



Thank you very much for volunteering to be a Lookerer for the Steyning Downland Scheme. Conservation grazing is essential for conserving our ancient chalk grassland and without the volunteer Looking Team, there would be no grazing!

This handbook explains what it means to be a volunteer Lookerer – the things to look out for and the steps you should take to ensure your volunteering experience is safe, effective and enjoyable.

Responsibilities

Your day-to-day contacts are **Frances Sedgwick** who owns the Dexter cattle we use and **Sarah Quantrill**, Volunteer Co-Ordinator for the Steyning Downland Scheme, who is responsible for organising the looking rota.

The contact details for everyone involved in the conservation grazing are given on the last page of this guidance. New copies of this page will be issued when these change. If you have any questions about this guidance, do please contact either Sarah or **Matthew Thomas**, SDS Project Manager.

A bit of background: Chalk Grassland

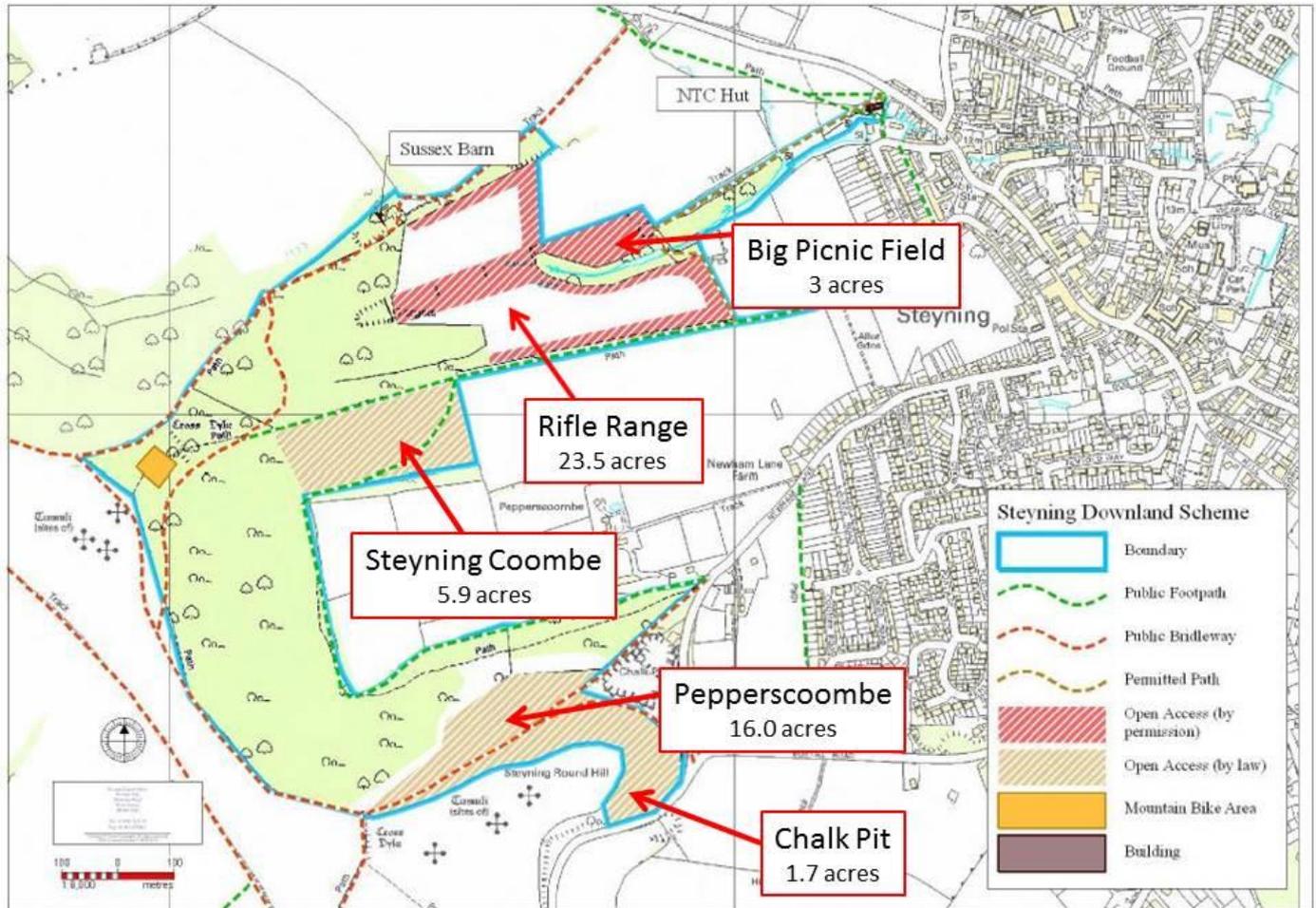
The Steyning Downland Scheme has around 47 acres (19 hectares) of chalk grassland, divided between the steep slopes of the Rifle Range, Steyning Coombe and Pepperscoombe.

At its best, chalk grassland (the technical term is 'Lowland Calcareous Grassland') is very species-rich, with up to 40 species of flowering plant in just one square metre of turf. These include classic, old countryside plants like Bird's-foot Trefoil ('egg and bacon plant'), Wild

Bird's-foot Trefoil



Thyme, Marjoram and Oxeye Daisy. These support a wealth of other wildlife, including chalk grassland butterflies such as Adonis Blue and Silver-Spotted Skipper (which both occur on our grassland).



*The places where Chalk Grassland is found on the Steyning Downland Scheme:
Rifle Range, Steyning Coombe, Pepperscoombe and Chalk Pit (the Big Picnic Field is too nutrient-rich)*

Chalk grassland is an internationally rare habitat which now occurs on about 20% of the area it covered in the 1940s. There are several causes for the decline, but perhaps the most important has been an increase in soil fertility, either due to modern agricultural methods, or simply neglect.

Most chalk grassland plants are small, low-growing species and these are dependent on very low soil fertility to survive. Fertile soil allows tall, fast growing plants such as Nettle, Tor Grass and Creeping Thistle to dominate and out-compete the others. Unless soil nutrients are constantly removed from chalk grassland, it will gradually change to dense grassland, scrub and eventually woodland as the fertility naturally increases. This process is called 'ecological succession'.

Conservation Grazing

Grazing halts succession by physically removing the invasive grassland plants and by converting soil nutrients to meat. Traditionally, the downland pastures would have been grazed by hardy sheep breeds, such as the Southdown and cattle. On the Steyning Downland, we generally use cattle because these are less prone to worrying by dogs.

Many modern breeds of cattle will not eat the plants found on old chalk grassland but the Dexters we use are an old, hardy breed that will thrive on a low-nutrient sward. They are also unusual because they will enthusiastically browse down invading scrub and young trees. Their small size and docile temperament also make them perfect for the Steyning Downland Scheme.

What Lookers should Look out for

As a volunteer Looker you have a crucial role in giving assurance to our grazier that the animals are safe and in good condition. For graziers living a distance away from the grazing site, a daily report from a team of Lookers is essential and many will not graze without it.

Before you start working, you will meet either Sarah or Matthew who will talk through the role with you. You will also be kept up-to-date by e-mail or text on the number of cattle on site and their whereabouts (Rifle Range, Steyning Coombe or Pepperscombe) and depending on your availability, you'll also be given a 'slot' on a weekly looking rota.

Please walk the grazing area on your allotted rota day. The things to look out for are:

Cattle:

1. Are all the livestock present and in the right field?
2. Are there any signs of ill-health, such as:
 - Unusual behaviour (looking listless / staying away from the herd)
 - Obvious weight loss
 - Lameness?

Facilities:

1. Water supply – the trough should be full of water but not frozen over or overflowing.
2. Are there any noticeable hazards?
3. Are gates and fences stock –proof? (No need to walk the fence line, but if there are any obvious problems, such as a gate not padlocked, or a fallen tree across the fence line, please report it.)

I've found a problem. What do I do now?

Once your checks have been made, if there are no issues, please send a brief text to Frances to confirm all the Dexters are well, including your name and the initials of the area you are in ('RR', 'SC' or 'PC').

If there is a problem with the **cattle**, or the **facilities**, please contact Frances as soon as you can (try all contact details and then text if she is not able to answer your call).

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What if I can't visit the Steyning Downland on my allotted day in the rota?

- a. If you know in advance that you will not be able to visit, please send a group e-mail to the Lookerer team, giving as much notice as you can. Copy in Sarah and Matthew and ask if anyone is able to swap with you. If no-one is able to help, Sarah will let Frances know about the gap in cover. At short notice (ie the same day), just text Frances to let her know you can't be there. Don't worry – it's not your responsibility to fill your slot in the rota if you can't be there!

2. The gate to the field with the Dexters in it has been left open – what should I do?

- a. If you feel able to do so, please shut the gate and padlock it (if an open padlock is available). Next phone or text Frances to let her know what has happened. Frances may contact Matthew if it's a problem that needs work.

3. I have seen a problem with one of the Dexters – should I approach it?

- a. You should only approach the cattle close enough to ensure they are all present. If you notice any problems, phone or text Frances straight away.

4. The Dexters are fenced on a very steep, grassy slope and I do not feel confident to climb it to check them. What should I do?

- a. Never attempt your looking task if you think it is putting you at risk. It is your responsibility to assess whether a particular task is putting you at risk, depending on your experience, level of fitness and the conditions at the time. If in doubt, text Frances and Sarah to explain why you have not been able to check the Dexters on a particular day.

5. The weather been wet and windy all day and I am due to check the Dexters today – what should I do?



Only visit the site in adverse weather if you feel confident and comfortable to do so. If the weather is very adverse, such as deep snow, please text Sarah and Frances to let them know you are not able to visit. In adverse weather, make sure you wear appropriate clothing and footwear with good grip. Let a friend or relative know where you are going and when you expect to be back. If you have one, carry your

mobile phone with you and remember to contact your friend or relative again when you return. (Photo credit: Pete Varkala).

In cold weather, the water trough may freeze over. Please break the ice if you can, or text Frances to let her know there is a problem with the water supply.

6. The Dexters are enclosed by electric fencing – what should I do?

- a. Do not attempt to climb over the electric fence – instead walk around the perimeter until you can see the animals and the water trough. If you are not able to see either the animals or the trough properly, text Frances and Sarah to tell them.

7. It looks like the electric fencing / water trough aren't working properly

- a. Please report this to Frances. If the water trough is frozen over, please break the ice if you can. If you would like to be trained to carry out basic maintenance of either the electric fence or the water supply, please let Sarah know. She will organise training for these through the National Park Rangers.

Further reading for the ultra-keen

DEFRA has published an extremely detailed cattle welfare guide which can be accessed online by following this link: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/publications/files/pb7949-cattle-code-030407.pdf>

The Steyning Downland Scheme
Wiston Estate Office
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Appendix 1: Contact details

1. Grazier: Frances Sedgwick

tel: 07989 318439 (preferred) / 01903 744236 / 07710 248431

e-mail: francesedgwick@btinternet.com

2. SDS Volunteer Co-Ordinator: Sarah Quantrill

tel: 07940 592347

e-mail: sdsvolunteers@gmail.com

3. SDS Project Manager: Matthew Thomas

tel: 01903 817996 / 07763 206030.

e-mail: SDS@WistonEstate.co.uk

4. Lookerer e-mail addresses

Appendix 2: Lookerer Rota
