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Councillor Warren Morgan
Chair, Policy and Resources Committee
Hove Town Hall
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By email: warren.morgan@brighton-hove.gov.uk

21 November 2016

Dear Councillor Morgan

Sale of Downland Estate by BHCC

The two biggest countryside action groups active in the national park, the South Downs Society and the Sussex branch of the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE Sussex) strongly urge you to halt and reconsider plans to sell off crucial parts of your Downland estate, including nationally important wildlife sites.

The Brighton Downland Estate is one of the largest and most important public assets within the new South Downs National Park. Many of the sites proposed by this sale are rich in heritage and wildlife and are of high landscape sensitivity. While recognising the protection afforded by the planning powers of the national park authority and the statutory rights of way and access land, we believe that only ownership by the Council or some other body with an environmental or recreation focus can safeguard those special qualities. We would urge the Council to consider very carefully whether it has identified the full economic, social and environmental capital and potential of its landholding before pursuing disposal. We believe that greater public consultation should have been carried out before agreement was made to sell the land.

We read with interest in the local press that **“when the council sells land we take advice from specialist agents to make sure appropriate control mechanisms are put in place to protect the council and the city’s residents against future development or possible changes in use.”** We would be grateful if you could provide further information to us about which safeguards have been put in place through the sale including;

- the promotion of access, for example through mapping permissive paths and incorporating into sale documents a maintenance schedule for these and for the public rights of way.

- the identification of opportunities for landscape conservation to which purchasers would be expected to commit
- the identification of historic features to be protected, interpreted and maintained
- any covenants made in favour of the National Trust, if they are willing: these can serve as a way of securing future public benefit if the land is subject to a further sale
- restrictions on certain types of land use which would be inappropriate in these locations and creation of landscape-scale management plans and any other measures to protect wildlife.
- prevention of “sell on” within a defined timescale; guarantee that any covenants and restrictions endure with the land if ownership changes

We would be very grateful for an opportunity to discuss this with you further.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours faithfully,

David Johnson, Chair, CPRE Sussex

Robert Cheesman, Chair, South Downs Society