**New Golf Course Tenants ‘Vandalising’ National Park.**

**Conservationists are calling for urgent action following reports that the new tenants of a golf course in the National Park have been ‘vandalising’ the landscape and ‘dumping’ soil on popular local footpaths.**

Hollingbury Golf Course, in the South Downs National Park and the Wild Park Local Nature Reserve,  is owned by Brighton and Hove City Council. It was leased to Circle Leisure in April this year with an understanding that local people would be consulted over how the land would be managed before any changes were made[[1]](#footnote-1)

However, Brighton Downs Alliance, which represents 20 local conservation groups, has been monitoring the situation and says the new management has caused extensive damage by using chemical herbicides and heavy machinery.

Local people have also reported Circle Leisure staff trying to close popular footpaths which have been in regular use for decades. Historically the course has had shared access with golfers having priority.

The Alliance has now written to local councillors reminding them of the council’s obligation to maintain the golf course ‘for nature and the public,’ and calling for urgent action to manage the land properly and to restore full public access.

‘The hill is a key local green space, accessible on foot, for a large local population,’ says the letter. ‘This is illustrated by the numbers enjoying the hill for mental respite and exercise during lockdown - more than 100 an hour, so at least 800 people a day we believe.’

CPRE Sussex Director, Kia Trainor, says green and open spaces like Hollingbury have become increasingly important to our physical and mental health and wellbeing over recent months.

‘At times like these the benefits from green and open spaces in towns and cities have become proportionately greater,’ she says. ‘So access to this treasured local amenity is really important.’

Chris Todd of Brighton and Hove Friends of the Earth says Circle Leisure’s actions show a complete disregard for residents who’ve worked hard conserving the area for both people and wildlife:

‘I was shocked to find the new golf course managers had trashed a swathe of wildlife habitat,’ he says. They’ve also tried to close off paths that local residents have used for decades. One they blocked by dumping a mass of soil across it.’

‘We were told that the new managers would work with local people when they were given the lease.  However, they seem intent on doing what they want without the relevant permissions or any understanding of the impact they are having.’

‘This is creating a lot of anger locally and the Council needs to take greater responsibility for sorting this mess out.’

Chris Todd’s views are echoed by local people who have described Circle Leisure’s actions as ‘vandalism’.

**For more information please contact:**

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**Notes**

***Brighton Downs Alliance*** *is a group of organisations, experts & community, campaigning for the fairer, sustainably managed & accessible public Downs of Brighton & Hove (B&H) Members include:  Beacon Hub, Rottingdean; B&H Archaeological Society; B&H Food Partnership; B&H Friends of the Earth; B&H Wildlife Forum; Butterfly Conservation Sussex Branch; Coldean Community Organisation; Campaign to Protect Rural England Sussex; Friends of Hollingdean Park; Friends of Waterhall; Friends of Whitehawk Hill, Keep Our Downs Public; Keep the Ridge Green; Moulsecoomb Forest Garden & Wildlife Project; Neil Ravenscroft Royal Agricultural University; South Downs Society; Sussex Bat Group; Sussex Socialist Environment & Resources Association: Sussex Wildlife Trust;  Wild Flower Conservation Society - Brighton & Beyond*

1. <https://present.brighton-hove.gov.uk/documents/g9870/Printed%20minutes%2023rd-Jan-2020%2016.00%20Policy%20Resources%20Committee.pdf?T=1> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)