



GIFT TO NATURE

TOWN COUNCIL MEETING

REPORT 49/20

15 JUNE 2020

The purpose of this Report is for Members to receive the Annual Report of Gift to Nature for 2019/20.

No. DETAILS

1) BACKGROUND

- a) The Island 2000 Trust began in 1997 as a partnership between 10 organisations: Isle of Wight Council, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Unit, Rural Community Council, National Trust, National Farmers Union, Country Land and Business Association, Environment Agency, Countryside Commission, Association of Town and Parish Councils and Southern Water.
- b) It registered as a Charity on 8 November 2000 having secured a Millennium Commission grant of £3m.
- c) In February 2016 the Island 2000 Trust charity took on the management of most of the Isle of Wight Council's countryside estate. This project is run under the name of Gift to Nature as a 20-year agreement to reinvigorate 25 Isle of Council sites, covering an area in excess of 170 hectares.

2) VENTNOR AREAS

- a) Three of Ventnor's landscape areas: Rew Down, Nansen Down and the Landslip are included in the Gift to Nature project.
- b) The Town Council meeting of 10 December 2018 considered a request for funding for this work and a donation of £540 from the Green Ventnor Budget line was agreed.
- c) Its Annual Report for 2019/20 has been provided and is attached to this Report.



Ventnor Nature Reserves
Annual Report
April 2019 – March 2020

Produced for Ventnor Town Council



Report

This is the annual 2019/20 report for the Gift to Nature sites within the Ventnor Parish.

Rew Down Local Nature Reserve

In Spring 2019 we instructed a grounds maintenance contractor to cut some areas of encroaching bramble at the western end of the down. This work was undertaken in conjunction with further cutting by the Isle of Wight Council on the land beyond to the west and along the northern boundary of Rew Down to facilitate some fencing repairs and amendments.

During the period we have visited to trim access paths from the eastern and south western ends of the down as needed. We have also replaced some fence posts along the southern boundary. This site remains low in terms of input required. If grazing was reinstated this would increase.

During the period the Isle of Wight Council has arranged for further contractor cutting on the down in early 2020 together with contractors replacing fencing along the top boundary and hedge trimming vegetation from the golf course road.

Nansen Hill

For several months we have been negotiating and drafting a grazing licence to allow the National Trust and their grazier to put cows on Nansen Hill. In August this was finalised and cows have been grazing from October 2019. This should be a mutually beneficial arrangement as the Trust graze the neighbouring fields and are experienced in this type of management in the area. They will be able to use Nansen in their overall grazing strategy to rotate stock between sites and in particular Nansen and Nansen North. The Trust will be able to graze between September and March depending upon ground and weather conditions.

Over the period we have visited the site seventeen times which usually involves a check and collection of any litter (very little). In May we trimmed around the lower entrance gate and checked gates in August prior to grazing starting.

We have been active in October finalising site preparations for grazing to begin. We have placed grazing notices with contact details for the Trust and ourselves, replaced 14 fence posts on the upper fence boundary with the Trust land and cleared overhanging vegetation from the fence in various locations.

The down was grazed with eight young cows from October to January having a clear effect on the vegetation. There were some concerns raised about mud on the site particularly around the lower gate but this was much localised and considering the wet winter was

considerably better than many other gateways and footpaths on the Island. With the advent of warmer, drier weather this has ceased to be a concern.

Bonchurch Landslip

We visited the site fifteen times during the period. A visit will usually include a site check and litter collection. Periodically we cleared debris (leaf and stick litter) from the steps at the Chink and Devils Chimney and prune paths where needed. In July and August we also pruned paths to clear some of the summer growth along edges of paths. In September we made safe a metal pin that was part of a fixing for an old step but had become a trip hazard.

In October our tree contractor removed some loose logs from an area above the Chink that had become a potential hazard. We also cut back some overhanging vegetation from the path at the top of the Chink.

We have been passing information to the Isle of Wight Council and enquiring about safety checks to the two sets of steps at the Chink and Devils Chimney. At the Devils Chimney Island Roads monitor rock movements and are happy upon inspection that conditions are stable. We have asked for the Chink to be inspected periodically by the Rights of Way section, who would have to say if the footpath is safe to remain open.

We have provided the Isle of Wight Council with photographs of parts of the wall along the top of the cliff between the Chimney and the Chink as we think they should consider some repairs.

Over winter we have inspected overhead growth and removed deadwood as needed. We have also removed at least three dead trees to the sides of the paths to maintain safety. During the period the chalkboard has been removed for repair then replaced. We have also repaired some of the metal railings on the steps down.

Issues and Opportunities

Rew Down Local Nature Reserve

Grazing has been sporadic over the past few years on the Down. Most recently in 2016/17 the site was grazed with sheep but there were a number of problems with dogs and the farmer is unwilling to place his animals there again. The Isle of Wight Council are currently seeking cattle grazing for the site. In the mean time we have done some bramble cutting in conjunction with the IW Council and much of the Down remains in a favourable condition with the help of heavy rabbit grazing.

Nansen Hill

The grazing arrangement with the National Trust was very successful over 2019/20 with good progress made with the management of the site. We were aiming to undertake some buddleia control following grazing but due to the Coronavirus situation this is now on hold for the time being.

We would also like to clear back scrub at the top of the Down adjacent to the neighbouring Trust land who have also expressed an interest on clearing on their side to join up neighbouring areas of species rich grassland. This is a possibility in the winter of 2020/21

Bonchurch Landslip

The new English Coastal Path will follow the existing Coastal Path which traverse the site. This will afford opportunities to promote the site, and there will be upgrades to this section of route, which can be very wet and slippery.

The landslip is always a difficult site to access for maintenance so any assistance from the Coastal Path project will be welcome. The Rights of Way team periodically check the routes through and undertake work to keep paths clear of vegetation.

Planned Activities 2020/21

Rew Down Local Nature Reserve

Regular site visits continue and once the Coronavirus restrictions are lifted we will reinstate the normal maintenance regime.

Nansen Hill

Regular site visits continue and once the Coronavirus restrictions are lifted we will reinstate the normal maintenance regime.

As discussed above we will endeavour to undertake some buddleia control and scrub clearance over the winter of 2020/21. There will also be some repair work required to the fences prior to cattle grazing in the autumn.

Bonchurch Landslip

Regular site visits continue and once the Coronavirus restrictions are lifted we will reinstate the normal maintenance regime.

We will continue to develop the Site Plan for Bonchurch Landslip.

Gallery





Gift to Nature

Gift to Nature as a project of Natural Enterprise, the Isle of Wight's local countryside charity. We own and manage countryside, green space and nature reserves across the Island for everyone to enjoy, for free, all year around.

Gift to Nature is passionate about the Isle of Wight's wildlife, countryside and open spaces, from our famous red squirrels to obscure tiny rare bees. Since 2002 we have created and cared for a variety of green spaces both in towns and countryside, right across the Island.

In 2016 we expanded the project to take on many sites that were previously managed by the Isle of Wight Council. So we have even more countryside and green spaces all around the Island. Many of our sites feature local art, whether a carved picnic bench or a scrap-metal sculpture. We invite local craftsmen and artists to help add something special to what nature (and our conservation workers) have provided.

We also work with eleven of the Island's Town and Parish Council's to help them manage Green Space within their jurisdiction, sometimes this is their own land, but this is not always the case. **We are keen to meet and work with them to promote greater community involvement in sites and develop plans for long term management.**

