

Report to: Lead Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment

Date of meeting: 17 June 2019

By: Director of Communities, Economy and Transport

Title: Future Management of Countryside Sites

Purpose: To recommend changes to the management of countryside sites

RECOMMENDATION: Lead Member is recommended:

- 1) To approve the publication of Notices in relation to the following transfers:
 - (a) Ditchling Common Country Park to be leased to the Sussex Wildlife Trust for a peppercorn rent through a long lease with the S106 funds for the Ditchling Common Management Contribution (c £400k) also transferred;
 - (b) The freehold of Ouse Estuary Nature Reserve to be transferred to Newhaven Town Council subject to the final terms being agreed for this and Riverside Park;
 - (c) Riverside Park to be leased to Newhaven Town Council for a peppercorn rent and for the lease to be subject to appropriate restrictions in relation to the history of the site as a former landfill site.
 - 2) To award South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) preferred bidder status with a view to transferring the freehold of Seven Sisters Country Park subject to the completion of an agreement regarding the terms of the transfer. To delegate authority to the Director of CET to agree the terms of any transfer and to publish notices in relation to the transfer. These terms will include (a) reference to the preliminary negotiation and offer from SDNPA submitted in December 2018 and (b) negotiation of a clawback clause such that the County Council would benefit from the proceeds from any future sale, transfer or development.
 - 3) To delegate authority to the Director of CET to agree the terms of any transfer of East Sussex County Council land at Broomhill and Camber to Rother District Council and to publish notices in relation to the transfer.
 - 4) To delegate authority to the Director of CET to agree the transfer, and the terms of any transfer, of management responsibility for:
 - (a) Chailey Common Local Nature Reserve to another party considered appropriate by the Director of CET;
 - (b) Weir Wood Local Nature Reserve to another party considered appropriate by the Director of CET, and;
 - (c) Any changes to the terms of the Local Nature Reserve agreements (other than the names of the parties) be reserved to the Lead Member for Transport and Environment for decision.
 - 5) Delegate authority to the Director of Communities, Economy and Transport in consultation with the Assistant Chief Executive to take any action he considers appropriate to give effect to or in consequence of, the above recommendations including determining the terms of, and entering into, any further agreements necessary.
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1 Background Information

1.1 In June 2017, Cabinet approved the Countryside Access Strategy which proposed that eight of the ten countryside sites owned and/or managed by East Sussex County Council (ESCC) would be considered for transfer to suitable external organisations. Cabinet agreed for discussions with external organisations in relation to these countryside sites to continue and delegated the implementation stage of the Strategy to the Lead Member for Transport and Environment.

1.2 The eight sites considered for transfer include: (1) land at Broomhill and Camber Sands, (2) the management of Chailey Common Local Nature Reserve, (3) Ditchling Common Country Park, (4) Ouse Estuary Nature Reserve, Newhaven, (5) land at Riverside Park, Newhaven, (6) Seven Sisters Country Park (SSCP), (7) the part of Shinewater Park in Eastbourne owned by ESCC and (8) the management of Weir Wood Local Nature Reserve.

2 External Bids Received

2.1 The following proposals were received from external bodies:

- The South Downs National Park Authority aims to create an outstanding habitat and world class visitor experience with SSCP serving as a gateway to the South Downs;
- The National Trust wishes to take on the freehold of SSCP to create a thriving visitor hub and an improved home for wildlife;
- The Forestry Commission proposal has a strong focus on recreation and the integration of Friston Forest and SSCP, creating a regional visitor attraction;
- Sussex Wildlife Trust has strong interest in leasing Ditchling Common Country Park and using the £400k of S106 funds to improve the visitor experience and wildlife at this site - at the other sites its interest is to work in partnership with others;
- Newhaven Town Council has strong interest in the management and ownership of Ouse Estuary Nature Reserve and in taking a long-term lease on Riverside Park that reflects its history as a former landfill site;
- The Kitesurf Centre is an existing tenant at Broomhill Sands and wishes to expand its business through buying or leasing the Broomhill Sands car park from ESCC.

2.2 Rother District Council (RDC) has also expressed interest in the ESCC land at Camber and Broomhill Sands in October 2018 and is undertaking further due diligence before reaching a final decision.

2.3 Three sites are without strong external interest at the moment – Chailey Common LNR, Shinewater Park and Weir Wood LNR. Both Chailey Common LNR and Weir Wood LNR are owned by other parties but under ESCC management as Local Nature Reserves. Discussions are ongoing with stakeholders at Chailey Common with a view to revising the LNR agreement and putting in place alternative management arrangements. Arrangements between Southern Water, the Friends of Weir Wood and ESCC would broadly remain the same at Weir Wood LNR. ESCC will continue to own and manage its part of Shinewater Park.

2.4 During negotiations, officers have explored with those organisations that have a primary interest in SSCP the possibility for them to take on the remaining sites, but this has not been possible.

2.5 The option for ESCC to retain the sites and improve outcomes has been considered alongside the external proposals through the development of an in-house business plan. This focussed on increasing income from the sites and using this income to improve visitor experience. The proposed improvements identified in the in-house business plan focussed on SSCP using existing maintenance budgets and estimates of future income, as well as £400k of S106 funding at Ditchling Common Country Park.

2.6 All the proposals have been evaluated qualitatively and scored by an ESCC panel. Appendix 1 summarises the extent of external interest across sites and Appendix 2 contains further details of the bids received including the in-house plan. Appendix 3 summarises the expected benefits assessed, and the work completed.

2.7 Further information about the bids, considered exempt, is contained in a later agenda item.

3 Evaluation of Proposals and Options Analysis

3.1 The options appraisal concluded that a transfer to an external organisation would be best to improve site outcomes in line with the Countryside Access Strategy, in particular at Seven Sisters Country Park (SSCP) where the increased investment proposed by two of the external bodies would enable significant improvements in the condition of the site and the visitor experience.

3.2 The investment into the countryside sites proposed by external organisations is significantly higher than the current ESCC budget plans in retaining the sites in-house. The SDNPA bid proposes at least £1.4 million with ambition for a further £7 million of new investment for SSCP while the Forestry Commission bid includes about £3 million of investment.

3.3 By contrast, the ESCC in-house business plan is based on using £200k of existing maintenance revenue budget plus £30k in grants to improve the facilities at SSCP in conjunction with £400k of S106 funding at Ditchling Common. This level of investment is significantly lower than that proposed by the external organisations.

3.4 If ESCC were to consider investing additional resources to a similar level indicated in the bids, i.e. £1.4m, then this would likely be funded through additional borrowing because the Capital Programme is fully utilised in support of Basic Need provision. An ESCC in-house proposal carries risks associated with securing future income and long-term maintenance liabilities.

3.5 The options analysis therefore concluded that a transfer of sites to an external organisation is both viable and best placed to deliver the benefits of the Countryside Access Strategy. The capital investment proposed by the external bodies, coupled with their focus on countryside management, would see a significant benefit in the quality of the sites for residents and visitors.

4 Seven Sisters Country Park

4.1 Three organisations expressed an interest in taking on the management of Seven Sisters Country Park, the largest and most visited of all the sites.

4.2 Whilst the National Trust (NT) has an excellent track record and reputation as an organisation, the Trust did not submit any detailed proposals or financial information to support their initial interest in SSCP and declined to provide any further information following interview. The NT would not consider any financial arrangement that benefits ESCC as a result of the transfer of SSCP and at this stage we are unsure whether they would require an endowment, which is their usual practice. Overall these factors make the NT the least attractive and the Project Board was not able to consider the Trust's interest further.

4.3 The SDNPA and Forestry Commission proposals received very similar scores from the evaluation panel, although each bid was very different with different strengths and weaknesses. The SDNPA's proposal is most ambitious in terms of investment and is balanced between conservation and recreation, whilst the Forestry Commission is more focused on recreation. The level of capital investment in both proposals would enable significant improvements to SSCP which could transform the site and address both short term and long-term maintenance liabilities.

4.4 Preliminary negotiations have been held with the SDNPA and Forestry Commission about SSCP. Neither organisation is prepared to take on any of the other countryside sites. The SDNPA offer is more explicit and potentially would provide greater benefits to ESCC. SDNPA has indicated they may be prepared to offer a regular payment of circa £35k per annum to offset any ESCC financial deficit, (loss of parking income) from transferring its countryside sites, or an allocation of shares should they choose to establish an operating company. Details of these options cannot be considered further without SDNPA having preferred bidder status. By contrast, the Forestry Commission is open to the option of leasing SSCP but has made it clear that this should be a 'modest' rent and they would be seeking a grace period for rental payments in the early years of investment.

4.5 The SDNPA also offers a number of other benefits over the Forestry Commission including (i) the potential to facilitate the transfer of management responsibility of Chailey Common LNR from ESCC to Sussex Wildlife Trust (SWT) as well as ownership of Ditchling Common CP as part of the SDNPA-SWT partnership, (ii) commitment to raise funds for the construction of an underpass under the A259 linking the visitor complex with the broader SSCP and (iii) SDNPA is ready to complete the transfer.

4.6 The Forestry Commission and SDNPA would both bring different benefits to SSCP which the Project Board has found difficult to separate. The Forestry Commission is clearly a well-resourced professional organisation but its focus on recreation is associated with a business model that is driven by car parking and parking income and it lacks experience with a site such as SSCP. The SDNPA has developed a strong and balanced narrative that covers conservation, recreation and other benefits. As an organisation, SDNPA lacks certain specialist in-house resources but its plan to work in partnership with others and tap into the experience of the National Parks network is credible and deliverable. Both organisations would bring much needed investment into SSCP and deliver significant and much needed improvements to the facilities for the benefit of residents and visitors.

5 Staffing Issues

5.1 The transfer of these sites may involve the TUPE transfer of staff who currently work on countryside sites. Discussions will be held regarding the future involvement of volunteers.

6 Financial Issues

6.1 The Countryside service currently receives approx. £380k pa of income from parking revenues, visitor centre sales, environmental stewardship grants, rents and concessions that is used for the management of all ten countryside sites. SSCP generates £273k pa of this overall income and the net overall cost to the Authority for the Countryside service is £50k pa.

6.2 The Countryside Access Strategy proposed that eight of the countryside sites would be considered for transfer.

6.3 The ESCC in-house business plan proposes utilising approx. £200-300k from income currently used for maintenance to refurbish a number of assets at SSCP plus £400k of S106 funding from Ditchling Common in order to increase income opportunities, but this is not without risk. In the longer term, the in-house business case could generate savings of up to £69k pa, £15k of which relates to SSCP, but as with all commercial operations, there are risks associated with securing this level of income and on-going maintenance liabilities.

6.4 The transfers result in savings which includes income in the region of £35k from Seven Sisters Country Park through the agreement with SDNPA. The transfer of 6 of the 10 sites recommended in this report would see the Council benefit from a net income in the order of £27k pa and therefore a net saving of up to £77k pa may be achieved.

6.5 The SDNPA bid envisages £1.4m of investment at SSCP with ambitions for a further £7m, while the Forestry Commission bid proposes around £3 million of investment.

6.6 The preferred transfer option offers greater financial savings for ESCC. The option of ESCC funding an additional capital investment of £1.4m over a period of 20 years would likely yield higher gross income but would require annual repayments of £83k which would need to be funded from income generated on the site. Any potential higher income from an ESCC investment may be off-set by the risks associated with securing income, debt repayment costs and future maintenance liabilities.

6.7 The options analysis shows that all the transfer options would result in a higher level of investment into the sites than ESCC has budgeted for and offer savings for ESCC.

6.8 The proposal to transfer the sites in question to external organisations is not likely to affect the ESCC balance sheet or debt ratio in any material way.

7 Legal Issues

7.1 No conditions have been found in the land titles and title deeds that may prevent a transfer. There are no Crichel Down issues, which is a requirement to offer land that has been purchased by compulsory order back to the original owners under certain circumstances, associated with these transfers.

7.2 The transfer value of the freehold of SSCP to SDNPA will be deemed to be below its market value. As the differential in value will likely exceed £2m (otherwise permitted under the General Disposal Consent Order 2003) the County Council may need to secure consent from the Secretary of State for this transfer.

8 Risk

8.1 There are a number of risks associated with the recommendations. The financial risk of transferring the countryside sites is considered to be lower than if ESCC were to keep them but there remains some financial risk, in particular associated with SSCP and the performance of the new management to generate revenues and deliver capital spending in line with its financial forecasts. Although this risk is considered to be low, the project team will need to assess this carefully when more detailed information is provided during final negotiations on transfer.

8.2 The Secretary of State consent may be needed for the transfer of SSCP and there is some risk and uncertainty over the timeline associated with gaining this consent.

8.3 Other risks include the liability for the former landfill site at Riverside Park and reputational risk relating to the transfers. Although there will be no change in terms of liability to ESCC for landfill management at Riverside, the lease of the site to Newhaven Town Council will need to be carefully drafted and for compliance to any restrictions to be monitored.

9 Place Scrutiny Committee Comments

9.1 The Place Scrutiny Committee established a scrutiny Review Board at its meeting on 14 June 2018, so that the Committee could comment on the detailed proposals for the future management of ESCC's Countryside Sites. This followed on from the work of the former Economy, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Committee on the development of the Countryside Access Strategy. The Review Board has held a several meetings to examine the proposals for the countryside sites and has visited the Seven Sisters Country Park to understand the proposals for investment in this site.

9.2 The Lead Member is requested to take into account the comments of the Countryside Access Review Board of the Place Scrutiny Committee when taking the decision, which will be provided in a separate document.

10 Next Steps

10.1 A timeline for the implementation stage is shown in Appendix 4. This will require the following to be undertaken if the Lead Member approves the recommendations:

- Public Notice informing the public of the intention of ESCC to transfer these sites;
- Negotiation of terms of the transfer for all sites, in particular SSCP which may lead to the recommendation for the transfer to SDNPA to be executed;
- Approval by recipient organisations of the terms of the transfers;
- Lead Member to consider any responses received to the Notices and final decision on the execution of transfers
- For SSCP, consent of the Secretary of State for the transfer.

11 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

11.1 The Countryside Access Strategy approved by Cabinet in June 2017 contained the recommendation that ESCC explore the transfer of its countryside sites to suitable external organisations that may be able to manage these in the future. This report summarises the results of work to consider these options and has resulted in the recommendations below.

11.2 It is clear that doing nothing is not an option – if this were to happen, ESCC countryside management service would continue to incur a £50k cost per year and the countryside sites would not benefit from much needed investment. The evaluation, options analysis and preliminary negotiations have demonstrated that the proposed transfers can deliver all of the benefits of a transfer in line with the Countryside Access Strategy

11.3 The transfer of interests of at least four and potentially up to seven of the eight countryside sites has been identified as feasible and is considered the best means of the achieving the objectives of the Countryside Access Strategy.

11.4 The recommendation regarding Riverside Park updates and supersedes the previous recommendation approved by the Lead Cabinet Member for Community and Resources at the March 2013 meeting for the delegation of authority to Director of Communities, Economy and Transport (CET) to agree the terms of the previously proposed transfer of Riverside Park, which did not ultimately go ahead.

12 Recommendations

12.1 Lead Member is asked to consider the information provided and to approve the following recommendations:

- 1) To approve the publication of Notices in relation to the following transfers:
 - (a) Ditchling Common Country Park to be leased to the Sussex Wildlife Trust for a peppercorn rent through a long lease with the S106 funds for the Ditchling Common Management Contribution (c £400k) also transferred;

- (b) The freehold of Ouse Estuary Nature Reserve to be transferred to Newhaven Town Council subject to the final terms being agreed for this and Riverside Park;
 - (c) Riverside Park to be leased to Newhaven Town Council for a peppercorn rent and for the lease to be subject to appropriate restrictions in relation to the history of the site as a former landfill site.
- 2) To award SDNP Authority preferred bidder status with a view to transferring the freehold of SSCP subject to the completion of an agreement regarding the terms of the transfer. To delegate authority to the Director of CET to agree the terms of any transfer and to publish notices in relation to the transfer. These terms will include (a) reference to the preliminary negotiation and offer from SDNPA submitted in December 2018 and (b) negotiation of a clawback clause such that the County Council would benefit from the proceeds from any future sale, transfer or development.
 - 3) To delegate authority to the Director of CET to agree the terms of any transfer of ESCC land at Broomhill & Camber to RDC and to publish notices in relation to the transfer.
 - 4) To delegate authority to the Director of CET to agree the transfer, and the terms of any transfer, of management responsibility for:
 - (a) Chailey Common LNR to another party considered appropriate by the Director of CET;
 - (b) Weir Wood LNR to another party considered appropriate by the Director of CET, and;
 - (c) Any changes to the terms of the LNR agreements (other than the names of the parties) be reserved to the Lead Member for Transport and Environment for decision.
 - 5) Delegate authority to the Director of Communities, Economy and Transport in consultation with the Assistant Chief Executive to take any action he considers appropriate to give effect to or in consequence of, the above recommendations including determining the terms of, and entering into, any further agreements necessary.

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LOCAL MEMBERS

The table below sets out the County Council Members that have the eight countryside sites considered for transfer to another suitable organisation in their electoral division.

<u>Site</u>	<u>Local Councillor</u>
Camber Sand Dunes/Johnson's Field	Cllr Keith Glazier
Chailey Common Local Nature Reserve	Cllr Jim Sheppard
Ditchling Common Country Park	Cllr Sarah Osborne
Ouse Estuary Nature Reserve	Cllr Darren Grover
Riverside Park	Cllr Sarah Osborne
Seven Sisters Country Park	Cllr Stephen Shing
	Cllr Phil Boorman
Shinewater Park	Cllr Alan Shuttleworth
	Cllr Colin Swansborough
Weir Wood Local Nature Reserve	Cllr Roy Galley

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

The following background documents have been used in the preparation of this report:

1. ESCC Countryside Access Strategy – Approved by Cabinet in June 2017.
2. Lead Member for Community and Resources – meeting papers 19 March 2013

Appendix 1 - Summary of Site Interest from Suitable External Organisations and Issues and Considerations

No	Site and Location	ESCC Interest	Interested Organisation	Nature of Interest in Transfer (or Site Manager for LNRs)	Issues, Considerations and Interest to Cooperate
1A	Broomhill Sands car park, Camber	Owner and manager	The Kite Surf Centre	Transfer of freehold or lease to improve site facilities and expand business.	No nature value – use as a car park / site for business.
			Rother District Council	Transfer of freehold (with Camber sand dunes and Johnson's Field) – interest being confirmed.	
1B	Camber sand dunes and Johnson's Field, Camber	Owner and manager	Rother District Council	Transfer of freehold (with Broomhill Sands car park) – interest being confirmed.	The Sussex Wildlife Trust has interest to cooperate.
2	Chailey Common LNR, Chailey	Manager	None	Discussions with LNR landowners and management committee ongoing. SWT with possible interest.	-
3	Ditchling Common Country Park, Ditchling	Owner and manager	Sussex Wildlife Trust	Leasehold transfer to realise the true country park status with an enhanced visitor experience and nature conservation management.	S106 funding available for site improvements.
4	Ouse Estuary Nature Reserve, Newhaven	Owner and manager	Newhaven Town Council	Transfer of freehold, lease or cooperation to enhance biodiversity and improve opportunities for recreation & education.	-
			Sussex Wildlife Trust	Leasehold transfer to work with partners to conserve and enhance this coastal floodplain for nature and people.	Interest to cooperate with Newhaven Town Council
5	Riverside Park, Newhaven	Owner and manager	Newhaven Town Council	Leasehold transfer to enhance biodiversity and public access, development of facilities at broader site including recreation ground.	SWT has interest to cooperate with NTC; ESCC to retain freehold as it is a former landfill site.
6	Seven Sisters Country Park, Exceat	Owner and manager	The National Trust	Transfer of freehold, part of freehold or partnership to create a landscape of outstanding international significance, highly valued by people and communities.	The Sussex Wildlife Trust is keen to cooperate with the future site owner on

No	Site and Location	ESCC Interest	Interested Organisation	Nature of Interest in Transfer (or Site Manager for LNRs)	Issues, Considerations and Interest to Cooperate
	Seven Sisters Country Park, Exceat (cont.)	Owner and manager	South Downs National Park	Transfer of freehold to create an outstanding habitat and world class visitor experience	continuing its education service, expanding to broader public engagement and, potentially, longer-term conservation.
			Forestry Commission	Transfer of freehold or leasehold to create an exceptional public green space integrated with Friston Forest that provides a high quality recreational experience	
7	Shinewater Park, Eastbourne	Owner and manager	None	-	The Sussex Wildlife Trust is potentially interested to cooperate at these sites.
8	Weir Wood LNR, Forest Row	Manager	None	-	

Appendix 2 - Overview of the Bids Submitted

1. The overall approach to the project was developed based on a bid and selection process. Firstly interested parties signed a Non-Disclosure Agreement and were provided information to complete due diligence on the sites from January-May 2018. Second, interested parties were asked to complete bids in the period June – August 2018, which were evaluated in September 2018. The results of the technical and financial evaluation were then used to complete a strategic options analysis across all eight countryside sites. This was then developed into final detailed options analysis after which preliminary negotiations were held that enabled the Project Board to develop its business case and recommendations.
2. Assessments on revenue income and expenditure at the countryside sites over the previous five years showed an average net annual cost of £40k for the eight sites and £50k for all ten sites. Assessments of staff time, legal aspects relating to the land titles and public access were also undertaken.

In-house Business Plan

3. The option for ESCC to retain the sites and improve management was considered through the development of an in-house business plan. This proposed improvement focused on SSCP using existing budgets and future income and at Ditchling Common Country Park using £400k of S106 funding. The main features of the ESCC Countryside Service business plan are:
 - Improving ecological management through external funding and income generation that supports two new officers;
 - Making the most of health, well-being and education opportunities by working with partners and developing site facilities;
 - Improving the visitor offer through new and exciting experiences including an adventure playground, craft and local business opportunities, cycle hire, camping, children's activities, holiday lets, wedding venues and access to enjoy the countryside;
 - Generate a net surplus by 2020/21 which reaches about £19k by 2023/24;
 - At SSCP, the in-house business plan would use existing budgets to convert Foxhole Cottages to holiday lets, increase car parking charges by 10%, improve the Visitors Centre including installation of a card payment machine, increase promotion and use of camping barn and Turkey Barn as a meeting space;
 - Transfer two sites – Riverside Park and Ouse Estuary Nature Reserve – to Newhaven Town Council.

External Proposals

4. Six final proposals from external organisations were received at the end of August as follows:
 - The National Trust already owns the land to the west and east of SSCP and wish to take on the freehold of SSCP to create a thriving visitor hub on the north side of the A259 and an improved home for wildlife on the south side of the A259. However, their proposal lacked detail and a financial plan for their future management and potential investment in the park. This would require them to complete their internal due diligence process, which they would not complete unless they had preferred bidder status. The Trust indicated they would invest about £1 million in the park.

- The South Downs National Park aims to create an outstanding habitat and world class visitor experience at SSCP. It would make SSCP the eastern gateway to the South Downs and use it as a resource to tell the story of climate change and natural processes to a wide audience. They would also look to increase the local economic impact of SSCP, supporting rural businesses and providing incubation space for rural crafts and other local employment opportunities. The investment would come in two phases, initially a guaranteed £1.4 million in phase 1 followed by up to £7 million in part financed through a fund-raising campaign. The investment would support a modernisation of the Exceat site, improved signage and visitor experience, expansion of catering facilities and refurbishment of the camping barn and Foxhole Cottages. The second phase aims to generate further investment and raise funds for a tunnel beneath the A259 linking the two parks and refurbishment of the New Barn complex.
- The Forestry Commission proposal has a strong focus on recreation and the integration of the Friston Forest and SSCP sites, creating a leading regional visitor attraction. It would invest in the region of £3 million and its financial plan sees strong revenue growth to over £1 million per year based mostly on car parking charges. The investment would support similar physical changes to the park as proposed by the SDNPA, although the Forestry Commission plans are at an earlier stage. The Forestry Commission also does not have significant plans for the New Barn complex.
- Sussex Wildlife Trust has strong interest in leasing Ditchling Common Country Park and using the £400k of S106 fund to improve the visitor experience and to improve its wildlife. At the other sites it has indicated its interest in working in partnership with others including with Newhaven Town Council at Ouse Estuary Nature Reserve and Riverside Park, with the future manager at SSCP and with ESCC and EBC at Shinewater Park in the absence of any external interest. There is a possibility that SWT may want to be directly involved in the future management of the two LNRs – Chailey Common LNR and Weir Wood LNR – neither is owned by ESCC and this will require further consideration in 2019.
- Newhaven Town Council (NTC) has strong interest in the management and ownership of Ouse Estuary Nature Reserve and taking a lease on Riverside Park to reflect its history as a former landfill site and in order to continue to maintain it as a Site of Nature Conservation Interest in the future . NTC has experience of informally managing part of Riverside Park and the adjacent recreation ground that is owned by Lewes District Council, which is considering a lease/transfer of those assets to NTC through its devolution of open spaces policy
- The Kitesurf Centre is an existing tenant at Broomhill Sands and wishes to expand its business, for which it will be submitting a planning application to Rother District Council. It proposes to buy or lease the Broomhill Sands car park from ESCC, manage the car park and provide additional toilet, environmental education and outdoor activity facilities.

Appendix 3 – Project Benefits and Work Completed

The benefits of reviewing the management of the ESCC countryside sites are to:

- i. improve the facilities, visitor and volunteer experience as well as wildlife conservation outcomes and contribution to the local economy of the countryside sites in line with the Countryside Access strategy;
- ii. mobilise resources for investment and to ensure there is a sustainable financial basis for the future management of the sites; and
- iii. make best use of our resources.

From September 2017, the following work was undertaken to determine the most appropriate future manager for the countryside sites based on the option of transfer of sites to one or more interested party compared to continued management by ESCC:

- Targeted marketing to identify interested parties (see Appendix 1), sharing of information and development of an in-house ESCC business plan as an option;
- Invitation to submit bids and the technical evaluation of bids;
- Analysis of options and development of a business case;
- Preliminary negotiation with short-listed organisations with respect to SSCP.

Appendix 4 - Timeline for Completion of Transfers

The table below provides an indicative timeline for the execution of the proposed transfers.

Date	Action
17 June 2019	T&E Lead Member meeting
June –July 2019	Public Notice of Transfer of (i) Ditchling Common Country Park, (ii) Ouse Estuary Nature Reserve, (iii) Riverside Park and (iv) Seven Sisters Country Park.
July – December 2019	Conveyancing of transfer of Ditchling Common Country Park, Ouse Estuary Nature Reserve and Riverside Park; Negotiation of a Heads of Terms and application for SoS consent for the transfer of Seven Sisters Country Park (may require longer depending on issues that arise); Finalisation of interest in Broomhill and Camber Sands followed by conveyancing; Further consideration of management arrangements at Chailey Common LNR.
December 2019 and early 2020 if needed	Transfers of Ditchling Common Country Park, Ouse Estuary Nature Reserve and Riverside Park executed; Conveyancing of transfer of Seven Sisters Country Park.