

other major City Council privatisations. The ripples from one dropped pebble can spread very wide.

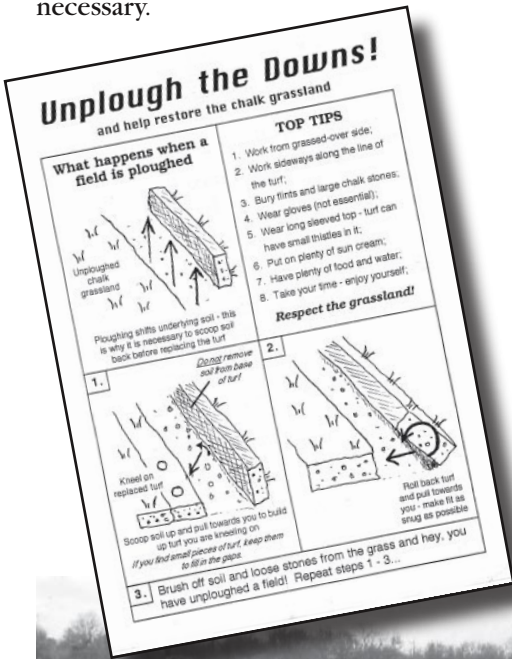
Like our successes with the ESA scheme, though, these gains are coming under new threats. Labour made several piecemeal sales on Downland, and new national and local policy shifts may encourage new asset sales. New campaigns will be necessary.

### The 'Un-Ploughing' of the Downs

As the General Election of 1997 approached another major crisis developed. Conservationists heard that a farmer was threatening to plough up large chunks of the lovely Offham Down, which is in the SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest) that stretches along the escarpment from Clayton to the River Ouse at Offham. SSSI's are the 'crown jewels' of nature in the UK, but had only limited legal protection.

Negotiations had been going on for months between the farmer, who wished to grow flax on parts of the SSSI, and English Nature, who were responsible for safeguarding SSSI's.

The talks broke down because EN were not able to offer sufficient compensation money to the farmer for the profit he would forgoe by not planting the flax, which was being promoted under the



Campaigners heaving back the turves of Offham Down in 1997. And here's their little instruction sheet!

