suggests that it is probable that ongoing public subsidy will need to be supplemented by revenue generation activities if all objectives for the project are to be delivered.







### 3 Market Appraisal

#### 3.1 Visitor numbers to Country Parks

The figure below provides comparative visitor data for a number of other Country Parks across the South East over the last five years. Hop Farm Country Park in Kent is the most visited Country Park in the South East, attracting over half a million visitors in 2005. Visitor numbers to Country Parks in the South East saw an average increase of 6% between 2004 and 2005, slightly lower than the national average of 7% (based on a sample of 86 Country Parks).

Based on this experience, we are using a target figure for the whole Park at Pebsham of around 150,000 visits per annum *once it has been developed to a stage where it offers a variety of high quality recreational and leisure experiences*. For reference, Hastings Country Park received more than 150,000 car visits during the year to May 2006.

Site	Location	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	% 05/04	Admission 2006
Hop Farm CP	Tonbridge & Malling, Kent	351,000	422,000	452,000	482,000	503,000	4.4%	£7.50 per adult
Queen Elizabeth CP	East Hampshire, Hants	212,780	229,476	268,101	269,623	288,094	6.9%	£1.00-£1.50 per vehicle
Tilgate Park & Nature Centre	Crawley, West Sussex	100,000	279,000	260,000	275,000	280,000	1.8%	£2.50 per vehicle
Itchen Valley CP	Eastleigh, Hants	188,691	200,587	254,573	201,082	232,612	15.7%	£0.50-£2.20 per vehicle
Bewl Water	Tunbridge Wells, Kent	120,000	120,000	200,000	190,000	200,000	5.3%	£5.00 per vehicle
Emberton CP	Olney, Bucks	80,000	90,000	120,000	100,000	100,000	0.0%	£3.00 per vehicle (Apr-Oct)
Staunton CP	Havant, Hants	33,778	70,293	68,464	68,464	71,273	4.1%	£5.00 per adult
Wilderness Wood	Wealden, E Sussex	28,000	28,000	30,000	31,000	34,000	9.7%	£3.00 per adult
Royal Victoria CP	Eastleigh, Hants	318,955	320,690	380,000	420,000	-	-	£1.30-£2.00 per vehicle
Wellington CP	Basingstoke & Dean, Hants	-	72,000	75,000	78,000	-	-	£6.00 per adult
<b>Total throughput (all sites supplying data)</b>		<b>1,433,204</b>	<b>1,832,046</b>	<b>2,108,138</b>	<b>2,115,169</b>	<b>1,708,979</b>		
<b>Average throughput (all sites supplying data)</b>		<b>159,245</b>	<b>183,205</b>	<b>210,814</b>	<b>211,517</b>	<b>213,622</b>		
<b>Average (8 sites supplying data for all five years only)</b>		<b>139,281</b>	<b>179,920</b>	<b>206,642</b>	<b>202,146</b>	<b>213,622</b>		
<b>% change (all sites supplying data for all five years i.e. excluding Royal Victoria CP and Wellington CP)</b>		<b>-</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>-2%</b>	<b>6%</b>		

Source: VisitBritain, Visitor Attraction Trends England 2004 and 2005. Additional analysis by PLB Consulting Ltd



### 3.2 Market demand and opportunities

An analysis of more than 20 potential markets, activities and themes for Pebsham Countryside Park conducted in 2005<sup>11</sup> identified many possible directions for the Park, some of which are relatively modest in aspiration and others that could totally transform the area and its role within the lives of residents and visitors alike.

The summary table presents a graphic overview of the market demand and opportunities for each activity, highlighting those exhibiting greatest demand. These activities are then incorporated into proposed activities and themes for different areas of the Park.

	Need:		Future demand	Opportunities		
	Local	Regional		Business	Social enterprise	Education
<b>Market</b>						
Access for All	L	R	+	√√√	√√√	√√
Education	L		= +	√√	√√√	√√√√√
Local Produce	L	R	+	√√√√	√√√√	√√√√
Sustainability		R	+	√√√√	√√√√	√√√√√
Visitor/short breaks	L	R	+	√√√√√	√	√√√
<b>Activities</b>						
Angling	L		=	√√	√√	√
Multi activity area	L	R	+	√√√	√√	√
BMX/ skateboarding	L	R	+	√√	√√	√
Cycling	L	R	=+	√√	√√	√√
Equestrian	L	R	=	√√√√√	√√	√√√
Farm attractions	L		=+	√√	√√	√√
Football	L		=+	√	√	√√
Orienteering	L		=-	√	√	√√
Table tennis	L		=	√	√	√
Team building	L		+	√√√√	√	√√
Walking	L	R	+	√√√	√	√√
Water sports	L		=+	√√	√	√√
Wildlife		R	=+	√√	√√	√√√√
<b>Themes</b>						
Art	L	R	=	√√	√√√	√√√√
Education	L		=	√√	√√√	√√√√√
Sustainability	L	R	+	√√	√√√	√√√√

Source: PLB Consulting Ltd with Acorn Consulting Partnership Ltd (November 2005) *Pebsham Countryside Project Recreational Demands Study Stage 2 Market Analysis Report*

#### Key

Need L Local Future + Increasing Opportunities √ Minimal  
R Regional demand = Constant √√√√√ Maximum  
- Decreasing

Activities and themes for the different areas of the Park are identified in the matrix presented

<sup>11</sup> PLB Consulting Ltd with Acorn Consulting Partnership Ltd (November 2005) *Pebsham Countryside Project Recreational Demands Study Stage 2 Market Analysis Report*



below.

<b>Development</b>	<b>All areas</b>	<b>South</b>	<b>North</b>
<i>Core activities</i>	Walking: extensive footpath network - way marked, themed routes, jogging  Nature interpretation  Events  Cycling	Well-maintained public RoW  Nature trail  Events field  Multi-activity area: Adventure playground Bouldering wall BMX/ Skate park Cycle/MTB trails	Well-maintained public RoW  Wildlife  Events for specific activities  Equestrian  Team building activities, accommodation
<i>Visitor facilities</i>	Ranger service (paid, supported by volunteers)  Public transport links	Visitor centre Catering facility Car parks	Farm attraction
<i>Additional development potential</i>	Education and learning  Sustainability	Accommodation  Inland water sports  Sports club building to house clubs, bar, table tennis	Angling  Local produce  Orienteering course

Source: PLB Consulting Ltd with Acorn Consulting Partnership Ltd (November 2005) *Pebsham Countryside Project Recreational Demands Study Stage 2 Market Analysis Report*

There is the potential for the public art theme identified previously to be integrated into every aspect of design and development at Pebsham.

A summary of market demand issues affecting each activity for which provision will be made at Pebsham is presented below.

### 3.3 Recreational Activities

#### 3.3.1 Angling

Angling has one of the highest rates of participation of any sports activity in the UK, although growth appears to be static. It fits well with other recreational activities and there is a crossover between freshwater and sea fishing. Local and visitor demand seems to be strong; there are five fisheries in the area but no facilities at Combe Haven with the current use unmanaged. Fishing is popular amongst young people aged 12 to 16 years and locally the *Fishing for You* project in Hastings has successfully engaged over 500 young people from deprived wards.

*Recommendation:* Manage current use. Expand facilities if greater expanse of inland water



created.

### **3.3.2 Artificial adventure sports area**

Demand for adventure sports continues to rise, particularly for mountaineering amongst 18 to 35 year old men. Mountaineers regularly participate in other outdoor activities such as mountain biking, running, photography that could also be provided for within the PCPP. Demand for bungee jumping is growing, and there are no clubs in Sussex or Kent; caving is in decline. Adventure playgrounds provide a supplementary draw for the family market.

*Recommendation:* Adventure playground and artificial climbing/bouldering provision with distinctive/artistic design. Potential to develop multi activity adventure sports area commercially or under park management.

### **3.3.3 BMX and skateboarding**

BMX is experiencing resurgence and becomes an Olympic sport in 2008, with freestyle BMX and skateboarding becoming Olympic events in 2012. The demand for both sports is usually from younger boys and teenagers, and local operators consider there is a need for a track of international standard.

*Recommendation:* Potential to provide international quality track to serve local demand and encourage youth participation in new Olympic sport. Facilities could be included in multi sport activity area.

### **3.3.4 Cycling**

The demand for leisure and family cycling outweighs the supply of safe cycle routes and trails. Where good trails have been developed local and visitor cycling activity has increased. Demand is also growing for more specialist provision i.e., for mountain biking and cyclo-cross tracks.

*Recommendation:* Improve the trail network for the PCPP and link it to the National Cycle Network and proposed Greenway. Investigate requirements for a mountain bike cross country circuit, cyclo-cross course (used in winter) and a 'North Shore' course in the more wooded part of the site, with a further link to the Sustrans route at Glyne Gap and the cycleway to Bexhill seafront.

### **3.3.5 Equestrian**

Regionally strategies support demand to improve equestrian facilities for the short break markets that could help extend the visitor season. Locally there is strong demand for an improved network of bridleways. Development of international level competition facilities is not appropriate but there is scope for increasing local and regional events for some disciplines e.g. driving. This could benefit both specialist and disabled users.

*Recommendation:* Build on existing local product, undertake detailed audit of existing equestrian interests of landowners within PCPP and the surrounding area to assess areas for development that could be of mutual benefit. Explore ways in which different user groups, particularly deprived groups, could use improved equestrian facilities. Provide network of bridleways/ pay rides within the countryside park to allow local equestrian businesses, their customers and other riders to enjoy the area.



### **3.3.6 Farm attractions**

Farm attractions are becoming increasingly popular as farmers look for ways to diversify and rural tourism grows. They need to be well managed and marketed to be successful but can combine a range of activities particularly for children. Successful examples include Farmer Palmer's Farm Park, Dorset<sup>12</sup>, the Middle Farm Countryside Centre near Lewes<sup>13</sup> and Staunton Country Park, Hampshire<sup>14</sup>.

*Recommendation:* An opportunity for landowners.

### **3.3.7 Football**

The sport is well supported by Sport England who runs schemes to encourage participation; girls' football is growing particularly fast. The local sports strategy helped justify the case for the improvement of the pitches at Bexhill Road Recreational Ground, which had experienced drainage problems. It also states that no pitches should be disposed of or granted change of use.

*Recommendation:* Use the PCPP as an opportunity to stimulate increased use of the pitches on Bexhill Road.

### **3.3.8 Orienteering**

Orienteering is not a growth sport, but uses natural landscape with respect and little disturbance. Permanent markers take up little space, fit in with the local environment and would generally go unnoticed by other Park users.

*Recommendation:* A permanent orienteering/wayfaring course in the Park could be used by the local clubs and schools for practice and events (local and regional), causing little disturbance to the other users or wildlife.

### **3.3.9 Table Tennis**

The English Table Tennis Association is based in Hastings and there is a strong club and league structure in the area, although activity is hindered by the poor facilities. The ETTA wants to develop new facilities in the area to house their offices and permanent halls for training camps, competition, local clubs and leagues. In early 2005 they indicated that they could bring funding of up to £500,000 to the project, as well as their own in-house architect and funding expertise.

*Recommendation:* Initiate discussions with the ETTA to establish whether their plans and time scales could be incorporated into the development of a multi-sports pavilion at PCP.

### **3.3.10 Team building**

Providing corporate conference and team building facilities is a growing business opportunity for the Park. Targeting conference and team building at the local business market could link well with providing facilities for education, farmer diversification and accommodation opportunities and promoting a sustainability theme for the site. Alternatively, a specialised high profile team building facility could appeal to a larger SE/London corporate market and further afield from the UK or other European countries.

<sup>12</sup> [www.farmerpalmer.co.uk](http://www.farmerpalmer.co.uk) 2006 Farm Attraction of the Year

<sup>13</sup> [www.middlefarm.com](http://www.middlefarm.com)

<sup>14</sup> [www.hants.gov.uk/countryside/staunton/index.html](http://www.hants.gov.uk/countryside/staunton/index.html)





*Recommendation:* Further research to establish how team building and conferences could fit with other educational facilities and accommodation.

### **3.3.11 Walking**

The walking market is extensive and includes all social groups, although the higher spending ABC1 market is predominant. The coast and AONB landscapes adjacent to the Park provide competition for walking opportunities at Pebsham.

*Recommendation:* Develop a distinctive product and atmosphere to attract wider audience than local users by creating a focus for the start/end of 1066 walk and links to coast. Provide for and market fully accessible footpaths within the Park, with specific project opportunities targeting walking for health and similar initiatives.

### **3.3.12 Water sports**

There is a demand for water sports in general often driven by the provision of facilities. Canoeing is most popular, followed by rowing, then windsurfing and sailing. Interest in sub-aqua is growing. Improved water sports facilities for training and general recreation would appeal to the visitor market, however PCP's location on the coast lends itself to developing sea-based sports rather than inland water sports, which would compete with Bewl Water to the north.

*Recommendation:* Sea: a slip way would need to be built at Glyne Gap for further development of sea-based water sports including sub-aqua. Inland: a small lake could provide a focus for the Park and provide for local need with sail sports training and flat water canoeing, particularly for beginners and the disabled. Information: details of water sports provision in the area could be provided through a visitor information service.

### **3.3.13 Wildlife**

Wildlife tourism is a potential growth market with increased general interest amongst the public towards the natural environment and high growth in bird watching.

*Recommendation:* Public rights of way need to be designed to maximise wildlife viewing. There is scope to develop a co-ordinated marketing strategy and possibly a visitor centre for Combe Haven, Pevensey and Pett Levels, Rye Bay Nature Reserve and Romney Marsh providing a central focus for interpretation of the wide variety of habitats within these five distinct areas. A centre could also house facilities for courses, field studies, guided nature tours and school visits.

### **3.3.14 Events**

The recreation grounds off Bexhill Road are already used on an occasional basis for events such as model airplane racing and displays, hot air balloon gatherings and other activities. These are reported to draw from mainly a local and sub-regional audience.

*Recommendation:* It is strongly recommended that a full events strategy is developed for Pebsham Countryside Park that exploits all of the physical characteristics of the park – open spaces, trails, water bodies etc.



## 4 Ownership & Management

### 4.1 Ownership

#### 4.1.1 Current state

Approximately a third of the land covered by the proposals for the Pebsham Countryside Park is already local authority owned and managed. Hastings Borough Council owns much of the land in the eastern part of the proposed Park. This includes the Activity Park zone and the Upper Wilting Centre zone referred to above.

Rother District Council owns a relatively small area of land in the western part of the proposed Park, the majority of which is the route of a disused railway line. The remainder is in private ownership, much of it used as grazing land.

#### 4.1.2 Options available

There are a number of options available in terms of future landownership of the Park area. These are:

- Retain the status quo
- Use Compulsory Purchase Orders and other mechanisms to secure all land into public ownership
- Undertake a selective land assembly programme that ensures those tracts of land most valuable to the Park in terms of helping to deliver its objectives can be secured in public ownership
- Vest ownership of all or some of the existing public land in a separate trust, to allow the local authorities to take a more arms length approach to their involvement

Strengths and weaknesses of each of the above are considered below:

<b>Option</b>	<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
Status quo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No capital funds needed for land acquisition</li> <li>• Can build on existing land management practices</li> <li>• Ties private landowners into the project</li> <li>• Allows incremental approach to project development</li> <li>• Allows project partners to negotiate local access agreements where needed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will require strong management by public sector to ensure private sector partners sign up to the project</li> <li>• Risk of unsuitable uses appearing if land changes hands privately</li> </ul>
All land in public ownership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All land management activities can be synchronised with public sector objectives for the Park</li> <li>• Allows creation of a single, strong identity for the Park</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will require major capital sums to purchase land from existing owners</li> <li>• Knowledge of acquisition programme may push up 'hope value' of the land</li> <li>• Public opposition to CPOs may result in bad press for the project</li> </ul>



<b>Option</b>	<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
Selective land assembly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Activity can be phased to reflect resource availability</li> <li>• Most likely to appeal to local landowners looking to divest some land in return for tax breaks etc. or for philanthropic reasons</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funds may not be available when suitable plots come on the market</li> </ul>
Transfer public land to separate Trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allows local authority to take an arms length approach to involvement</li> <li>• May unlock sources of funds not available to local authorities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No existing organisation willing to take on ownership without a guarantee of revenue support or an endowment to cover land management costs</li> <li>• Possible loss of local democratic control over the project</li> </ul>

### **4.1.3 Recommended strategy**

Having considered the above scenarios for land ownership, it is recommended that the following strategy is adopted:

Pebsham Countryside Park should be developed incrementally, building on the existing 'patchwork' ownership situation. A selective and targeted programme of land acquisition should be developed to ensure that all important recreational facilities are under public sector control, with management inputs from the voluntary sector where appropriate. A comprehensive strategy for the involvement of private landowners should be developed to ensure delivery of a coherent and integrated management plan for the Park.

## **4.2 Management**

### **4.2.1 Current state**

A number of organisations are currently involved in managing land within the boundary of the proposed Countryside Park:

- East Sussex County Council:
  - Maintains Public Right of Way network
  - Maintains landfill site
- Hasting Borough Council:
  - Employs the Countryside Ranger based in the area
  - Countryside team occasionally active in the area
  - Maintains pitches at southern end of the site
  - Environmental Services (litter collection etc)
- Rother District Council
  - Environmental Services (litter collection etc)
  - Responsibility for maintaining railway line
- Sussex Wildlife Trust:
  - Manages the Filsham Reedbeds Local Nature Reserve
- English Heritage



- Manages wreck of Amsterday in Coastal Zone
- Private landowners (farmers, Southern Water, landfill operator)
- Commercial organisations (e.g. leaseholders of Pebsham Riding School)

#### 4.2.2 Options available

In order to deliver a high quality recreational experience, it is essential to have an organisational structure that is fit for purpose. This is particularly necessary given the proposal for multiple ownership (public and private sector) of the assets that will be included within the Countryside Park.

A comparator review carried out to advise this business plan<sup>15</sup> identified a range of possible approaches to co-ordinating the management of the countryside Park:

- Partnership of local authorities with private landowner input
- Existing trust to take on responsibility to manage whole facility
- New community land trust formed to manage whole facility
- Creation of a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) to formalise relationship between the three local authorities
- Private sector leisure operator contracted to manage whole Park

Strengths and weaknesses of each of the above are considered below:

<b>Option</b>	<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
Partnership of local authorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Builds on existing structures and relationships</li> <li>• Would permit seamless transition from current arrangements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Officer time and resources will be under pressure from other activities and priorities</li> <li>• Unlikely to deliver major additional funding</li> <li>• May be difficult to establish a 'Champion' to drive project forward</li> </ul>
Existing Trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Would benefit from existing skills in the selected Trust</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unlikely to be an attractive proposition to them without guaranteed revenue support</li> <li>• Trust priorities may differ from those of partners'</li> </ul>
New Community Land Trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structure can be tailor-made to desired outcomes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unlikely to be attractive proposition to them without guaranteed revenue support</li> <li>• Possible loss of local democratic control over the project</li> <li>• May take time to recruit suitable trustees and staff</li> </ul>
SPV	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structure can be tailor-made to desired outcomes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Costly to establish and maintain</li> </ul>
Private sector leisure operator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will be very market focused</li> <li>• May bring funds for investment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public sector social policy objectives will take second place to search for profits</li> </ul>

<sup>15</sup> Presented in the Issues Paper submitted November 2006



Having reviewed the above options, and in the light of feedback received during a programme of workshops with elected members and officers of the three local authorities, the preferred strategy is to proceed with the existing partnership of the three local authorities (East Sussex, Hastings, Rother) and build on its success to date. Relationships will be formalised through a structure that includes a properly constituted Management Board and an executive committee (see below).

### **4.2.3 Recommended Strategy**

The recommended strategy for managing the Pebsham Countryside Park project is as follows:

- Creation of a formally constituted Management Board that includes representation from the three local authorities (elected members), relevant government agencies (e.g. Natural England, Sport England), local landowners and the Chair of the proposed Friends' group (see below). Maximum membership approx. 20 people, with an independent Chair appointed for an initial three-year period. The Board would meet at least twice a year to monitor progress and agree future strategic direction. One meeting would include a public meeting at which anyone can question the Board on activities at the Park, and would provide a forum for local interest groups to input their views into future strategy for the Park. The Board would agree the Management Plan for the Park and prepare an annual budget for implementation, reporting back on progress towards meeting the Management Plan objectives to the three local authorities and other funding agencies
- Creation of an Executive Committee of officers from the three authorities and representatives of other organisations delivering conservation and public access activities at the site (e.g. Sussex Wildlife Trust). The Executive Committee would meet 6 times a year to ensure all aspects of the management plan and development plan are being delivered. The Committee would be bound by the Management Board's budget and would be expected to deliver the Management Plan objectives within the resources available. The team of rangers appointed to help manage and deliver activity on the ground will report to the Executive Committee through the Senior Ranger, who may attend Executive Committee meetings
- Creation of a number of Technical Panels on which will sit individuals with a particular interest in guiding strategy for the delivery of different aspects of work at Pebsham. Suggested panels include:
  - Conservation and environment (i.e. conservation benefit)
  - Access, interpretation and recreation (i.e. public benefit)
  - Tourism and business development (i.e. commercial benefit)

The Technical Panels would be directed by, and report to, the Executive Committee during the final stages of planning for the project and once the Park is operational. There may be some cross-over in membership of the Executive Committee and the Specialist Panels. Panels would meet on a quarterly basis, and would play a key role in helping prepare the initial Management Plan and subsequent revisions. Local commercial interests would be represented on all relevant Technical Panels

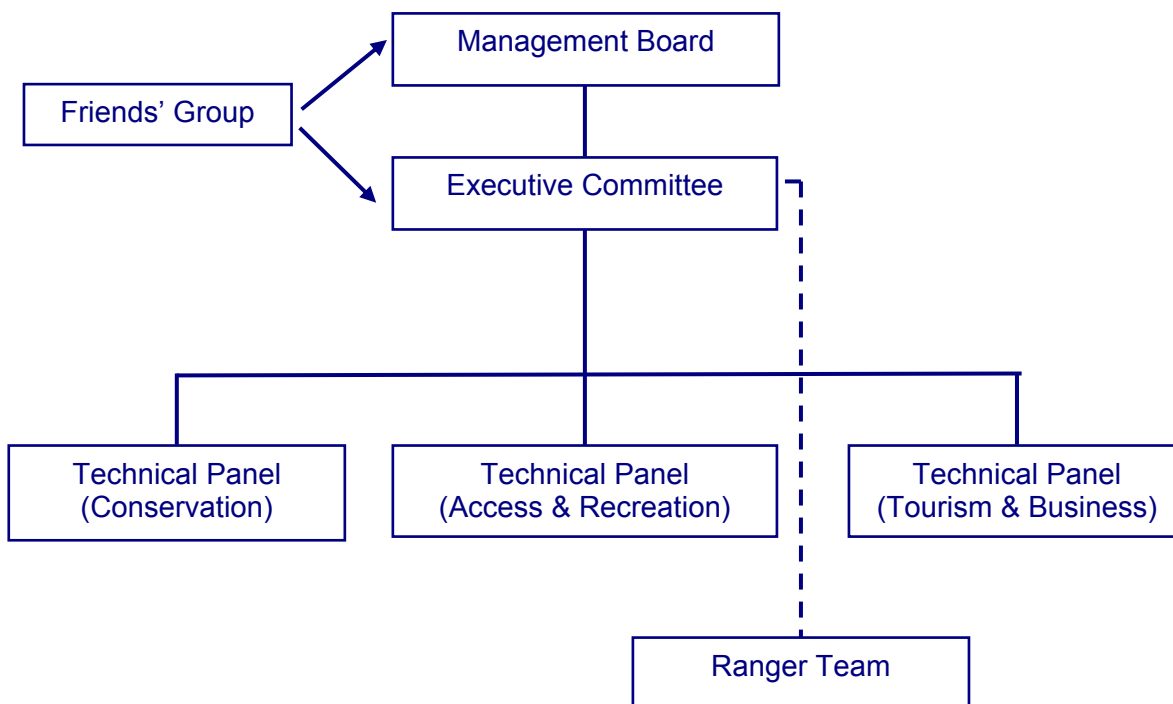
- Establishment of a Friends' Group as a separate organisation with Charitable Status. The role of the Friends' Group would be to raise funds for specific projects at the



Park, and to act as a conduit for public interest in the project. Friends could also provide volunteers for tasks such as clearing vegetation, paths maintenance, escorting guided walks etc.

In preparing the business plan, an allowance of £10,000 per annum should be allocated to cover costs of resourcing the meetings of the Management Board, Executive Committee and Specialist Panels.

The proposed structure is illustrated below.









## 5 Staffing

### 5.1.1 Current State

At present, one member of staff is employed at the Park, in the role of Countryside Ranger. Responsibilities include minor conservation and access works, interpretation and wardening/policing and, very importantly, liaison with landowners and public.

In addition, there are major officer inputs being expended on planning for the Park.

### 5.1.2 Options Available

The key options available for servicing the maintenance, promotion and management needs of the Countryside Park once it is established can be met through a number of means:

- On-site local authority team, dedicated to Pebsham
- Off-site local authority team, working at Pebsham as and when required
- Volunteers programme, providing inputs as and when required
- By contracting out all services to an external organisation

Pros and cons of each option are presented below:

<b>Option</b>	<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
On-site team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Permanent presence on site</li> <li>• Can respond to issues as they arrive</li> <li>• Provides increased security compared to other options</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will require considerable investment in salaries and associated personnel costs</li> <li>• Will require a physical base, increasing initial capital and then running costs</li> </ul>
Off-site team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less resource intensive than an on-site team</li> <li>• May not require a permanent base on site, thus reducing initial capital costs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May not be able to respond quickly to urgent requirements</li> <li>• No day-to-day contact with public</li> </ul>
Volunteers only	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Should be deliverable at far lower costs to public sector than other options</li> <li>• May bring in particular skills not available in a normal work team</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Management time/cost to recruit and manage volunteers</li> <li>• Level and quality of inputs cannot be guaranteed</li> <li>• Interest may fall off over time</li> <li>• Possible issues over public liability insurance, H&amp;S responsibilities etc.</li> <li>• Group may fold, leaving landowners and users in a vacuum</li> </ul>



<b>Option</b>	<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
External organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Precise terms of engagement can be drawn up under a management contract</li> <li>Organisation may be able to benefit from economies of scale if linked in with management activities at nearby sites</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Will require regular monitoring of progress by Management Board</li> <li>Management contract may be so tight as to lose opportunity for flexible working and spontaneous reactions to emerging opportunities</li> </ul>

### **5.1.3 Recommended strategy**

The recommended strategy is a site-based team of three staff (1 FTE Senior Ranger, 2 FTE Rangers) who will carry out all site management tasks between them. This is a significant increase on the current staffing level of 0.5 FTE ranger currently allocated to Pebsham. It remains to be agreed who will employ the Rangers once the Park is fully operational.

When recruiting the team, it would be helpful to secure the services of individuals with different areas of professional interest (e.g. habitat protection, access and interpretation, education) so as to meet the needs of the Park's varied stakeholders. It is recommended that all three rangers are in situ within three years.

When necessary, it may be necessary to buy in specialist support e.g. tree surgeons, ecological surveyors etc.

Revenue costs associated with this strategy are estimated as follows (2006 prices)

<b>Item</b>	<b>£</b>	<b>£ total</b>
Senior Ranger (salary)	£ 25,000	
Ranger 1 (salary)	£ 18,000	
Ranger 2 (salary)	£ 18,000	
<b>Sub-total, salaries</b>		<b>£ 61,000</b>
NI, Pensions etc. (25%)	£ 15,250	
<b>Sub-total, personnel costs</b>		<b>£ 76,250</b>
Training, uniforms, travel etc	£ 5,000	
Materials	£ 10,000	
Vehicle	£ 10,000	
<b>Sub-total, other outlays</b>		<b>£25,000</b>
<b>Total</b>		<b>£101,250</b>

The costs above exclude central overheads that might be incurred by the local authority employers.

This investment in ranger service at Pebsham is likely to be phased in over time, with the possible phasing of investment being as follows:



	2007/8	2008/9	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
FTE posts	0.5	1	2	2	3	3
Salary cost <sup>16</sup>	£ 12,500	£ 25,750	£ 44,523	£ 45,858	£ 65,234	£ 67,191
NI, Pension costs (25%)	£ 6,250	£ 6,438	£ 11,131	£ 11,465	£ 16,308	£ 16,798
Training, uniforms	£ 1,000	£ 2,000	£ 3,500	£ 3,500	£ 5,000	£ 5,000
Materials	£ 2,000	£ 4,000	£ 7,000	£ 7,000	£ 10,000	£ 10,000
Vehicle	£ 5,000	£ 5,000	£ 10,000	£ 10,000	£ 10,000	£ 10,000
<b>Total outlay</b>	<b>£ 26,750</b>	<b>£ 43,188</b>	<b>£ 76,153</b>	<b>£ 77,823</b>	<b>£ 106,542</b>	<b>£ 108,989</b>

These costs are used to advise the financial appraisal presented in section 9.

<sup>16</sup> Increases by 3% per annum for posts already *in situ*





## 6 Project Phasing

### 6.1 Factors affecting Project Phasing

There are a number of key factors affecting the implementation stage of the Pebsham Countryside Park Project (PCPP) including:

- The commencement on-site of activities by Veolia in 2007
- The proposed exit of Biffa from the site in 2008
- The programmed opening of the new link road across the northern end of the site in 2010
- The need to spend the £300,000 or so funds available from Southern Water under the Section 106 agreement by 2010
- Occupancy of the first phase of housing in North East Bexhill during 2011 (eventually, well in excess of 1,000 new households will live in this area providing an additional audience for the Park)
- The anticipated opening of a new rail station at Glyne Gap on the southern periphery of the Park in 2015, providing additional public transport access to the seafront

Benefits of adopting a phased approach are as follows:

- It allows the project team to respond to the above major external drivers for change, as well as associated funding and resourcing issues
- It allows continued market testing and refinement of project proposals
- It increases the opportunity to bring in commercial partners (e.g. a potential investor for the pub chain)

### 6.2 Proposed Phasing of Investment

The proposed phasing of investment, with key milestones, is as follows:

- |         |   |
|---------|---|
| 2007-09 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minor investment in additional access works</li> <li>• Establishment of Management Board, Executive Committee, Technical Panels, Friends' Organisation</li> <li>• Continuation of fundraising</li> </ul> |
| 2009-10 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Major access route project, installation of provision for outdoor recreational activities</li> </ul>   |
| 2011/12 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pebsham Centre opens</li> </ul>  |
| 2014/15 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Environmental Education Centre opens<sup>17</sup></li> </ul>   |

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<sup>17</sup> This centre could in fact be developed at any time, as resources and a site become available







## 7 Project Costs

### 7.1 Capital Costs

Costs associated with delivering the Development Plan for Pebsham Countryside Park remain outline at this stage, and the amounts presented below may be readjusted as proposals are refined. The sums contained in the matrix below have been drawn from previous reports prepared for the Pebsham project, other information provided by the three stakeholder councils and from experience of other countryside recreation development projects.

The four phases identified below are based on an assessment of factors governing the availability of funds and the need to market test some project proposals, and should be interpreted as follows:

- Phase 1: essential investment, to be made between 2007 and 2009, when landfill site becomes available
- Phase 2: desirable investment in a high quality network of access routes around the site, to be made between 2008 and 2010, when link road construction is underway
- Phase 3: desirable investment in recreation provision and associated visitors to be made between 2009 and 2011
- Phase 4: aspirational investment, to be made from 2010 onwards, as North East Bexhill developments are underway and Section 106 agreement funds become available

Activities	Phase	Capital Costs		Notes
		Low	High	
<b>General investment requirements</b>				
Access for all routes	1	£ 100,000	£ 200,000	Nominal sum
Enhance wildlife	1	£ 50,000	£ 100,000	Nominal sum
Create branded 'core' identity	1	£ 10,000	£ 25,000	Nominal sum
Ranger base	1	£ 10,000	£ 25,000	Nominal sum for small 'defensible' building
Signposting to and around Park	1	£ 30,000	£ 50,000	Nominal sum
Initial landscape design for visitor hub	2	£ 25,000	£ 50,000	Nominal sum
<b>Sub-total, phase 1</b>		<b>£ 225,000</b>	<b>£ 480,000</b>	
<b>Access</b>				
Network of accessible trails	2	£ 3,000,000	£5,000,000	From ESCC
Re-route Freshfield Road access	2	£ 200,000	£ 500,000	Nominal sum
Car parks x 3 (including Park Centre)	2	£ 400,000	£ 400,000	£100 per m <sup>2</sup> , 200 spaces in all, 20 m <sup>2</sup> per space
<b>Sub-total, phase 2</b>		<b>£ 3,600,000</b>	<b>£5,900,000</b>	



Activities	Phase	Capital Costs		Notes
		Low	High	
<b>Multi-sport activity centre</b>				
Cycle sports, inc BMX	3	£ 25,000	£ 100,000	<i>Figures from RDS: Outline Business Case p.9</i>
Skateboarding	3	£ 200,000	£ 450,000	<i>Figures from RDS: Outline Business Case p.10</i>
Bouldering & climbing	3	£ 20,000	£ 150,000	<i>Figures from RDS: Outline Business Case p.11</i>
Adventure play area	3	£ 10,000	£ 340,000	<i>Figures from RDS: Outline Business Case p.12</i>
<b>Pebsham Centre - iconic building</b>				
Building construction costs	3	£ 2,000,000	£ 3,000,000	<i>Based on 1,500m<sup>2</sup>; Low - £1,333 m<sup>2</sup>; High - £2,000 m<sup>2</sup>; would need to be high+ for iconic building</i>
Education facilities: wildlife, interpret 'waste story' (design & fit out)	3	£ 50,000	£ 200,000	<i>Based on industry standard of £2,500 to £5,000 per m<sup>2</sup> for interpretive planning &amp; fit out, and an exhibition area of between 20 and 40 m<sup>2</sup></i>
Conference & seminar suite (fit out)	3	£ 10,000	£ 20,000	<i>Nominal sum</i>
Restaurant/ café (fit out)	3	£ 50,000	£ 100,000	<i>Experience elsewhere suggests this is sufficient for a basic kitchen and 50 cover café</i>
Community facilities (fit out)	3	£ 5,000	£ 10,000	<i>Nominal sum</i>
Admin centre for Park & Nature Reserve (fit out)	3	£ 5,000	£ 10,000	<i>Nominal sum</i>
Retail area (fit out)	3	£ 5,000	£ 10,000	<i>Nominal sum</i>
Improvement works to sports pitches to create large event area	3	£ 50,000	£ 100,000	<i>Nominal sum</i>
Informal play and recreation areas x 4	3	£ 50,000	£ 100,000	<i>Nominal sum</i>
Good physical access routes to open spaces	3	£ 50,000	£ 100,000	<i>Nominal sum</i>
<b>Sub-total, phase 3</b>		<b>£2,470,000</b>	<b>£ 4,390,000</b>	
<b>Phase 4</b>				
Footpath link to new station at Glyne Gap	3	£ 25,000	£ 50,000	<i>Nominal sum</i>
Pebsham Farm – environmental education centre	3	£ 500,000	£ 1,000,000	<i>Nominal sum</i>
<b>Sub-total, phase 4</b>		<b>£ 525,000</b>	<b>£1,050,000</b>	
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>£6,850,000</b>	<b>£11,790,000</b>	



## 7.2 Phasing of investment

Based on the proposed timescale, the likely phasing of investment requirements is as follows:

Phase	Timescale	Amount	Mid-point
Phase 1: Essential	2007 - 2009	£225,000 - £450,000	£337,500
Phase 2: Desirable	2008 – 2010	£3.6 - £5.9 million	£4.75 million
Phase 3: Desirable	2009 - 2011	£2.47 - £4.39 million	£3.43 million
Phase 4: Aspirational	2010 onwards	£0.525 - £1.05 million	£787,500
<b>Total</b>		<b>£6.82 - £11.79 million</b>	<b>£9.31 million</b>

## 7.3 Proposed Capital Funding Strategy

At present there remains some uncertainty about potential sources of funding for some of the capital works, particularly in the longer term. What is presented below provides an initial indication of where capital resources might be secured, particularly in the final stages of planning for the project. A more sophisticated funding strategy should be prepared once agreement has been reached amongst all stakeholders on the proposed phasing of development, and particularly on the size and quality of the Pebsham Centre building that will be provided at some stage. It will be essential to employ not only a full time Project Manager but also a full-time fundraising team to

Item	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4	Total contribution
<i>Sum required</i>	£337,500	£4,750,000	£3,430,000	£787,500	£9,305,000
<b>Sums known to be available</b>					
Southern Water	£50,000				£50,000
Waste Water Treatment Works funds	£150,000	£200,000			£350,000
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>£200,000</b>	<b>£200,000</b>	<b>£ -</b>	<b>£ -</b>	<b>£400,000</b>
<b>Predicted funding</b>					
NE Bexhill Section 106 (estimate, based on £1,000/ house and 1,100 houses)		£1,100,000			£1,100,000
Contribution from BHLR development (nominal value)		£1,000,000			£1,000,000
INTERREG		£400,000	£ 600,000		£1,000,000
Other regeneration funds		£1,500,000	£ 100,000		£1,600,000
LA contributions	£50,000	£300,000	£ 100,000	£ 200,000	£650,000
Environmental trusts				£ 100,000	£100,000
Sport England Lottery Fund		£250,000			£250,000
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>£50,000</b>	<b>£4,550,000</b>	<b>£800,000</b>	<b>£300,000</b>	<b>£5,700,000</b>
<b>Total funds available</b>	<b>£250,000</b>	<b>£4,750,000</b>	<b>£800,000</b>	<b>£300,000</b>	<b>£6,100,000</b>
<b>Funding gap</b>	<b>£87,500</b>	<b>£0</b>	<b>£2,630,000</b>	<b>£487,000</b>	<b>£3,205,000</b>



What this initial outline funding strategy demonstrates is that the successful implementation of the whole project will be very dependent on securing major sums (or support in kind) from the Section 106 agreement for the NE Bexhill housing project and the Bexhill-Hastings Link Road (both of which will also facilitate access to the site for local people as well as generate enabling funding for the Park's development).

The project will also be dependent on securing substantial funds from regeneration bodies, since few of the project components are eligible for support from any of the lottery distribution agencies etc.

Given the longer-term development timescale for the Environmental Education Centre at Upper Wilting Farm, this offers a key opportunity for a tailored fund-raising programme targeting environmental trusts etc.

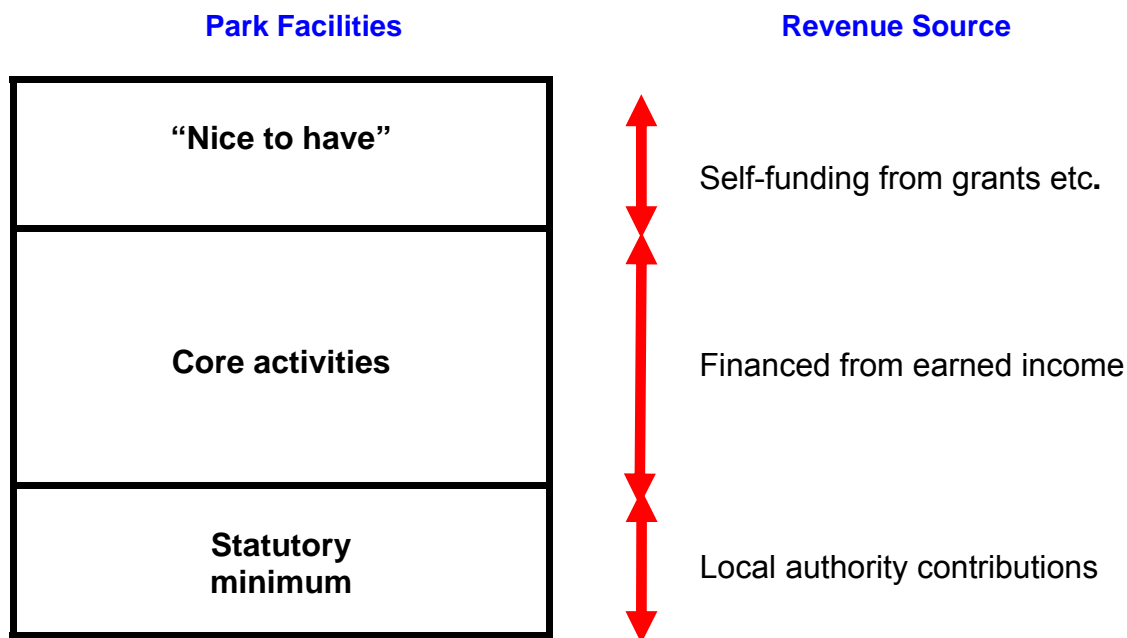


## 8 Financial Review

### 8.1 Introduction

Following extensive discussions during the plan preparation process, it was agreed that the Park project should, as far as possible, be financially self-sustaining. It was recognised that there are some statutory responsibilities (e.g. maintaining public rights of way) that must be funded whether or not the Park project proceeds. However, many of the other areas of anticipated spending are optional and may only be funded if there is a committed revenue stream of sufficient value to remove or significantly reduce the need for a long-term public subsidy. There are also some initiatives that might be carried out at the Park that are not central to the project's core objectives and which in all likelihood will only take place if they bring their own funding with them.

This conceptual approach to breaking down the revenue-funding requirements is illustrated below.



### 8.2 Expenditure

#### 8.2.1 Current Spending on Management and Maintenance

At present the three authorities are committed to spending the equivalent of more than £80,000 supporting the development project for the Park and in managing the assets within the Park. This spending is broken down as follows:

- £18,000 from Hastings BC for the Pebsham Project
- £18,000 from East Sussex CC for the Pebsham Project
- £18,000 from Rother DC for the Pebsham Project
- £1,000 spent on public Right of Way maintenance by East Sussex CC
- £79,000 spent by Hastings BC on managing the Bexhill Road recreation ground
- £17,000 in support in kind (mainly staff time) from East Sussex CC
- £2,000 support in kind for staff time incurred by Hastings BC employees





- £5,500 support in kind for staff time incurred by Rother DC employees

This is a total of **£158,500 (£78,500** of which is financial support and in-kind support from the three partners), and excludes any allowance for the costs incurred by Hastings BC in managing the landfill site. It also excludes the costs incurred by Sussex Wildlife Trust in managing the local nature reserve at the Reed Beds, which is carried out under contract to the local authority.

### **8.2.2 Anticipated Spending once Operational**

Once operational, there will inevitably be an increase in the scale of spending on managing the Park. The main areas of spending are outlined below (2006 prices except where otherwise stated):

<b>Item</b>	<b>£ per annum</b>	<b>Note</b>
<b>Spending during final development stage<sup>18</sup> (i.e. 2007/08 and 2008/09)</b>		
Staffing	£ 27,000 upwards	see Section 5
Maintenance of Bexhill Road Recreation Ground	£ 84,000	5% increase on current budget to reflect larger sum for contingencies. Then increases by 3% per annum
Footpath maintenance	£ 1,000	As at present, then increases by 3% per annum
Servicing of Management Board etc	£10,000	Increases by 3% per annum
Officer time	£24,500	Current value, increases by 3% per annum
Legal costs, funding applications etc	£20,000 average	
<i>Sub-total</i>	<i>£ 166,500</i>	
<b>Additional spending once access network in place</b>		
Spending on footpath & trail network	£5,000	Rises by 3% p.a.
Spending on landscape management	£10,000	Rises by 3% p.a.
Marketing	£20,000	Stable budget for period till 2015-16
<i>Sub-total</i>	<i>£35,000</i>	
<b>Additional spending once all provision for recreational activities developed</b>		
Pebsham Centre - buildings costs	£ 80,000	Buildings maintenance, energy, insurances, cleaning, general administration
Pebsham Centre - staffing	£ 40,000	Salaries for 1 FTE caretaker, 1 FTE administrator & on-costs
Maintenance of skatepark, bouldering walls etc.	£ 15,000	Includes insurances, maintenance
<i>Sub-total</i>	<i>£ 135,000</i>	

Many of the above costs are based on a previous outline business case prepared for the

<sup>18</sup> excluding value of support in kind from local authority officers



project in November 2005, updated where necessary to reflect changes in the project components. No costs have been allocated for the Environmental Education centre as this concept remains relatively undeveloped. Moreover, it is the type of project component that could be brought forward in the development timetable should resources become available. It has thus been treated as a separate aspect of the main Park development project because there are so many uncertainties at present.

### **8.3 Income and Revenue Generation**

#### **8.3.1 Introduction**

Revenue streams for the Pebsham Countryside Park (including the Pebsham Centre as detailed in the Revised Draft Strategy) have been based on examples from other similar facilities across the UK. These projections may need to be further refined as new investment partners are identified.

#### **8.3.2 Reception area in the Pebsham Centre**

No income has currently been allocated to the 75m<sup>2</sup> reception area, however there could be potential for this space to be used as a visitor information resource providing leaflets and web-based information on local accommodation, activities and entertainment.

#### **8.3.3 Exhibition space in the Pebsham Centre**

An additional 75m<sup>2</sup> has been allocated to an exhibition space in the gateway reception area. However, it is envisaged that the reception space is flexible and the exact usage will depend on demand. There could be scope to increase the proportion of catering and retail space and reduce the exhibition space if required.

The provision of the exhibition space allows for rental for temporary exhibitions to be held at the Pebsham Centre. Alternatively it provides scope for the Centre to develop its own interpretation themes for visitors.

In the first year it is anticipated that usage will be low and an average charge of **£50** a day for around one quarter of the year (100 days) could be achieved, generating an annual income of **£5,000**.

However the green build specifications that are proposed for the Pebsham Centre provide scope for the building to generate a unique image and attract exhibitors that want an environmentally relevant site. In this situation the Year 5 scenario anticipates that annual income from exhibitions could rise to **£18,200** by charging £100 per day and assuming a 50% usage rate.

#### **8.3.4 Office rental**

The proposed Pebsham Centre building will have a floor area of around 1,500 m<sup>2</sup>. Of this space 75 m<sup>2</sup> has been allowed for Park administration office space with 425 m<sup>2</sup> available for rental.

Rental rates for office space in Hastings range from £8-£15 per foot sq per year (approximately £75 to £150 per square metre). Revenue for Year 1 has been based on £100/m<sup>2</sup> at 80% occupancy, generating an income of **£34,000** per annum rising in Year 5 to an annual income of £63,750 based on £150/ m<sup>2</sup> in Year 5 at 100% occupancy.



### **8.3.5 Room hire for meetings and conferences**

The proposals for the Pebsham Centre allow for 300 m<sup>2</sup> of rooms that could be rented for meetings or conferences. Of this, 150 m<sup>2</sup> has been allocated to commercial room hire and 150 m<sup>2</sup> to use by educational partners (including 100 m<sup>2</sup> of wet room space).

The rate for commercial room hire has been set as equivalent to that charged by the University Centre Hastings in 2005/06 and assumes an occupancy rate of only day per week in the first year, rising to 4 days a week in Year 5.

The capacity of the rooms at UCH is similar to those proposed for the Pebsham Centre. It is expected that the number of rooms available for hire at UCH will decrease in future years as more space is used for the delivery of educational courses.

Anticipated rental income would be **£12,000** in Year 1 rising by 10% per annum.

### **8.3.6 Educational use**

It is envisaged that both commercial and educational markets can use the rooms available for hire. However 100 m<sup>2</sup> has been allocated specifically to wet room space to allow for two classes to work together on field studies activities.

For forecasting purposes an additional 50 m<sup>2</sup> has been allocated specifically to educational use, to take account of the difference in standard required for educational and commercial use. Educational users do not want to worry about using a high standard of accommodation that must be left in a suitable state for commercial users.

Educational users will not be able to pay a full commercial rate for the space they use and the rate charged for educational space has been calculated as 50% of the rate charged for commercial use.

It is expected that although there is an interest in creating an environmental education hub at the Pebsham Centre, it could take several years to build up and a conservative estimate for usage has been used for the financial predications. Usage of one day per week during term time has been used for the Year 1 estimate, rising to 4 days a week in term time and 4 weeks of holiday courses by Year 5.

Anticipated income rises from **£4,200** per annum in Year 1 to **£19,200** in Year 5.

### **8.3.7 Catering**

Three scenarios have been prepared for the centre:

- Provision of a snack bar/ café facility, open 7 hours per day, 7 days per week and managed in-house by the local authority's catering team
- Provision of a larger café/ restaurant, open 10 hours per day, 7 days per week, managed in-house by the local authority's catering team and offering light meals as well as snacks. It is envisaged that this facility would have a liquor licence in order to appeal to a broader audience (e.g. the restaurant at Beecraigs Country Park, Linlithgow, Central Scotland [www.beecraigs.com](http://www.beecraigs.com))
- Provision of a pub and family restaurant, with a commercial chain taking tenancy of the main building and providing an annual rental income



The snack bar will require a floor area of around 30 m<sup>2</sup> of which around 60% would be for customers and 40% for food preparation, storage etc. This is sufficient to accommodate between 15 and 20 covers at any one time. Additional seating could be supplied outside on a terrace in good weather.

The café/ restaurant would require a much larger floor area, with at least 60 m<sup>2</sup> needed to accommodate 60 covers, plus a further 30 m<sup>2</sup> minimum for food preparation, storage etc (i.e. a minimum of 90 m<sup>2</sup>).

Indicative spreadsheets prepared for each scenario and presented in the November 2005 Outline Business Plan demonstrate that a snack bar/ café serving around 1,000 visitors per week would require an average spend per head of around **£2.25** per head to break even. This is equivalent to some 140 customers a day, or a sizeable proportion of proposed Park visitors. Assuming that management of the facility was contracted to an external operator, a minimal rental income of around **£2,550** per annum would be the most that could be realised.

The larger café/ restaurant would require a much higher throughput of customers to break even, assuming that it was to generate a rental income to the Park of £15,000 per annum. In this case, more than 100,000 customers would be needed or 2,000 per week (around 290 per day), assuming an average spend per head of around **£4.25** per head). Obviously, the higher the average spend per head, the lower the level of throughput needed to break even but the higher the pressure on the marketing budget.

This facility would generate its own market and could require a sizeable car park close by if it is to compete with other catering facilities in the area such as country pubs, fast food facilities and small town centre restaurants. This second scenario will also require the involvement of a third party, running it on either a franchise basis or under another form of management agreement that is attractive to both sides. Because of local concerns about the scale of visitor activity that might be generated at the site, and because of the risks that could be incurred in developing a sophisticated restaurant at the Pebsham site, for business planning purposes at this stage the smaller café scenario is proposed.

A potential commercial pub operator could pay an annual lease of an amount at least similar to, and probably exceeding that of, a café/ restaurant operator. It would also bring with it the opportunity to invest considerable capital resources in the Centre building, assuming that it is offered a long lease (20 years+) on the building. This is initially the preferred strategy as it will reduce the outlay by the public sector on the Pebsham Centre and will still generate an annual rental income. For forecasting purposes, a rental income of £20,000 is assumed at this point.

### **8.3.8 Retail**

It is envisaged that a specialised retail unit will be provided within the main centre building, selling items linked to activities offered within the Park.

Two scenarios are suggested for the use of retail space:

- A retail outlet managed and run by the Park management
- Lease of retail space to third party operators



### Park managed retail outlet

Average retail income per head at UK Country Parks in 2002 (the most recent year for which data is available) was 21 pence (equivalent to 25p at 2006 prices). Assuming that the Park attracts a target throughput of 150,000 visitors per annum then a retail operation would generate around **£18,750** annual income once costs of sales have been deducted from gross trading income.

Spend per head	£0.25
Visitors	150,000
Gross income	£37,500
Costs of sales (%)	50%
Costs of sales (£)	£18,750
Net income	£18,750

Assuming that all sales are administered through an outlet staffed by existing employees working at the centre, or by volunteers, then this would in effect be net income that could be used to underwrite different activities at the site.

If, however, a further paid post is required to run the retail outlet, this would incur a salary and on-cost of around £12,000 p.a. minimum, reducing the operating surplus/ contribution to around £7,000 per annum.

### Lease of retail to third party operators

The alternative scenario is for retail space to be leased to third party operators. The financial predictions work on an allocation of 150 m<sup>2</sup> for retail, which is sufficient for more than one operator. With the concentration of cycling and skateboarding activities in the Park it is feasible for more than one retail unit to be operating from the site.

The Year 1 scenario assumes a low rental income of £100/m<sup>2</sup>; current high street retail rents in Hastings are between £200 to £400/m<sup>2</sup>. In this scenario, occupancy is calculated at 80% generating an income of **£12,500** per annum.

By Year 5 full occupancy is assumed, however rental rates are taken at the lowest end of the retail scale i.e. £200 m<sup>2</sup>, this generates an annual rental income of **£30,000**.

As this option delivers the higher income, it is the strategy proposed for the project.

#### **8.3.9 Events**

Most events hosted at UK country parks are revenue-neutral, in the sense that they raise little additional income, except where they are arranged and managed by third parties who pay a facility fee to the park's owners or managers. For forecasting purposes, a nominal figure of **£15,000** income has been identified or 10p/ visitor, which is 50% of the average figure for UK Country Parks in 2002, uprated to 2006 prices to take account of inflation. This is predicted to rise to **£18,000** by Year 5.

#### **8.3.10 Car parking**

Average spend per head on parking by countryside visitors was 10p per head in 2003, according to the Leisure Day Visits Survey commissioned by VisitBritain, the Countryside Agency, Forest Enterprise and other public sector agencies. Assuming that 50% of the



150,000 visitors to the Park come by car, then a parking charge could raise around **£7,500** per annum (50% x 150,000 x 10p).

An alternative method of calculation is to assume a charge of £2 per car, and that 50% of park visitors (around 150,000) are car borne. Assuming an average of 3 visitors per car, this gives a total of 25,000 cars per annum. Using assumptions similar to those employed in the recent Hastings Country Park business planning exercise gives the following outcome:

- 70% of cars (17,500) are regular, twice-weekly users of the park, paying £20 for an annual permit. Assuming each car uses the park 100 times/ year this gives a total of 175 separate vehicles
- 175 x £20 = £3,500
- the remaining 7,500 cars (i.e. 30% of the total) pay £2 each visit. Assuming 95% compliance, then 7,125 cars pay £2 = £14,250
- gross income from permits and display tickets = £17,750. Subtract 40% costs = £10,650 net income

In order to secure close to 100% compliance it would be necessary to staff the car park at all times which may not be feasible at Pebsham. Stressing that all parking income is ring-fenced for conservation work in the Park should have the positive impact of increasing compliance – at Seven Sisters Country Park compliance is reported to be around 95%.

Moreover, it is normally the case that countryside car parks that charge displace a certain amount of activity to nearby road verges etc, creating traffic management problems in the vicinity. This would have to be carefully managed in and around Pebsham so as not to annoy residents of the surrounding areas.

For forecasting purposes, a sum of **£7,500** has been used for 2010/11, once the access network is in place, rising by £1,000 per annum to reflect increased levels of visitor interest in the site and infrequent rises in the charge per vehicle.

### **8.3.11 Other potential sources of income**

Other potential sources of revenue funding for the Park include:

- Ongoing financial contributions from the three authorities, to the value of their existing inputs (£158,500 at 2006/07 prices). This sum is built into the spreadsheet
- A proposed “Pound for the Park” local tax initiative, that raises an additional £1 from every household in the two districts of Rother and Hastings (38,830 and 38,360 households respectively or 77,190 households in all), generating an additional annual income for the Park of £77,000+ per annum<sup>19</sup>. This sum is built into the spreadsheet
- Donations from external sources to cover costs of particular conservation or recreation projects. A nominal £5,000 per annum is built into the spreadsheet
- Possible revenue contributions from agencies represented on the Management Board (e.g. Natural England, Environment Agency). No allowance is made in the spreadsheet

<sup>19</sup> Assuming political support is forthcoming, this could be expedited through the new Neighbourhood Improvement District (NID) initiative



for sums from this source.

- Grant-aid support for one or more of the Ranger posts from Conservation organisations (public and voluntary sector) and/or from commercial interests/ private sponsorship. No allowance is made in the spreadsheet for sums from this source.

The impact of all of the above revenue generating activities on the Park budget is considered below.

#### **8.4 Review of Likely Financial Performance**

The spreadsheet overleaf demonstrates that as the project matures it will begin to break even, but in the early years there will be a requirement for ongoing subsidies from the public sector in order to deliver all of the proposed services at the Park. The overall additional subsidy requirement reaches a maximum in the year that the Pebsham Centre opens. This positive financial performance is generated by the presence in the business plan of the proposed “Pound for the Park” initiative – without this income of £77,000 per annum there will be a need for a significant element of public sector support from elsewhere.





<i>Item</i>	<i>2007-8</i>	<i>2008-9</i>	<i>2009-10</i>	<i>2010-11</i>	<i>2011-12</i>	<i>2012-13</i>	<i>2013-14</i>	<i>2014-15</i>	<i>2015-16</i>
	<i>Final planning stages, minor investment in access works</i>	<i>Major investment in access networks</i>			<i>Pebsham Centre opens</i>			<i>New education centre opens</i>	
<b>Spending</b>									
Staffing (Rangers)	£ 26,750	£ 43,188	£ 76,153	£ 77,823	£ 106,542	£ 108,989	£ 112,259	£ 115,626	£ 119,095
Bexhill Rec maintenance	£ 84,000	£ 86,520	£ 89,116	£ 91,789	£ 94,543	£ 97,379	£ 100,300	£ 103,309	£ 106,409
Footpath maintenance	£ 1,000	£ 1,030	£ 1,061	£ 1,093	£ 1,126	£ 1,159	£ 1,194	£ 1,230	£ 1,267
Pebsham centre running costs					£ 80,000	£ 82,400	£ 84,872	£ 87,418	£ 90,041
Pebsham centre staffing					£ 40,000	£ 41,200	£ 42,436	£ 43,709	£ 45,020
Activity park maintenance				£ 15,000	£ 15,450	£ 15,914	£ 16,391	£ 16,883	£ 17,389
Additional spending on trail network				£ 5,000	£ 5,150	£ 5,305	£ 5,464	£ 5,628	£ 5,796
Additional spending on landscape management				£ 10,000	£ 10,300	£ 10,609	£ 10,927	£ 11,255	£ 11,593
Marketing and promotion	£ -	£ -	£ 20,000	£ 20,000	£ 20,000	£ 20,000	£ 20,000	£ 20,000	£ 20,000
Servicing costs (management board etc)	£ 10,000	£ 10,300	£ 10,609	£ 10,927	£ 11,255	£ 11,593	£ 11,941	£ 12,299	£ 12,668
Officer time (valued at present input level)	£ 24,500	£ 25,235	£ 25,992	£ 26,772	£ 27,575	£ 28,402	£ 29,254	£ 30,132	£ 31,036
Spending on finalising Park plans, funding applications, legal costs etc	£ 20,000	£ 30,000	£ 10,000						
<b>Total spending</b>	<b>£ 166,250</b>	<b>£ 196,273</b>	<b>£ 232,931</b>	<b>£ 258,404</b>	<b>£ 411,940</b>	<b>£ 422,949</b>	<b>£ 435,038</b>	<b>£ 447,489</b>	<b>£ 460,314</b>



<b>Income</b>									
Exhibition space					£ 5,000	£ 7,500	£ 10,000	£ 15,000	£ 18,200
Office rental					£ 34,000	£ 40,000	£ 45,000	£ 55,000	£ 63,750
Room hire					£ 12,000	£ 13,200	£ 14,520	£ 15,972	£ 17,569
Educational use					£ 4,200	£ 7,500	£ 10,000	£ 15,000	£ 19,200
Catering					£ 20,000	£ 20,600	£ 21,218	£ 21,855	£ 22,510
Retail					£ 18,750	£ 18,750	£ 18,750	£ 18,750	£ 18,750
Events					£ 15,000	£ 16,000	£ 17,000	£ 17,500	£ 18,000
Car parking					£ 7,500	£ 8,500	£ 9,500	£ 11,000	£ 12,000
Hastings BC spending on Bexhill Road Rec	£ 84,000	£ 86,520	£ 89,116	£ 91,789	£ 94,543	£ 97,379	£ 100,300	£ 103,309	£ 106,409
Ongoing LA contribution (including value of staff time)	£ 78,500	£ 80,855	£ 83,281	£ 85,779	£ 88,352	£ 91,003	£ 93,733	£ 96,545	£ 99,441
Contributions from Board Members		£ 10,000	£ 10,300	£ 10,609	£ 10,927	£ 11,255	£ 11,593	£ 11,941	£ 12,299
"Pound for the Park"			£ 77,000	£ 77,000	£ 77,000	£ 77,000	£ 77,000	£ 77,000	£ 77,000
Donations		£ 5,000	£ 5,000	£ 5,000	£ 5,000	£ 5,000	£ 5,000	£ 5,000	£ 5,000
<b>Total income</b>	<b>£ 162,500</b>	<b>£ 182,375</b>	<b>£ 264,696</b>	<b>£ 270,177</b>	<b>£ 392,272</b>	<b>£ 413,687</b>	<b>£ 433,614</b>	<b>£ 463,872</b>	<b>£ 490,128</b>
<b>Operating surplus (deficit)</b>	<b>-£ 3,750</b>	<b>-£ 13,898</b>	<b>£ 31,766</b>	<b>£ 11,773</b>	<b>-£ 19,668</b>	<b>-£ 9,262</b>	<b>-£ 1,423</b>	<b>£ 16,383</b>	<b>£ 29,815</b>



## 9 Concluding Remarks

### 9.1 Summary of Main Findings

This business plan has been prepared in response to a brief prepared by East Sussex County Council and its partners in June 2006. The brief required the consultants to:

- Provide options and recommendations on management structures and organisations to:
  - Implement the Park
  - Manage the Park
- Advise on external funding sources to:
  - Implement the Park
  - Manage the Park
- Create a financial structure to:
  - Implement the Park
  - Manage the Park
- Propose a programme for
  - Implementing the Park
  - Creating a management organisation

It is proposed that a Management Board be created during 2007/08 to oversee the final stages of planning for the Park, and that this is supported by an Executive Committee of officers from the three participating local authorities and other organisations involved in delivering conservation and public access activities at the site. The Board and the Committee would be supported by a number of Technical Panels providing specialist inputs in areas such as conservation; access, interpretation and recreation and tourism and business development. A small team of rangers would be employed to deliver conservation and access activities on the ground.

The plan has confirmed the scale of costs that will be incurred in delivering the ambitious plans for Pebsham Countryside Park. A capital investment of between £6.85 and £11.8 million will be required over the period 2007 to 2014 to deliver the ambitious proposals that will transform the landscape and recreational facilities in this 'green gap' between St Leonards and Bexhill. Whilst some "seed corn" funding is already available, there remains much to be done to secure the capital sums necessary to pay for the project.

In the early years of operation, there will be a need for some additional local authority subsidy payments to ensure that the high quality of visitor services anticipated can be delivered. However, once the proposed Pebsham Centre opens in 2011 and is operating at full earning capacity, the need for public sector subsidy payments over and above existing commitments will diminish.



## 9.2 Next Steps

This business plan represents a major milestone towards the delivery of the Pebsham Countryside Park project. During the first half of 2007, the three local authorities will need to consider carefully and agree to meet the likely short, medium and long-term financial implications of their continued involvement in the project before preparing and signing up to a Memorandum of Understanding that binds them to the delivery of the project. Thereafter, it is important to appoint the first members of the proposed Management Board, including a Chair, to maintain the impetus towards project implementation. A target date of the end of financial year 2007-8 is proposed for the establishment of the Management Board, Executive Committee and Friends Organisation.