



Interim strategy for mitigating the effects of recreational pressure on the Chesil Beach and the Fleet SAC, SPA and Ramsar

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Chesil Beach and the Fleet SAC, SPA and Ramsar

Chesil Beach and the Fleet is designated as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC)¹, Special Protection Area (SPA)² and a Ramsar³ site in recognition of its exceptional ecological importance.

Natural England have recently provided evidence which suggests that recreational pressure at Chesil Beach and the Fleet is adversely affecting the internationally important habitats and species at the site.

This has resulted in Natural England objecting to planning applications for residential development within the vicinity of Chesil Beach and the Fleet on the basis that the increase in local population will result in an associated increase in recreational pressure. This includes an objection to the reserved matters planning application for stages 2 to 4 of the proposed Curtis Fields development.

There is currently no adopted strategy in place to address the impacts of recreational pressure at Chesil Beach and the Fleet. However, Dorset Council recognise the need for a strategic solution in the longer term to ensure that future development will not affect the integrity of the Chesil and the Fleet European site.

Such a strategy would need to be informed by evidence, which is currently not available. It is unlikely to be possible to undertake a study in the foreseeable future given the measures currently in place to prevent the spread of the Covid-19 virus.

In the period prior to evidence being gathered and a more comprehensive strategy being adopted, Natural England have suggested that the local authority considers implementing an interim mitigation strategy.

¹ Under Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora ('Habitats Directive')

² Under Directive 2009/147/EC on the conservation of wild birds ('Birds Directive')

³ Under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat

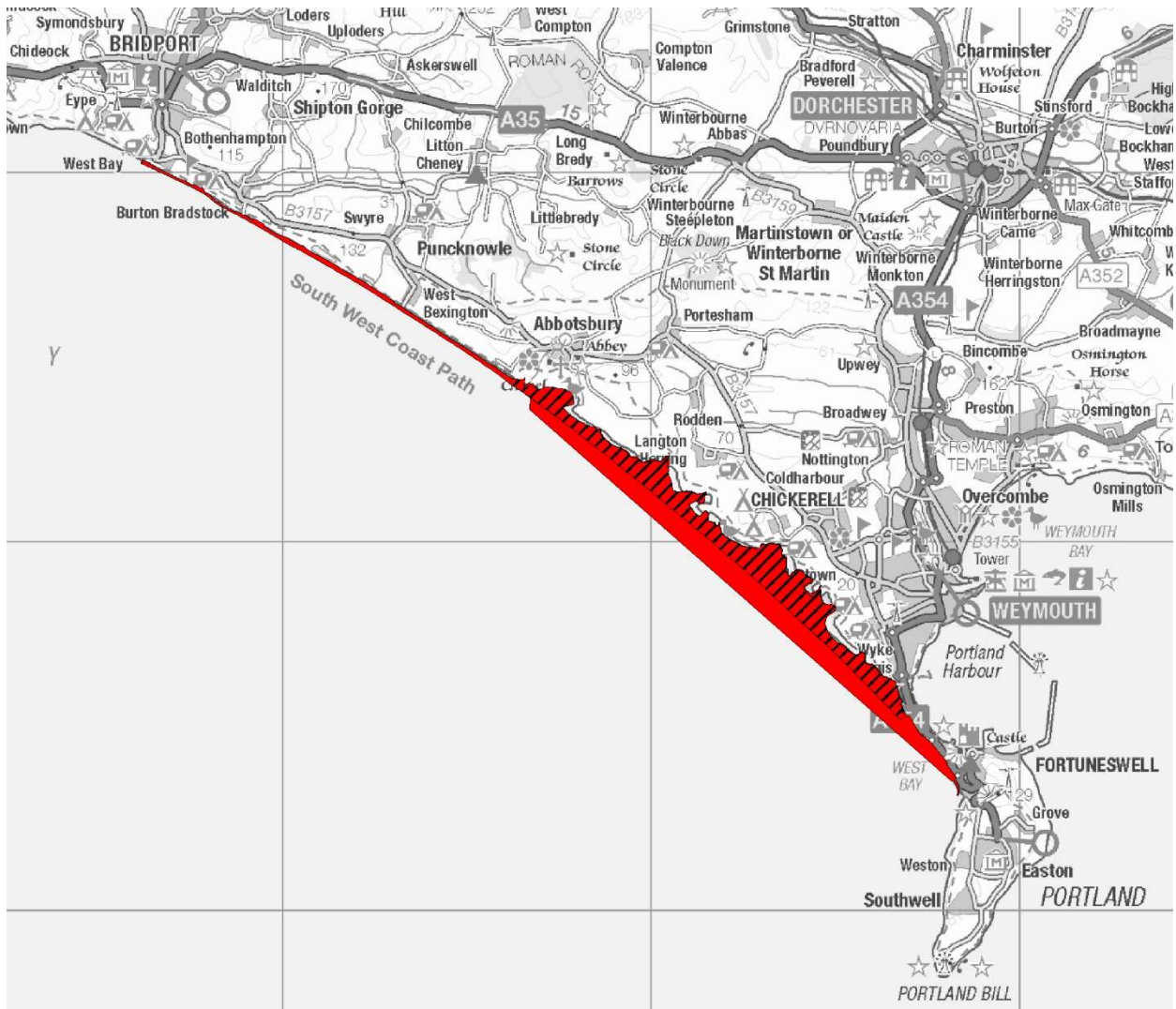
This document provides an interim approach to addressing the recreational impacts upon Chesil Beach and the Fleet which will ensure that new development contributes to the mitigation in a fair, transparent and proportionate manner. This will also provide a means of ensuring that the Curtis Fields development provides the appropriate level of mitigation, allowing the application to proceed.

This interim approach considers the mitigation measures which are likely to be required to address the impact according to Natural England and the degree of development which is estimated to come forward which may affect Chesil Beach and the Fleet in the period to 2038. This allows an estimate to be made of the cost charge per dwelling required to secure sufficient funding to deliver the necessary mitigation for new developments, which can be applied to the reserved matters applications at Curtis Fields.

Chesil Beach and the Fleet SAC, SPA and Ramsar

The Chesil Beach and the Fleet European site is characterised by a 29km long shingle storm beach and a coastal lagoon called the Fleet (Figure 1).

Figure 1: A map showing the extent of the Chesil and the Fleet SAC, SPA and Ramsar (area of SPA shown in hatching only, area of SAC and Ramsar shown in both red and hatching)



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The primary reasons for the designation of the Chesil and the Fleet SAC are the following habitats:

- Coastal lagoon;
- Mediterranean and thermos-Atlantic halophilous scrubs (*Sarcocornetea fruticoia*);

- Perennial vegetation of stony banks; and
- Annual vegetation of drift lines.

The shingle beach encloses a brackish lagoon called the Fleet, which is the largest lagoon in England occupying 495ha and supports the greatest diversity of habitats and species of any lagoon in the UK⁴. Due to the salinity gradient, peculiar hydrographic regime, and associated reedbed and intertidal habitats, the Fleet is extraordinarily rich in wildlife with outstanding numbers of aquatic plants and animals present.

The Mediterranean and thermos-Atlantic halophilous scrubs habitat is largely associated with the lagoon habitat, since it is found predominantly on the seaward margin of the Fleet.

Chesil Beach represents a large area of 'perennial vegetation of stony banks' habitat which supports the most extensive occurrences of the rare sea-kale *Crambe maritima* and sea pea *Lathyrus japonicas* in the UK, together with other grassland and lichen-rich shingle plant communities typical of more stable conditions.

In addition, Chesil beach is also one of two representatives of Annual vegetation of drift lines on the south coast of England. The inner shore of the beach supports extensive drift-line vegetation dominated by sea beet *Beta vulgaris maritima* and orache *Atriplex*.

The Chesil Beach and the Fleet SPA occupies the Fleet lagoon and immediate surroundings which support saltmarshes and reedbeds. The SPA supports over wintering bird species such as the Dark Bellied Brent Goose *Branta bernicla*. In Spring and Summer, Chesil Bank is an important breeding ground for the Little Tern *Sterna albifrons* which feed in the shallow waters of the lagoon. The site also provides a habitat for bird species which do not breed at this location, such as Wigeon *Mareca Penelope*.

⁴ Bamber, R. N. 1997. Assessment of saline lagoons within Special Areas of Conservation (SACs). Peterborough: English Nature

Chesil and the Fleet is also a designated Ramsar site in recognition of its international importance as a wetland.

The Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) units which overlap with Chesil and the Fleet European Site is 34% in an 'unfavourable' condition, with 15% of these areas declining into an even poorer condition. Given the deteriorating condition of this habitat, it is likely that Chesil and the Fleet is vulnerable to the additional pressures which may be introduced by new development.

Natural England's Objection to the Curtis Fields Reserved Matters Application

Natural England objected to the reserved matters planning applications for Phases 2 to 4 of the Curtis Fields development (WP/19/00635/RES, WP/19/00693/RES, WP/19/00273/RES) in November 2019⁵ and March 2020⁶, and requested the following:

- Details of the likely recreational impacts on the designated site features and the scope for mitigation; and
- An Air Quality Assessment of the likely impacts of traffic movements on designated sites.

Natural England explained that the increase in residential dwellings of up to 500 units within a kilometre from Chesil Beach and the Fleet European site, as a result of the Curtis Fields development as a whole, would be likely to substantially increase the recreational pressures on the features of the designated area. This may result in an 'alone' impact given the proximity to and connectivity with the European site.

Natural England suggest that the trampling of habitats and species are adversely affecting the primary reasons for the SAC designation. Furthermore, recreational pressure particularly from dog walkers and water sports during the winter period is having an adverse effecting the over-wintering birds of the SPA.

⁵ Letter from Jack Potter c/o Natural England to Dorset Council, dated 7th November 2019 (ref: 297149 and 297654)

⁶ Letter from Jack Potter c/o Natural England to Dorset Council, dated 9th March 2020 (ref: 297149 and 297654)

Natural England cited evidence on the excess recreational use of the Chesil and the Fleet European Site which has emerged since they provided advice on the outline application in 2015, including:

- 'Chesil Beach 2019 Recreational Activity Strategy', Footprint Ecology (2019) (ref: 549)
- Supplementary Advice for Conservation Objectives (SACO) for the Chesil Beach and the Fleet SPA, Natural England (2019)⁷.

According to Natural England, the Footprint Ecology report indicates that there is an unacceptable level of existing recreational pressure at Chesil Beach and the Fleet which is likely to be compromising the integrity of the SAC site features.

The SACO identified significant concerns regarding recreational pressures on the features of the site, in particular Little Tern, which is in unfavourable condition with a target to restore to the former population as it was upon designation.

Natural England commented in March 2020 that no air quality assessment had been made of the likely air quality impacts as a result of additional vehicular movements upon the Chesil and the Fleet European site from the Curtis Fields development. Since this time, the applicant has submitted an air quality screening report⁸ which concludes that:

“the increase in traffic on Portland Beach Road due to the proposed development in-combination with committed development is less than 1,000 AADT. Therefore, the impact on the integrity of the protected areas due to emissions from road traffic generated by the proposed development will be insignificant and detailed assessment should not be required.”

⁷ SACO for Chesil and the Fleet may be viewed here, at the time of writing: <https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/Marine/SupAdvice.aspx?SiteCode=UK9010091&SiteName=&SiteNameDisplay=Chesil+Beach+and+The+Fleet+SPA&countyCode=&responsiblePerson=&SeaArea=&IFCAArea=&NumMarineSeasonality=2>

⁸ 'Screening Statement', Air Quality Assessments Ltd, dated 17th March 2020 (document ref: J0402/1/F1)

In addition to the impacts of the proposed development 'alone', Natural England have indicated that the proposed development may also contribute to the 'in-combination' effects with the existing recreational pressures on the Chesil and the Fleet European site.

Natural England have commented that a wider strategy may be needed to address the 'in-combination' issue of recreational pressure at Chesil and the Fleet.

Suggested approach towards developing a strategy for Chesil and the Fleet.

Dorset Council recognise that a strategic solution is required to tackle the effects of recreational pressure at Chesil and the Fleet. This will ensure that future development which comes forward through the emerging Dorset Local Plan which is currently scheduled for adoption in 2023, will not affect the integrity of the Chesil and the Fleet European site.

Substantial evidence, which includes site-specific data on the recreational use of Chesil Beach and the Fleet, will need to be gathered to ensure that the strategy comprehensively addresses the issue. It is currently not possible to undertake these works due to the measures in place to tackle the Covid-19 virus.

In the interim period, prior to evidence being gathered and a strategy being adopted, Natural England have suggested that a potential approach is for the local authority to consider implementing an interim mitigation strategy. This would allow planning applications to be determined in the shorter term, prior to a more permanent strategy being adopted.

This document presents an interim strategy. The approach taken has been to estimate the charge per dwelling which will need to be secured through planning obligations in order to fund the mitigation required to address the impacts. This has been derived from the cost of the mitigation required at Chesil Beach and the Fleet and the anticipated housing supply in the surrounding areas. Applying this approach to the Curtis Fields development will ensure that it contributes to the impacts at Chesil and the Fleet in a fair and proportionate way.

Mitigation

Natural England have provided a series of measures which they consider likely to provide the necessary mitigation against the impacts of recreational pressure upon the Chesil and the Fleet, in the interim period prior to a more comprehensive study being undertaken (Figure 2).

Figure 2: A table showing the interim mitigation measures required to address the impacts of recreational pressure at Chesil and the Fleet (provided by Natural England)

Ecological Impact	Source of Impact	Mitigation Measure
Land based disturbance to breeding Little Terns	Dogs and walkers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Little Tern wardening, fencing, monitoring, volunteer co-ordination • Visitor Centre presence for dissuading inappropriate activities and source of information for users • Chesil Beach Carpark spaces and charges review • Expansion of Dorset Dogs • Interpretation; leaflets, signage (land and water), smartphone app, • Infrastructure projects • Seasonal by-laws to re-inforce encouragement of positive behaviour • Provision of alternative strategic green space • Policy based major development (10 dwellings or equivalent) within 400m of the designated site to provide bespoke infrastructure mitigation measures
Water based disturbance to breeding Little Terns	Recreational watercraft users	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Little Tern Wardening, fencing, monitoring, volunteer co-ordination • Interpretation; leaflets, signage (land and water), smartphone app, • Review of water access points • Use of existing watercraft permit system

Land based disturbance of wintering birds	Rambling, dog walking, wildlife watching and jogging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wardening of activity hotspots • Interpretation; leaflets, signage (land and water), smartphone app, • Provision of alternative strategic green space • Infrastructure projects • Expansion of Dorset Dogs • Identify key bird watching points and provide screening and viewpoints • Engagement with user groups and agree codes of conduct where appropriate • Policy based major development (10 dwellings or equivalent) within 400m of the designated site to provide bespoke infrastructure mitigation measures
Trampling of terrestrial/intertidal vegetation	footfall or launching of craft	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wardening of activity hotspots • Interpretation; leaflets, signage (land and water), smartphone app, • Provision of alternative strategic green space • Infrastructure projects • Expansion of Dorset Dogs • Identify key bird watching points and provide screening and viewpoints • Engagement with user groups and agree codes of conduct where appropriate • Policy based major development (10 dwellings or equivalent) within 400m of the designated site to provide bespoke infrastructure mitigation measures
Pollution of all habitats	Littering and dog fouling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of bins for litter and dog waste • Wardening of the northern shore

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of alternative strategic green space • Infrastructure projects • Expansion of Dorset Dogs • Policy based major development (10 dwellings or equivalent) within 400m of the designated site to provide bespoke infrastructure mitigation measures
Damage to subtidal habitats fishing	Fishing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement with user groups and agree codes of conduct where appropriate • Wardening of activity hotspots • Introduce permits where appropriate to enable control of activity locations/methods • Interpretation; leaflets, signage (land and water), smartphone app,
Deliberate mortality or damage to plants and animals (e.g. harvesting or foraging of plants or animals);	Harvesting, foraging, beachcombing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement with user groups and agree codes of conduct where appropriate • Wardening of activity hotspots • Introduce permits where appropriate to enable control of activity locations/methods • Interpretation; leaflets, signage (land and water), smartphone app,

Cost of mitigation

Natural England have provided an estimate of the costs associated with the mitigation (Figure 3).

The total cost of mitigation is estimated at £191,673 per year, which over the period to 2038 equates to a total cost of £3,450,114.

Figure 3: A table showing the estimated cost of mitigation (provided by Natural England)

Mitigation Delivery Measure	Delivery Body	Estimated Cost (per year)
Little Tern Wardening, fencing, monitoring, volunteer co-ordination	RSPB	£18,000
Seasonal by-laws to re-inforce encouragement of positive behaviour (if positive measures are insufficient)	Dorset Council	n/a
Policy based major development (10 dwellings or equivalent) within 400m of the designated site to provide bespoke infrastructure mitigation measures	Dorset Council	n/a
Chesil Beach Visitor Centre presence for dissuading inappropriate activities and dissemination of information for users (central base for officers/wardens)	Wildlife Trust	£25,550*
Expansion of Dorset Dogs	Dorset Dogs	£2,000
Car park spaces and charges review	Dorset Council (selected infrastructure projects)	SAMM - £86,123 Infrastructure projects –
Review of existing watercraft permit system and enabling its effective use (in liaison with the Estate)		
Introduce permits where appropriate to enable control of activity locations/methods (in liaison with the Estate)		

Review of water access points	hosted by the Wildlife Trust based at the Chesil Beach Visitor Centre)	improvements per year (£50,000) Other infrastructure projects listed (£10,000)
Interpretation; leaflets, signage (land and water), smartphone app,		
Infrastructure projects, i.e.; Establishment of a strategic SANG for Weymouth residents in close proximity to houses; Enhancement of existing access to encourage footfall on non-sensitive paths; open up views from existing footpaths; create new access to enable circular routes; screening/ barriers to dissuade access to the foreshore from key points; dog swimming ponds outside of sensitive area; Provision of designated picnic spots with views and natural feel in non-sensitive areas; Identify key bird watching points and provide screening/viewpoints; Provision of bins for litter and dog waste in appropriate locations		
Wardening of activity hotspots		
Engagement with user groups and agree codes of conduct where appropriate		
Monitoring of mitigation effectiveness to feedback to inform ongoing strategy		
Total annual charge		

Mitigation delivery measure	Delivery Body	Estimated cost (per year)
Review of water access points		

Anticipated housing supply in the areas surrounding Chesil Beach and the Fleet

Dorset Council do not currently have sufficient data to determine where visitors to Chesil Beach and the Fleet for recreational purposes are travelling from. A survey will be required in future to determine this fully.

In the interim period, Natural England have recommended the approach should focus on development within 5km of the Chesil Beach and the Fleet (Figure 4) to ensure consistency with the Dorset Heathlands Planning Framework.

Figure 4: A map showing the extent of the 5km buffer zone surrounding Chesil and the Fleet



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The 5km buffer zone occupies the settlements of Bridport in the northwest, and Weymouth, Chickerell and the Isle of Portland in the southeast.

The estimated future development in this area has been calculated by predicting the future strategic development and the likely windfall development.

The future strategic development within 5km of the Chesil and the Fleet European site (Figure 5) has been estimated by considering the following two sources:

- Existing allocations from the West Dorset, Weymouth & Portland Local Plan (2015) which have not yet been given full planning permission; and
- Future strategic development through the emerging Dorset Local Plan which occupy the period up to 2038. This has been estimated from the preferred options for the West Dorset, Weymouth & Portland Local Plan Review (2018).

Figure 5: A table showing the predicted future strategic development within 5km of Chesil Beach and the Fleet

Settlement	Planning ref	Name	No of dwellings
Portland	PORT2	Former Hardy Complex	348
Weymouth	WEY9	Bingleaves Cove	228
	WEY10	Markham and little Francis	425
	WEY12	Land at Wey Valley	340
	WEY15*	South of Wey Valley	150
Chickerell	CHIC2	Chickerell Urban Ext	762
	CHIC3	Land off Rashley Rd	50
	CHIC4*	West of Southill	400
	CHIC5*	Chickerell Camp	30
Bridport	BRID1	Vearse Farm	930

	BRID2	Land off Skilling Hill	40
	BRID3	Land to East of Bredy	40
	BRID5	St Michaels Trading	83
Total			3,826

* Preferred option in the West Dorset, Weymouth & Portland Local Plan Review (2018)

There is also likely to be development at windfall sites within 5km of the Chesil and the Fleet European Site. Windfall sites are defined in the glossary of the National Planning Policy Framework (2019) as “sites not specifically defined in the development plan”. The windfall allowance may be predicted through previous development at windfall sites (Figure 6).

Figure 6: A table showing the number of housing completions at windfall sites within 5km of Chesil Beach and the Fleet

2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
133	196	122	136	232	186	260	380

The average number of completions at windfall sites within 5km of the Chesil and the Fleet between 2011/12 and 2018/19 is 171 dwellings per year.

The total number of dwellings within 5km of the Chesil and the Fleet European site in the period up to 2038 is therefore 3,826 dwellings from strategic development and 3,078 dwellings on windfall sites (applying the average rate of development on windfall sites between 2011/12 and 2018/19 of 171 dwellings per year). This provides a total housing supply of 6,904 dwellings within 5km of Chesil and the Fleet European Site.

Financial contribution towards mitigation

An interim cost per dwelling charge has been calculated to ensure that new development contributes towards the mitigation for the impacts of recreational pressure upon Chesil Beach and the Fleet in a fair, consistent and proportionate manner, in the interim period before a more comprehensive strategy is adopted.

The charge has been prepared in line with Regulation 122 of the Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations 2010 (as amended), which requires planning obligations to be necessary, directly related and fairly and reasonable related in scale and kind to the development.

The charge applies to all development which results in a net increase in dwellings within 5km of Chesil Beach and the Fleet.

Other types of development which may result in an increase in recreational pressure upon Chesil Beach and the Fleet within 5km of the designation will be considered on a case by case basis in consultation with Natural England. These uses are likely to include:

- Residential Development houses in multiple occupation (Use Class C4);
- Residential Institutions within where the residents are not severely restricted by illness or mobility (Use Class C2);
- Private student accommodation that is not managed by a university or run on their behalf by an accommodation provider;
- Self-catering, caravan and touring holiday accommodation;
- Gypsy & Traveller sites; and
- Hotels.

Where significant adverse effects are identified, the applicant will be expected to demonstrate how these effects will be avoided or mitigated, which may include paying a suitable financial contribution.

The interim cost per dwelling charge has been calculated in the following way:

Total cost of mitigation until 2038 = £3,450,114

Anticipated housing supply within 5km of the Chesil and the Fleet over the period to 2038 = 6,904 dwellings.

Cost charge per dwelling is therefore $\text{£}3,450,114 / 6,904 = \text{£}499.73$

In addition, an administration fee of 5% of the total contribution will be applied to the charge to account for Dorset Council's cost of collection and distribution of the obligation.

The charge will be index linked and adjusted annually each year to reflect inflation and ensure that the mitigation can be delivered to 2038.

Interim charge for development at Curtis Fields

The interim cost charge per dwelling may be used to calculate a fair and proportionate financial contribution which Phases 2 to 4 of the Curtis Fields development should make towards mitigation for the impacts of recreational pressure upon Chesil and the Fleet.

Phase 2 to 4 of the Curtis Fields application will result in an additional 425 dwellings.

Therefore, applying the cost per dwelling figure calculated above, the proportionate contribution towards mitigation should be:

$$(425 \times £499.73) + 5\%^* = £223,003.10$$

*administration fee