Whitehawk Hill Local Nature Reserve
Results of Public Consultation 2012

Whitehawk Hill has an ancient history, with a 6000 year old Neolithic camp and old chalk grassland, which supports many rare plant and animal species.
Today the hill is a vital green lung within the city and is a popular area for dog walking and nature spotting.
The council is looking at ways to conserve the important features of the hill and improve it as a resource for local people.

The Consultation

People in the local area were asked to comment on how they'd like to see the hill managed in the future. We received around three hundred responses from all over the city, and beyond. This is very encouraging and clearly shows how highly regarded the hill is, and for so many reasons.

Here's a reminder of the Council's seven priorities for the future of Whitehawk Hill:

Wildlife – Conserve, restore and enhance the rare and important species and habitats.
Recreation – Promote quiet, informal access for all.
Communities – Encourage community involvement and awareness
Landscape – Protect the hill and promote awareness of the importance of the hill within the South Downs
History – Safeguard the nationally important Neolithic camp on the hill and raise its profile.
Food – Provide more allotment plots and support community-led food projects.
Problems – Minimise anti-social behaviour on the hill, such as fly-tipping, fires, motorcycling and dog related issues.

Question 1: Do you agree with the Council's 7 priorities for the future of Whitehawk Hill?

Yes 86%
No 9%
Don't know 5%

Comments:

"I'm very supportive of all seven priorities. In particular I support recreation, places to walk and sit. And also minimising anti-social behaviour. I was recently bitten by a dog and it wasn't pleasant!"
"Whitehawk Camp needs preservation and info tours to raise awareness of this amazing site"
"We think that the money would be better spent elsewhere, the cost and the hard work that it would need to rejuvenate the area would just be wasted and destroyed"

More specifically, we wanted to know how people felt about 3 significant management actions for the future.

Question 2: Are you happy with our proposals to conserve ancient chalk grassland on Whitehawk Hill?

Yes 90%
No 7%
Don't know 3%

Comments

"I'd like to see volunteering opportunities for local residents to be involved, and more nature walks"

"I am worried for the sheep."

"I think an area of woodland/scrub should be preserved for the wildlife such as birds and hedgehogs and to show how succession works in nature for educational purposes"

"Ensure the area used by the children for sliding down in the snow stays open"

"The existing apple trees in the grazing area should be retained and individually protected from livestock. These are genetically unique seedling trees, of possible international significance. This could be a landscape where food production, wildlife and amenity are in harmony."

"I'm very concerned about the impact of fencing on open landscape, both visually and for access. The fence line should therefore be very carefully sited, with maximum number of gates and respect for desire line paths."

Sheep grazing is generally considered to be the best way to manage lowland chalk grassland (a European Priority Habitat), as this is largely how this habitat evolved in the first place, over hundreds or even thousands of years.

"An open and varied sward is best achieved through grazing by cattle or sheep in combination with rabbit grazing" – Buglife UK

Our plan is to erect livestock fencing around the hill, keeping to the perimeters as much as possible (see map). This will enable us to use flocks of sheep to traditionally manage the hill. Grazing will take place in sections to ensure that there are always sheep-free areas for dog walking etc. Permanent fencing is much safer than temporary electric fencing for the sheep, although responsible dog ownership is also paramount. Gates will be positioned around the reserve to ensure continued public access throughout. Signs will be erected (with a map) at every access point to let people know where the sheep are grazing and when.

The triangle of grassland at the top of Bear Rd known as Tenantry Down has already been fenced and trial-grazed. This has received overwhelming support from the local community.

We recognise that scrub and woodland habitat is vital in supporting other wildlife such as birds, foxes and badgers. These areas are also well used by local children for building camps and exploring. Therefore, while some of the bramble, thorny scrub and young woodland that have grown up in the last century will be removed some areas will be retained and made more accessible.

There are also many fruit trees that occur naturally on the hill. These "wildings" could be very important local varieties. These will be retained and the council will work with local food groups to propagate and protect these local specimens.

The popular 'ski slope' behind the Crew Club will not be affected. Most of the fencing will run directly along the bottom of the steep slope but the fence line will be adjusted here to include all or part of the southern playing field. This will also provide a safer dog walking area (when the sheep are not on site), and will reduce access for illegal motorcycling in that area.

A dynamic new proposal has also emerged from the consultation, in the form of cattle grids on Manor Hill (see map). This has been provisionally approved by our Highways and Health & Safety teams and is supported by local councillors. This would facilitate sheep grazing freely on both sides of Manor Hill, without the need for further fencing on both sides of the road. This would be less visually intrusive in the landscape and will naturally reduce traffic speed, as well as providing a feeling of countryside within the city. This proposal is still in the preliminary stages so we welcome your views.

Question 3: Do you agree with our plans for a Community Orchard and wildflower area proposed for the land at Swanborough Drive?

Agree 83%
Disagree 17%

Comments

"There should be ways for young children to be involved, and safe areas to sit, picnic, stay a while"
"Sounds great - although there should still be available space to freely walk through"
"I would like to see a portion of this area returned to traditional allotment provision; in addition to the community orchard"
"Any 'wildflower area' should encompass all of Sheepcote and Whitehawk Hill, should focus on enlarging existing wildflower populations, ie better management of the *existing* resource."
"Will harvesting be controlled /regulated?"

The Community Orchard will ultimately be managed by an independent community group, supported by the Brighton & Hove Food Partnership, Brighton Permaculture Trust and the council. The project will involve local people, schools, food-based groups and conservation volunteers from all over the city.
Prior to any decision-making an Environmental Impact Assessment was carried out by our ecologist. He said,

"The proposed community orchard would not have any significant adverse impact on Whitehawk Hill Local Nature Reserve. Moderate adverse impacts on some species groups are considered probable, but these can be mitigated by appropriate site establishment and management. The proposed orchard also creates opportunities to increase the biodiversity of the site and to benefit the LNR as a whole through increased community engagement."

The orchard will be traditionally managed, which means that the trees will be well spaced and the native flora beneath will be encouraged. This type of management has been shown to support unique invertebrate communities, as well as providing an important habitat for birds, small mammals and reptiles. Gaps in the established hedges will be planted with other native fruit and nut bearing species, to protect the orchard from the wind. Areas of scrub will be retained for existing wildlife.
The site will remain fully accessible to all and while we recognise people's concerns about the security of the orchard it is clear that a large, unsightly perimeter fence is not the solution. It is hoped that a regular presence by staff, volunteers and the local community will act as some deterrent.
Thirty to forty trees a year will be planted for up to five years, so that we can gauge the success of the project as it grows.
Space will be left in case there is a demand in the future for standard allotments in this area.
The proposed "Bee Haven Wildflower Area" will not be implemented here. We have taken on board people's comments about supporting and enhancing our existing flower-rich habitats and that a "Bee Haven" would be more suitable in a more urban setting.
With regard to harvesting the produce, this is very difficult to manage, especially as this is meant to be a 'community' orchard. Local people are welcome to pick fruit as they pass or collect small amounts for home consumption but we will do what we can to prevent any unauthorised mass-harvesting.

Question 4: Do you agree with the council's plans to increase allotment provision at Craven Vale?

Yes 58%
No 37%
Don't know 5%

Comments

"Great idea."
"There is already a lot of under cultivation of plots on Whitehawk Hill + Craven Vale sites. Turn over amongst new plot holders is high."

"I oppose allotment idea as the site is good for wildlife such as migrant warblers."
"On behalf of Allotment Federation Committee, I oppose the new allotment site."
"I strongly oppose loss of Access Land to new allotment site".
"I think it would be better to break new plots elsewhere on the hill rather than ruin such a beautiful spot."
"This is great open space with grand views. The grassy foreground and distant sea and city views should be preserved. Not a great place for new allotments - also too exposed."
"It is free open access land and should remain free for all to enjoy as people do now. It is the only section of green horizon viewed from the west not already urbanised. It is also adjacent to an important ancient monument. The existing grassland here should be expanded, not reduced."
"I am an allotment holder at Craven Vale. Despite recent efforts to increase occupancy and activity many plots lie dormant. I think extension should be implemented only after every effort has been made to rigorously increase use at existing sites."

Despite a majority in favour, nearly all of the more detailed feedback we received was against the proposal. With this in mind we have decided that this area is not suitable for new allotments. We recognise the demand for allotments in this area and are looking at alternative sites, as well as re-letting existing vacant plots on the Whitehawk Hill, Craven Vale, Race Hill and Tenantry Down sites.

The hill's future - how you can get involved

Whitehawk Camp

B&H Archaeological Society - http://www.brightonarch.org.uk/
An exciting archaeological project is being proposed, focusing on Whitehawk Camp and headed by University College London, in partnership with the council and other local organisations. Please contact park ranger Paul Gorringe for more details of how to get involved (below).

Race Hill Community Orchard

There are regular work days and workshops taking place at the new orchard site. Contact Helen Starr-Keddle for more details - Helen@bhfood.org.uk

The Friends of Whitehawk Hill

The park ranger for Whitehawk Hill is in the process of establishing a community group to involve local people and to help protect and enhance the site. Participants will have a say in management decisions, take part in practical conservation tasks, undertake wildlife surveys, promote the site at events and much more. To get involved please contact Paul Gorringe (below).

The Friends of Craven Wood

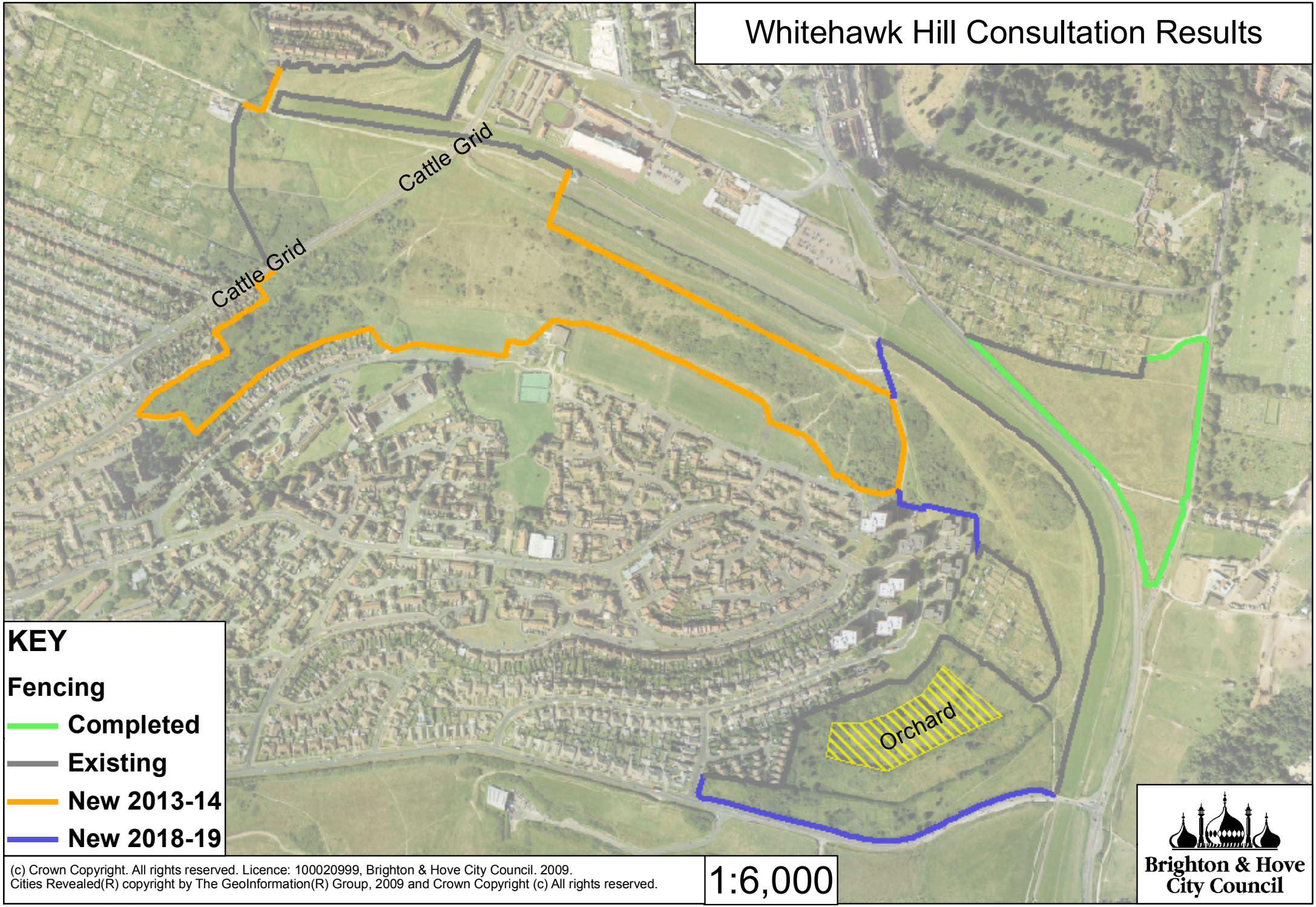
This small but important woodland on the south-west facing slopes of the hill has been managed by the local community for over two years, supported by the park ranger. They can be contacted via Grant Scott at cidarec@hotmail.com

Volunteer Urban shepherds (lookerers)

Details of how you can help us to look after the sheep can be found on the council's website - www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/lookerers

If you'd like to comment on any topic in this consultation document please email park ranger Paul Gorringe – paul.gorringe@brighton-hove.gov.uk, or write to Paul Gorringe, Park Ranger, Cityparks, Stanmer Nurseries, Stanmer Park, Lewes Road, Brighton BN1 9SE

Whitehawk Hill Consultation Results



KEY

Fencing

- **Completed**
- **Existing**
- **New 2013-14**
- **New 2018-19**

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