

# **Steyning Downland Scheme Ltd - Trustees' Annual Report for the year 1st April 2012 to 31st March 2013**

Charity number: 1132957  
Company limited by guarantee, number: 6946165

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## **Legal and administrative information**

### **Registered address**

The Wiston Estate Office, Wiston Park, Steyning, West Sussex BN44 3DD.

### **Trustees**

Richard Goring, Chair

Alan Chilver

John Hartwell

Caroline Armitage

### **Staff**

Bryony Webb, Project Manager, three days a week (to January 2013)

### **Volunteers**

The Board of Directors is assisted by an advisory committee of eight local people whose enthusiasm, commitment and activity has been invaluable. Still other volunteers take on many practical roles within the scheme. The Project Manager has also given a considerable amount of voluntary time to the scheme.

### **Bankers**

Unity Trust Bank, Nine Brindleyplace, Birmingham

### **Independent reviewer**

Paul Kirkbride, FCCA, Horsham, West Sussex

### **Policies**

The charity has kept a range of policies updated including those on Safeguarding, Health and Safety and Equal Opportunities.

### **Objects**

The objects of the charity are

- a) to promote the education and study of all matters relating to conservation and the environment;
- b) to enable and encourage conservation of the natural resources and habitats for the benefit of the public;
- c) to educate and encourage the general public, and local young people in particular, in an understanding of the natural environment and
- d) in the context of the objects at (a) – (c) above, to work in accordance with the moral principles and the spirit of love that authenticates the Christian faith, and in a manner which demonstrates Christian stewardship of the environment. For the purposes of these objects ‘Christian faith’ means the Christian faith as revealed and expressed in the Holy Scriptures of both old and new testaments.

## **Trustees' Report**

### **History:**

The Scheme was instigated by Harry Goring and Pip Goring of the Wiston Estate. The present trust was founded in 2007 in partnership with A Rocha (a Christian conservation movement), and interested local people. Some 160 acres of chalk downland adjacent to Steyning has been set apart for the benefit of wildlife and the local community as the main focus of the Scheme. It includes open grassland, a watercourse, ponds and mixed woodland. Over the past six years there has been an excellent network of local volunteers built up, many of whom have helped restore the chalk grassland and support a great variety of events on site. An area that was fast becoming degraded is flourishing into an area of genuine diversity.

### **The year in a nutshell:**

*“The hope is to foster a meeting of different minds and people, coming together in the pursuit of seeing the everyday miracle of Creation and being inspired to hope for the future in a fractured and despairing world.”*

When these words were written back in January 2008, we had only an inkling of what was coming our way. Now five years later the Scheme continues to develop and mature, involving people of all ages and backgrounds. There is still a healthy tension of different opinions as to how to tackle the various tasks we face, but also a growing understanding and awareness between different people who enjoy the area. A hallmark of this continues to be to try to hear from different users before taking action. Whilst this approach often takes longer, the results are nearly always better and help to achieve the aim of a better understanding of the site by as many users as possible. The finances of the charity have remained stable and enabled the project manager's role to be maintained at three paid days a week. This has released more time to develop an expanding network of volunteers and activities.

We had a full program of events over the spring and summer again this year, with an excellent art day, mothy breakfast, Big Picnic (attended by over 450 people), bushcraft days and butterfly walks. Surveying events continued to strengthen, including regular early morning bird surveys, and the botanical surveys have already shown a measured improvement in the flora as a result of the conservation grazing regime.

In October the Steering Group and Board of Trustees held their joint meeting (now an annual event) to progress our priorities. There was clarity reached on the areas of site management which should be prioritised, specifically to progress cattle grazing, develop the ranger team and further establish ecological survey. A strategy for further developing volunteer involvement, particularly from young people, was also agreed, including developing clear volunteer roles, improved marketing and promotion and further development of the Friends scheme.

The Ranger group progressed from strength to strength, working to a pre-agreed conservation Action Plan, derived from the over-arching Management Plan. The Rangers complemented the conservation work carried out by Steyning Grammar School, involving over 200 Year 7 pupils in active conservation work during the

autumn and winter, cutting back ash regeneration and other scrub to enable the chalk grassland to recover. Work also began on a thorough review of the Management Plan so that new strategic objectives could be established post 2013.

For a second year running, we worked in partnership with the Steyning Grammar School to host three 'Discovery Days' – with 160 year sevens spending three days finding out 'what is special about the Steyning Downland Scheme'. Local, volunteer 'experts' were involved, introducing students to aspects of the land as diverse as butterflies, ponds, avoiding litter and chalk grassland conservation. Despite some very heavy rain on day one, some wonderful presentations were subsequently made by the student relating to maths, art, biology and marketing.

The open information evening hosted in March was testament to the increasing profile of the Scheme. Over 80 local people attended the evening to hear presentations from the National Park, the botany surveying group and pupils from the local grammar school. There was also an opportunity for people to provide feedback on the issues of importance to them.

The year involved some important staff changes. In the autumn, the Trustees heard of the founding Project Manager's intention to step down to progress her career in a new direction. After discussion it was unanimously agreed that the part-time, paid post was crucial to the future of the Scheme and should be retained. A job description and person specification were then formalised and the post advertised and interviews duly held in January 2013 (the successful candidate began in post the following May). This period coincided with the appointment of a Volunteer Administrator who was able to successfully keep the project on track during the months without a paid post.

Notable progress was made with devising a logo, leaflet and site signage, via the establishment of a Signage Group and the development of a signage specification. The objective has been to create a clear 'look' for the Scheme which will greatly aid promotion and further engagement of the local community.

It was recognised that completion of the Signage Group's objectives would involve significant resources and therefore the engagement of a professional Fundraiser early in 2013 was warmly welcomed by the Trustees. The intention is for the Fundraiser to work closely with the Project Manager to develop and implement a clear fundraising strategy going forward.

## **Financial Review:**

The accounts show that whilst funding, particularly core funding, is still tight, there was a healthy balance of £8,732 carried forward at the end of the year. The West Sussex Council Community Initiative Fund was spent on a (much needed) new computer for the Project Manager, promotion materials in conjunction with Steyning Grammar School and conservation equipment. The National Park Authority provided a grant of £1,780.32 towards a water trough to facilitate conservation grazing.

The Reserves Policy states that the charity will work towards £1000 designated for reserves in each financial year, aiming to reach a minimum of three months expenditure, and a maximum of six months expenditure.

**Support in kind**

The Wiston Estate is highly supportive in providing land management advice, estate staff time and use of equipment.

A Rocha UK assist through advice on legal, conservation and community matters, also supporting the staff member where appropriate

The South Downs National Park Authority and the Neighbourhood wardens provide a staff member each for the advisory committee and support the practical work of the scheme with their volunteer groups.

Steyning Grammar School provides a staff member to co-ordinate the young conservation groups.

A minimum of 1300 volunteer hours were given to the project in this year.

The Trustees declare that they have approved the above report and it is signed by the Chair on behalf of the board.

***Signed:***

***Richard Goring***

***20<sup>th</sup> November 2013***