

High Weald Joint Advisory Committee

Annual Review 2008-2009



Working together to care for one of England's Finest Landscapes



The High Weald Joint Advisory Committee is a partnership between: East Sussex, West Sussex, Kent and Surrey County Councils; Horsham, Mid Sussex, Tandridge, Sevenoaks, Wealden and Rother District Councils; Tunbridge Wells, Hastings, Ashford, Tonbridge and Malling and Crawley Borough Councils; Natural England; and organisations representing farming, forestry, community, business and recreation interests.

THE HIGH WEALD AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY

One of England's Finest Landscapes



The essential character of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) was established by the 14th century and has survived major historical events and social and technological changes. It is considered to be one of the best surviving, coherent medieval landscapes in Northern Europe.

The five key components of its character are:

- **Geology, landform, water systems and climate** Deeply incised, ridged and faulted landform of clays and sandstone. The ridges tend east-west and from them spring numerous gill streams that form the headwaters of rivers. Wide river valleys dominate the eastern part of the AONB. The landform and water systems are subject to and influence, a local variant of the British sub-oceanic climate.
- **Settlement** Dispersed historic settlements of farmsteads, hamlets and late medieval villages founded on trade and non-agricultural rural industries.
- **Routeways** Ancient routeways (now roads and Rights of Way) in the form of ridge-top roads and a dense system of radiating droveways. The droveways are often narrow, deeply sunken and edged with trees, hedges, wildflower-rich verges and boundary banks.
- **Woodland** A great extent of ancient woods, gills and shaws in small holdings, the value of which is inextricably linked to long-term management.
- **Field and heath** Small, irregularly shaped and productive fields, often bounded by (and forming a mosaic with) hedgerows and small woodlands and typically used for livestock grazing. Small holdings and a non-dominant agriculture. Distinctive zones of heaths and inner river valleys.

These fundamental characteristics of the High Weald AONB are enriched by locally distinctive and nationally important details. These include castles, abbeys, historic parks and gardens, hop gardens and orchards, oast houses and parish churches, veteran trees and local populations of key threatened species.



■ A Message from the Chairman

I am delighted to introduce the High Weald Annual Review 2008-09. I continue to be amazed by the range of activities and achievements delivered by our team and our partnerships. I am heartened that the many local authorities and other public bodies involved in the High Weald are starting to take seriously their duty under Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 to have regard for this wonderful landscape, valued so highly by our residents and visitors.

Foremost this year has been the launch of the revised AONB Management Plan. The objective led, character based approach developed by the Plan in 2004, which has so effectively underpinned management policy and communications, has been maintained in the new Plan. This clear statement of purpose allows us to focus our resources effectively and ensures that the interests of the High Weald are foremost in our policy responses.

This has been a year in which terms such as 'peak oil', 'ecosystem services' and 'food security' have really entered our consciousness. As a commentator remarked in the midst of the global financial crisis "economists can learn a lot from land managers and ecologists who have long understood the complex and dynamic nature of interactions between human society and the natural environment".

In the High Weald we have expanded our research programme into how this wonderful landscape can accommodate the necessary changes involved in moving to a low carbon economy without damage to its unique character. Work to look at renewable energy technologies appropriate to the High Weald, affordable housing and the extent to which the area can provide for its food needs, will help us formulate effective policies for the future.

Our £3.3 million Heritage Lottery Funded programme, the Weald Forest Ridge Landscape Partnership Scheme, had a flying start with the flight of a small plane over the Weald Forest Ridge mapping archaeological features beneath the forest canopy using LiDAR, an optical remote sensing technology. Early images are already giving us fascinating glimpses into how people used this landscape in the past.

I cannot write about the past year without extending a huge thank you to our partners, whose names appear throughout the pages of this review. These partnerships are the basis of our success, fusing ideas and practical experience across many sectors to create a forward looking, interdisciplinary and action focused approach vital to securing the High Weald's future.



Councillor Mrs Sylvia Tidy

Councillor Mrs Sylvia Tidy
Chairman of the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee (JAC)
July 2009

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STRUCTURES AND PARTNERSHIPS

Locally, regionally, nationally and across Europe



Conserving and Enhancing

■ High Weald Joint Advisory Committee and Management Board

The High Weald Joint Advisory Committee's (JAC) main purpose is to provide advice and guidance to constituent authorities and other organisations on the management objectives for the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The JAC met on 6 October 2008 and 1 April 2009 to discuss and agree report recommendations relating to the annual budget, the management plan review, the constitution, the Sustainable Development Fund and the Memorandum of Understanding between Natural England and the constituent local authorities.

This year the key decisions made by the JAC have included: an agreement to consult with the local authorities on the proposed budget for 2009-10; the approval of the High Weald AONB Management Plan 2004, 2nd edition; an agreement to delegate the requirement to sign off statutory accounts to the Management Board; and an agreement to make no major changes to the constitution in the light of the Audit Commission's advice that the JAC should consider itself a Joint Committee.

The Management Board consists of six JAC members and meets with the High Weald AONB Unit staff on a more frequent basis to assist, when necessary, with the delivery of the AONB management plan and the JAC business plan objectives. The Management Board met three times this year, in June and September 2008 and in March 2009. The Management Board approved the Annual Return and Annual Governance Statement at its June meeting.

Furthering Public Understanding and Enjoyment



■ Local Partnerships

The High Weald AONB Unit staff met with a number of representatives from different organisations as part of a commitment to putting protected landscapes and rural issues at the top of local and regional agendas.

Local Authorities

Of particular note were visits to the AONB Unit by East Sussex County Council staff including Andy Robertson, the new Assistant Director within the Transport and Environment Department and all of the the Team Heads for the Operations Division. There was also a visit by the planning department of Wealden District Council and environment staff from Kent County Council.

For each visit AONB Unit staff provided presentations on: the history of both the AONB and the JAC; the management plan approach; research work undertaken and commissioned; High Weald pilot demonstration projects and its innovative communication and education programmes.

A number of projects were progressed through partnership working with local authorities, in particular the Historic Farmsteads Project and the Weald and Downs Ancient Woodland Project.

Environment Agency

In an effort to address a widespread feeling within the protected landscapes sector that links with the Environment Agency were weak, a meeting was held with Dr Sean Ashworth of the Environment Agency's Sussex and Kent office. Dr Ashworth was keen to ensure that the Agency increases its understanding of the AONB, helps inform and define future policy to achieve AONB management plan objectives and meets its statutory responsibilities with respect to AONBs. This was a significant step in the right direction with the Environment Agency, which was then furthered when the Agency became a core funding supporter of the Weald Forest Ridge Landscape Partnership Scheme.

Leader Partnerships

The High Weald AONB Unit was invited to join both the WARR partnership and West Kent Partnership. Due to constraints on its personnel resources the Unit was unable to be an active member of the partnerships but views and comments were supplied on the West Kent Partnership Bid and, following the success of both schemes, the AONB Unit commented on subsequent prospective applications to both schemes.

Patrons

Gregory Barker, MP for Bexhill and Battle, Shadow Minister for Climate Change and Environment and a High Weald AONB Patron organized and hosted a well attended Wood Fuel and Coppicing Summit at the Woodland Enterprise Centre at Flimwell in May.

Mr Barker brought together wood fuel producers, technology suppliers and engineers, local councillors, planning officers, AONB Unit staff, NGOs and the business sector to exchange ideas and expertise on the potential for woodlands to provide renewable energy.



Developing partnerships



Developing partnerships

STRUCTURES AND PARTNERSHIPS

Locally, regionally, nationally and across Europe



Dr Helen Phillips, Chief Executive of Natural England

Other

HRH the Duke of Kent visited the Woodland Enterprise Centre at Flimwell in November and met with AONB Unit staff to discuss, albeit briefly, the work of the Unit. The Duke attended an event organized by David Saunders, Chief Executive of Woodland Enterprises Limited, and met with a variety of organizations and individuals to learn more about environmentally sustainable building design and woodland management practice.

■ Regional and National Partnerships

Natural England

Dr Helen Phillips, Chief Executive of Natural England, spent a day in October 2008 with Co-Directors Sally Marsh and Jason Lavender to learn more about the High Weald's distinctive countryside and how it arose from a long history of human interaction with the natural environment.

Helen enjoyed a walk to experience first hand the High Weald's landscape and learnt from the AONB Unit staff how an understanding of how the High Weald has been created by people over time has allowed the AONB Unit to draw some important conclusions of direct relevance to the management of the area today.

Following the visit Dr Phillips wrote thanking the AONB Unit for ***"giving me such an excellent flavour of your achievements and issues, with the added benefit of plenty of fresh air and not a powerpoint slide in sight! I will long remember some of your stunning landscapes."***

Defra

Towards the end of June Hilary Benn, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs launched DEFRA's new policy cycle and programme management approach to developing and implementing policy.

This new approach is designed to improve the way Defra manages its work to implement their national strategic objectives. A key element of the approach is to explicitly require the involvement of what are termed 'delivery partners' at an early stage and throughout the policy cycle to ensure Defra is working in true collaboration with a variety of external organisations.

Considering that AONB Units, with others, are considered to be delivery partners and also integral to ensuring the success of Defra's rural programme, it was important to take up Defra's offer of a specially tailored briefing session for AONBs in September. A number of the English AONBs meet with Defra to discuss and learn how the policy cycle is to work and also how AONB Units and Defra could work better together to further the national rural programme.

Jason Lavender, Co-Director of the AONB Unit attended the session on behalf of the South East Protected Landscapes.

National Association of AONBs

In July three members of staff from the High Weald AONB Unit attended the National Association for AONBs tenth annual conference at Harper Adams University College in Shropshire.

The annual conference brought together representatives from AONBs throughout England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The conference theme 'Adding Value in Valuable Landscapes: Partnership working for real' was investigated and discussed over three days through presentations from a variety of guest speakers and a series of practically focused workshops and field trips, which also gave the delegates opportunities to explore further subjects presented during the plenary sessions.

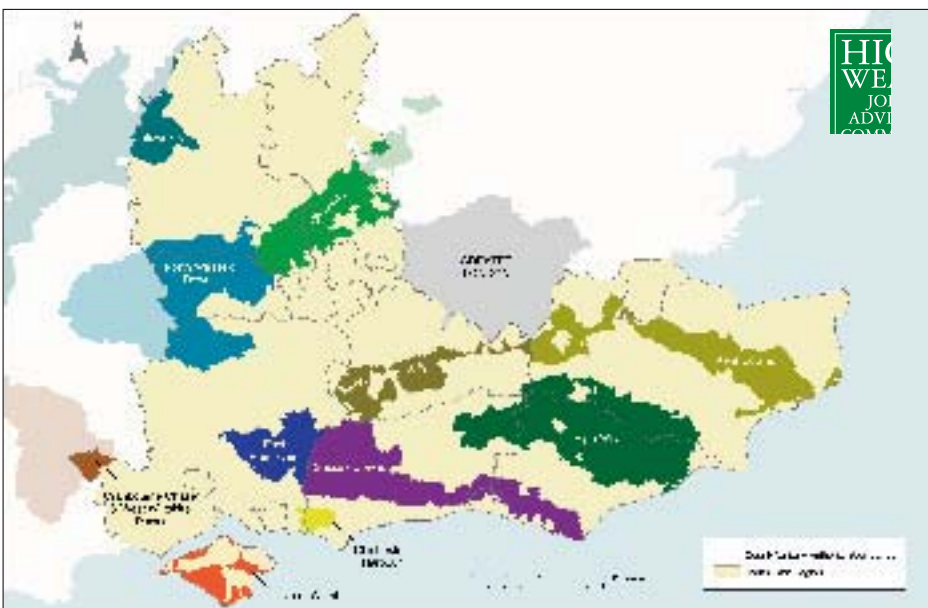
The conference was hosted and organised by the National Association for AONBs, Cannock Chase AONB, Malvern Hills AONB and Shropshire Hills AONB.



South East Protected Landscapes

Richard Clarke was recruited to the position of Regional Policy Manager for the South East Protected Landscapes, a post hosted by Surrey County Council and supported jointly by Natural England and the nine protected landscapes of South East England. The role aims to influence both regional and national policy to ensure others recognise and value the important contribution to the economic, social and environmental well being of the region made by AONBs. The officer also represents the South East protected landscapes within the work of both the National Association for AONBs (NAAONBs) and Association of National Park Authorities (ANPA).

The Chairman of each of the nine protected landscapes in South East England, accompanied by their respective directors, attended the annual meeting with the National Association for AONBs in March 2009. Uppermost in the minds of those attending the meeting was the thought that we are living in a time of unprecedented change and, as a result, discussions tended to centre on the issues and opportunities facing this sector and the need to identify ways the protected landscapes and the NAAONBs can begin to address them.



STRUCTURES AND PARTNERSHIPS

Locally, regionally, nationally and across Europe



Integrated Land Management was a focus for the Rural Research and Strategy Partnership

South East England Development Agency

Cllr. Mrs Sylvia Tidy, Chairman of the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee (JAC), joined the Chairmen of the eight other South East Protected Landscapes JACs for their annual meeting in November 2008, held at the Farmer's Club at Whitehall. The nine Chairmen, accompanied by their respective directors, met with Oona Muirhead, the South East England Development Agency's (SEEDA) Executive Director, to discuss how best to assist the with its objective to stimulate economic activity that in itself can deliver environmental benefits.

Dr Muirhead provided a strategic overview of SEEDA's direction for what they term 'sustainable prosperity' along with its main priorities for the next five years. This timescale links well with the majority of the protected landscapes' management plan cycles. Each Chairman considered and discussed how each protected landscape might assist SEEDA with its priorities in an effort to better understand where interests coincide. They also re-iterated that the protected landscapes' JACs are well placed to influence others and assist SEEDA at a regional and local level because they are an impressive network of partnerships with well-defined and widely supported strategies.

Rural Research and Strategy Partnership

Using evidence when formulating policy is absolutely fundamental for the Unit and to enable the generation of new relevant research to meet this end, the AONB Unit has become a member of the Rural Research and Strategy Partnership (RRSP), which is a new partnership of organisations from across the south east region. The aim of the partnership is to broker and develop collaborative thinking and stimulate innovative, policy-relevant research for rural South East England.

Being a member of this group allowed the AONB Unit to foster new relationships and meet a variety of organisations from a wide range of different sectors whose work relates to the area. This membership is a platform from which the Unit can access a pool of expertise on rural matters as well as forming research partnerships of its own. At the end of the year the RRSP projects were reviewed culminating in the production of the paper 'Securing Integrated Land Management: Issues for Policy, Research and Rural Communities'. This programme with its associated papers is one of several that the AONB Unit used to help translate research into policy.

A second scheme to bury power lines was progressed



EDF Energy

The scheme to bury electricity power lines underground in the AONB was progressed. Planning work with landowners was completed prior to work starting on the main scheme at Brightling Down in the summer of 2009. Work also began on the second scheme at Little Scotney Farm, with completion planned for late autumn 2009. The Steering Group, made up of Natural England, EDF Energy and South East protected landscape representatives met several times and actively lobbied the regulator OFGEM for a continuation of the scheme for another five years after 2010, with a decision due in the summer of 2009.

■ Management Plan Review

The High Weald AONB Management Plan was adopted in March 2004 and under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act the plan must be reviewed every five years.

In 2008-09 the Unit worked to update and amend the 2004 plan involving stakeholder consultation, a limited public consultation during the summer and several revisions of the plan text.

Following the review stage completed in February and March 2008, a revised version of the plan was prepared during the Spring, along with a draft Strategic Environmental Assessment report, Performance Monitoring report and Condition Monitoring report. These were all agreed by the JAC's Management Board in July who authorised a public consultation exercise on the revised plan.

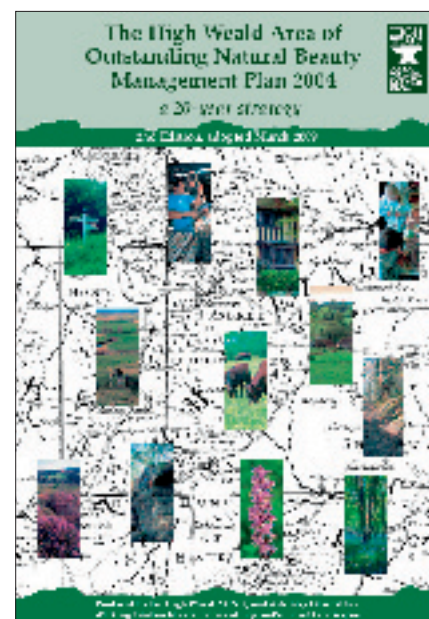
Over the summer 255 partners and stakeholders were contacted and 26 public copies made available in council offices and libraries. The consultation generated over 230 comments and observations on the plan, resulting in 63 amendments and some additional significant negotiations on specific aspects relating to nature conservation and climate change. A final draft of the plan was completed by the end of September.

At its October meeting, the Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) approved the revision of the High Weald AONB Management Plan and formally recommended it to the local authorities on whose behalf the plan was prepared. It was formally approved (or 'adopted') by them in the latter part of the year. It was published for submission to the Secretary of State by 1 April 2009.

The plan is substantially the same – what has changed most are the Indicators of Success and Targets for each component of natural beauty. These indicators and targets are set for the next 5 years of the plan's life to 2014 when it is due to be reviewed again. The revised plan includes 2 new objectives, one relating to climate change and the other to cultural perceptions of the High Weald landscape.

Rationale

Production of a Management Plan is a statutory requirement for local authorities under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. Its review and production on behalf of the local authorities is part of the core duties of the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee (JAC). The plan details the primary components of Natural Beauty and sets a direction for conserving and enhancing Natural Beauty. The Management plan underpins the JAC's business strategy, in particular its research programme, which explicitly aims to understand the components of Natural Beauty and provides guidance on the care and management of them.



The Plan includes a new climate change objective





■ Planning and Policy Consultations

The Unit regularly responds to a wide range of planning related consultations, in accordance with the planning protocol agreed by the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee (JAC). Over the year more than 93 general planning applications and other consultations were received.

The Unit responds by email to most of these minor planning applications and consultations. Where the application involves significant issues for the AONB the Unit may have a greater involvement.

The Unit commented on the following major applications:

- A proposed tennis centre at Steel Cross Farm, Crowborough to which the Unit objected and, following letters to the Secretary of State, the application was withdrawn.
- A planning appeal at Benhall Mill Road. The Unit provided specialist advice on wildflower grasslands. The appeal was refused, partly on the impact on the local meadow.
- Freshfield Lane Brickworks in West Sussex submitted further information for the extensive proposals for clay extraction. The Unit provided advice to the local authority.
- An application for the deregistration of common land at Crowborough Golf Club was objected to by the Unit. Following a public inquiry the Inspector refused the application.
- A new water main pipeline near Pembury. The Unit provided advice to the local authority.

Other significant consultations that prompted greater Unit involvement included:

- A West Sussex County Council meeting regarding the landscape impacts of their Waste and Minerals Development Framework.
- A DCLG Planning & Climate Change consultation.
- The South East Plan with a joint response from South East AONBs submitted.
- 7 highways related matters (such as the A21 Pembury scheme and Kippings Cross, the Baldslow Link road and A22 Handcross improvement)
- 27 district and county level general planning application consultations (Tunbridge Wells 4, Hastings 5, Wealden 7, Tandridge 5, county councils 4 and others from Ashford, Rother, Tonbridge, Horsham and Sevenoaks).

■ Research

Wind Energy Regional Assessment for the High Weald

In autumn the JAC commissioned research to ascertain the actual wind resource available within the High Weald. Importantly this research judged the scope to realise the resource against the same technical constraints applicable to a wind energy developer.

The report concluded that the High Weald has an above average wind speed; however due to its large population and proximity to key areas of infrastructure, for example Gatwick Airport, the research results deemed the High Weald unsuitable for large scale wind farm developments. However given suitable local requirements and further visual assessments, individual or small clusters of turbines may be appropriate.



Understanding and learning about the High Weald, informing its management and future

The data provides a technical evidence base directly relevant to the unique landscape of the High Weald, upon which the Unit can scrutinise applications and direct resources appropriately to make further local assessments.

The potential of the High Weald to supply the local food of its population

The study, commissioned by the JAC, found that whilst the High Weald currently does not come close to being self sufficient in local food supply, it has the potential to be self sufficient if land used to produce surplus was redirected to areas of shortage such as beef, potatoes and field scale vegetables. It advised that significant surpluses are currently being produced in some food commodities such as cereals, milk, top and soft fruit, with the bulk of production being exported from the region. Utilising the land used in producing this surplus would allow High Weald agriculture considerable flexibility to readjust production to meet local food needs under all scenarios examined, including a move to a healthier diet and adoption of low carbon production methods.



Medieval deer parks and designed landscapes in the High Weald

The study, commissioned by the JAC, investigated the survival and location of medieval deer parks and other 'designed landscapes' in the High Weald. The research identified 12 possible lost deer parks which have become incorporated into later designed landscapes or survive as ghosts in the historic landscape, traceable by pale boundaries, veteran trees and place names, and concludes that there are many more post medieval 'gentrification' parks than we originally thought.

These designed landscapes – areas of the countryside that have been purposely altered to create parks and formal areas within the landscape – are an important local feature of the High Weald. Many of these park areas which were once scattered across the High Weald have disappeared or have been changed over time, particularly the medieval deer parks which were palisaded areas reserved for hunting deer, with extensive bank and ditch boundaries.

The study used English Heritage's Historic Landscape Character database to search for old deer parks and other 'designed landscapes' and traced their origins and boundaries through the historic maps.

The Sustainable Development of Dispersed Settlement

The study, commissioned by the JAC From CCRU at the University of Gloucestershire, investigated areas of dispersed settlement (characterised by high densities of isolated farmsteads and hamlets) which tend to dominate western and parts of eastern and south east England. These areas present a challenge to current settlement and sustainable development planning policies which are based on village landscape models more prevalent in central England. Current policy as a result tends to focus new development in larger villages and towns which can damage the distinctive character of dispersed settlement landscapes like the High Weald and further erode the sustainability of smaller rural settlements.

This research proposes a new approach using 3 sets of criteria – generic, type and local to ensure that the characteristics of specific landscapes and communities are fully integrated into sustainable settlement planning.





Current Socio-economic Context of Historic Farmsteads

The research, commissioned by the JAC from the University of Sheffield, investigates the current socio-economic context of the area's distinctive historic farmsteads, analysing access to services, highlighting the growth of home working, and the struggle faced by agriculture in the face of high demand for residential properties. The study has shown that the number of directorships of substantial companies occupying historic farmsteads in the High Weald AONB, is double that of surrounding areas, rising to 80 per 100 households in some parts of the AONB. This has significant impacts on how we plan for future sustainable development in the High Weald and highlights the importance of affordable housing and accommodation for the key workers required to support land management.

Rationale

The High Weald Joint Advisory Committee's management aims and priorities for the AONB are firmly based on an understanding of the fundamental and defining character of the whole area – that is, those components of natural beauty that have made the High Weald a recognizably distinct and homogenous area for at least the last 700 years and that will continue to define it in the future. It develops its understanding through undertaking work itself, through its specialist team, the AONB Unit, or by commissioning independent reports from others.

The primary purpose of its research programme is to better understand the components of natural beauty. By researching the key components – their history, development, distribution, special qualities, deterioration, damage and loss – we can develop an evidence base for the AONB Management Plan and other AONB policy and guidance.

The JAC's secondary purpose is to better understand how the High Weald landscape can contribute to society – food, energy, water provision, flood protection, recreation, biodiversity and fisheries – without damage to its natural beauty.

Publications

High Weald Anvil 2009

The 10th edition of the High Weald Anvil, published in March 2009, had a print run of 85,000. Using National Letterbox Marketing, 69,500 copies were distributed with free papers to households within the AONB. A further 3450 were distributed directly to local tourist attractions and key village and farm shops. The balance will be distributed by the Unit and partners at events.

In addition to the regular features; News in Brief, AONB map, attraction listings and event tasters, the 'numbers themed' Anvil included articles on: Sussex Cattle, the Unit's favourite places, the value of volunteering to the High Weald and opportunities on offer through the Weald Forest Ridge Scheme, the 60th Anniversary of the National Park and AONB legislation and a project that will see Barn Owl boxes installed along all High Weald rivers.

Website

The High Weald website received 40,000 hits during the year with an average of 4000 visitors per month. An average of 3000 downloads of AONB documents were made each month. The top downloads continue to include copies of the High Weald Anvil, habitat leaflets and the general AONB leaflet. New pages were developed to include 2 new sets of videos: Green Living in the High Weald; Wildflower Grassland Conservation in the Weald; and The Farmstead Toolkit. Home page revisions included adding the facility to have webclips, making it more dynamic and informative, and creating more space for events and news. Top level introductory page revisions included a redesign and rewrite and revisions elsewhere focused on encouraging visitors to view pages for longer and move to other parts of the website. At the end of the year the site design was updated to give the whole site a lighter look and feel.

Your website looks brilliant by the way, really interactive and fun.

Christina Dandison, Project Manager, Natural England

Green Living Videos

Local residents who have taken action to care for the High Weald were given the opportunity to enthuse others through the production of 'Green Living' themed videos for the High Weald website. Over 40 people were filmed as part of the project to produce videos focused on the High Weald Charter actions: Buy local products and services; Manage your land for wildlife and maintain the rural nature of your property; Help prevent the spread of invasive and harmful plant and animal species; Use less water; Reduce, reuse and recycle, and dispose of all litter responsibly; Respect other users – follow the Countryside Code; Slow down for people, horses and wildlife; Avoid using the car where possible and consider using renewable energy in your home; Take pride in the High Weald – promote its special features and places to family, friends and visitors; Have a say and Get involved – support local conservation organisations. The Project was delivered by Kent High Weald Partnership under contract to the Unit and with financial support from Natural England.



New videos encourage residents to maintain the rural nature of properties





Friends newsletter

Quarterly Briefings

A new approach was developed for the Unit's briefings, enabling them to be sent as an email format. They were distributed quarterly to the Unit's key stakeholders; local, regional and national organisations as well as interested members of the public, approximately 450 in total. Feedback from stakeholders indicated that the format was user friendly and the content useful.

Just thought I would congratulate you on a brief and well laid out summary of what goes on in the AONB. It is immediately accessible and a good model for other information bulletins.

Stan Abbott, Environment and Planning Manager, Forestry Commission

Audio Visual Display

Town Mayor Ian Dixon launched the Unit's audio/visual display unit at the East Grinstead library in April. The Unit was loaded with the Story of the High Weald which tells the history of the High Weald from the Stone Age until the Tudors. The display was a big hit with visitors according to the tourist officer based in the library.

Media

The Unit sent out 1 media release which focused on the WMI small grants awards. A total of 63 references to the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty were made in local, regional and national newspapers and magazines.

A five part series of articles on the High Weald's character components continued to be used by local organisations. They appeared in: three editions of T&E Break, an internal East Sussex County Council newsletter; an edition of the East Grinstead Civic News which was distributed to 12,000 households in the town in February; and the East Grinstead Observer.

Friends of the High Weald

Friends received 1 newsletter in October. It included an article supplied by a Friend on coppiced woodland and one supplied by the High Weald Landscape Trust on the 'The Big Pull', an event in July to pull ragwort on a wildflower meadow site in the High Weald. The main article was a reminder about the pledges made by Friends to care for the High Weald on joining. The article promoted the new Green Living videos on the website. As of 31st March 2009 there were 245 Friends.

High Weald audio visual display



■ Events

Launches

Plumpton College at Netherfield formally opened the 'Living Classroom', the first of its type in the Rother District. Key features of the Living Classroom were: a 'green' roof planted with native species, a rain water harvesting system, a woodchip burner for heating, rammed earth for the its external walls, external walls clad in Sussex grown cedar wood and sheep's wool insulation in between the rammed earth walls and the cedar cladding.

In contrast, Ben Law unveiled his latest project, a unique hand sculpted barn built as part of the regeneration programme at Pestalozzi International Village Trust in Sedlescombe. Locally sourced wood was used for the traditional A-frame design and handcrafted shingles for the roof. It created opportunities for local apprentices to learn about the construction of a Sussex Barn with a modern perspective. This barn is part of a wider development to produce a sustainable garden to support the Trusts work with educating children from worn-torn countries all over the world.

BBC South East Today presenter Kaddy Lee-Preston officially opened 60 new solar panels at The Skinners' School, Royal Tunbridge Wells, on 8 October. The panels will generate enough energy for the Science Department in the New Wing and significantly reduce energy use and CO2 emissions.

All of the projects were supported by the 2007-08 Sustainable Development Fund.

Training Courses

As part of the review of the Kent List of Historic Parks and Gardens within Tunbridge Wells, a study day was held on 21 October 2008 at Bell Bedgebury International School. The day was aimed at volunteers interested in helping with the update of the 1992-6 Historic Parks and Gardens Register. Twenty-two volunteers attended and fourteen signed up to support the project which finished at the end of March 2009.

The event involved lectures by guest speakers in the morning and an afternoon site visit to Bedgebury House Gardens with Virginia Hinze, formerly of English Heritage.

The project was led by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, in partnership with Kent County Council, English Heritage, Kent Garden Trust and High Weald AONB Unit and supported by the High Weald Sustainable Development Fund.



Inside of the Pole Barn at Pestalozzi International Village



New solar panels at The Skinners' School

Historic Parks and Gardens Study Day



Profile

Weald Forest Ridge Landscape Partnership Scheme

Purpose

The Weald Forest Ridge Landscape Partnership Scheme is a £3.2 million programme of activity, supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, to enrich the area's natural and cultural heritage and to enable people to understand, enjoy and care for the area.

Delivery Partners

BTCV, the Conservators of Ashdown Forest, East Sussex Archaeology and Museums Partnership, East Sussex County Council, ESUS Forestry & Woodlands Ltd, FWAG (Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group), the Forestry Commission, Gatwick Greenspace Partnership, Highbrook Village Hall Committee, Horsham District Council, Plumpton College, Root and Branch Theatre Company, RSPB, Sussex Police, Sussex Wildlife Trust, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and the Weald & Downland Open Air Museum. These are supported by a much wider range of other partner organisations, including funding partners; with statutory, community, business and heritage interests.

Timescale

First initiated 2004. Delivery phase Jan 2009 – Dec 2011.

Giant Maiden



Weald Forest Ridge Landscape Partnership Scheme

*Involving people with the unique heritage of one of England's
Finest Landscapes*



At the end of September the Heritage Lottery Fund approved the Stage 2 bid submitted in April. Mechanisms to deliver the Scheme were quickly put in place and the Scheme began, on time, in January 2009.

Achievements

- Stage 2 bid submitted and HLF queries responded to.
- £1.92million grant offer secured.
- 1 x contract agreed with the Heritage Lottery Fund.
- 1 x contract to deliver the 'Giant Maidens' community arts project set up.
- 18 x partner agreements and delivery contracts in place.
- 3 x Partnership Board meetings held.
- 2 additional staff, a Scheme Officer and Administrator, recruited to the Scheme Management team.
- 4 new staff recruited by delivery partners with support from the Scheme Management team.
- Rolling programme of visitor counts undertaken on eight, key, publicly accessible countryside sites across the Weald Forest Ridge area: Leechpool and Owlbeech Woods, St Leonard's Forest, Weir Wood LNR, Old Lodge, Birchden Woods, Eridge Rocks, Broadwater Warren and Tudeley Woods.
- 2 x presentations: 1 to Wealden District Council Officers and 1 to the Friends of Ashdown Forest.
- First phase of an exciting LiDAR survey completed over much of the Weald Forest Ridge.
- Radio interview broadcast on BBC Southern Counties to publicise success of Stage 2 bid.

Rationale

The Weald Forest Ridge runs west to east, in an almost unbroken line, from Horsham to Tunbridge Wells. It is the highest ridge of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and within it are the remnants of the Weald's 4 great medieval forests, as well as numerous unique sandrock outcrops. It lies in close proximity to a number of large urban settlements, making it an important recreational resource.

The Scheme will contribute the following to High Weald Management Plan targets:

- Over 250ha of nationally important habitats improved.
- Over 3,500 volunteer days carried out within the Scheme.
- Volunteering time to the value of £110,000 contributed to the local economy.
- Over 500 activities staged – on sites, in schools and with local communities.
- Over 23,000 people engaged with the Scheme.
- Enhanced access to and interpretation of the Weald Forest Ridge area, for both local people and visitors.

■ High Weald Education Programme

Enabling primary school communities to understand and care for one of England's Finest Landscapes

Gemma Swallow, the Unit's Education Officer, left in early August to teach at the new Rye Primary School. As a result High Weald Heroes (HWH), the JAC's primary school education programme, was put on hold whilst funds were sought to enable recruitment of a new officer on a 2-3 year contract. The Kent High Weald Partnership was contracted to deliver High Weald assemblies, map sets, teacher training and newsletters to enable momentum on the programme to be maintained.

Achievements 2008-09

- 12 new schools registered bringing the total involved with the scheme to 30.
- 14 whole school assemblies, teacher training sessions and map packs were delivered.
- Production of 2 new HWH activities; High Weald Energy Story and the High Weald Farming Story. Both were developed by the Kent High Weald Partnership with support from the JAC's Sustainable Development Fund.
- 1 x education training event held at Brede High Woods in June. This event was run in partnership with the Woodland Trust and formed part of their consultation for the development of the site. The results of the workshop were also fed into the development of the HWH education resources.
- 1 x newsletter circulated to the HWH partnership.
- 1 x evaluation of HWH. A high and positive response rate from a questionnaire circulated to all schools involved with the scheme confirmed its success and value and in helping schools undertake local studies and history/geography curriculum work.
- 4 Welly Walks reached fruition. As part of a new approach the children created the walks themselves through workshops that helped them research route options, walk the route, write directions, record features of interest, assess risks and consider leaflet design options. The walks extend the schools' outdoor classrooms and provide a way in which the local community can explore that area without the need for transport.
- Involvement of over 350 children from local primary schools in Kent in the High Weald Energy Story. The project encouraged children to think and learn about sustainable energy, the choices we as a community need to make and the implications for the local landscape. All Year 6 students in the schools experienced a classroom based workshop on the history of sustainable energy in the High Weald. On 17 March the same schools visited Bedgebury Pinetum to experience a hands-on workshop. The day was split up into 3 dynamic learning zones: Wood – the story of the woodchip; Wind & Water – how can we harness them; and Solar & Mechanical – build your own solar vehicle. The project was co-ordinated by Kent High Weald Partnership and High Weald AONB Unit in collaboration with the Bedgebury Pinetum educational team, Commonwork, Greengauge, students from The Skinners' School and Angley College.
- 1 x open morning 'High Weald Adventure' held by Staplecross School. Parents and other members of the community were welcomed to the village hall to see how the pupils had used the local countryside and countryside sites within the High Weald; Wilderness Wood, Guestling Wood and Ashdown Forest, as part of their geography, literacy, art, science,

Profile

High Weald Heroes

Purpose

To enable schools in and around the High Weald to recognise and value the special features of the landscape and to use the landscape as a cross-curricular resource. Partners High Weald JAC, Kent High Weald Partnership, individual schools, Ashdown Forest Conservators, Sussex Wildlife Trust, The Woodland Trust.

Partners

Woodland Trust, Forestry Commission, High Weald AONB Unit, INTERREG IIIB *Lifescape*. *Your Landscape*.

Timescale

Phase 1 April 2005 – March 2009.



Developing the Matfield and Brenchley Welly Walk

The Energy Story Day at Bedgebury Pinetum



INITIATIVES

Developing strategic and practical solutions



maths and ICT work. This was a fantastic example of a school being real High Weald Heroes; the open morning showed very clearly they were proud of their area, they also were encouraging others to 'Find Out About' the High Weald and 'Take Care of' it.

- 1 x High Weald Hero School of the Year Award 2008 presented to Staplecross Primary School. The success of a High Weald Open Morning was one of the reasons that the High Weald Landscape Trust selected Staplecross Primary School from the other 5 entrants.

Rationale

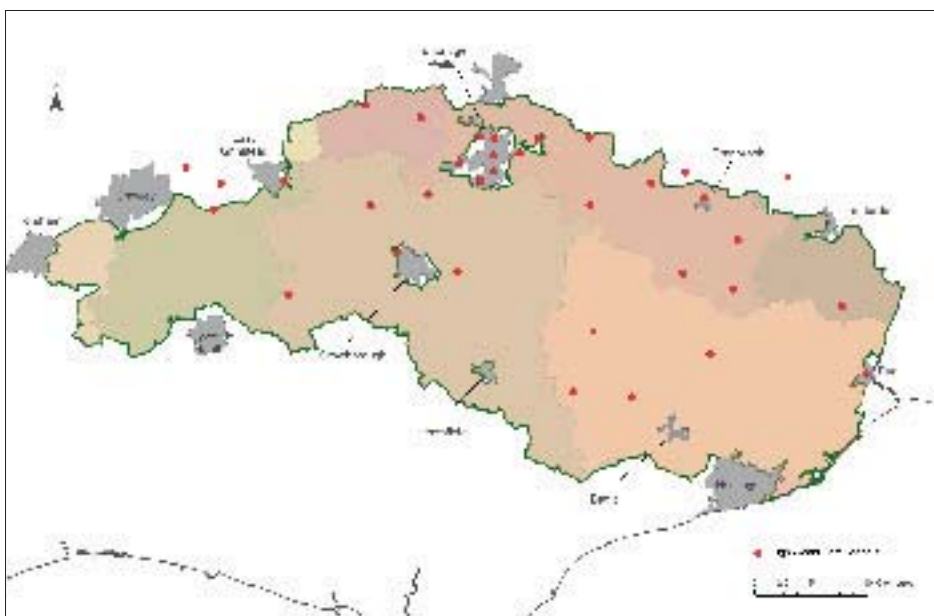
The High Weald Heroes (HWH) programme has been developed to implement the recommendations of the High Weald Primary Education Strategy. The strategy identifies opportunities for joint working with schools to enable implementation of the government's Learning Outside the Classroom Manifesto, the National Framework for Sustainable Schools and Excellence and Enjoyment: A Strategy for Primary Schools, as well as High Weald AONB Management Plan objectives.

The programme is based around the 5 High Weald Hero Actions, Find Out About, Explore, Take Care of, Be Proud of and Enjoy. The actions are positive, proactive and non-prescriptive leaving room for discussion and creativity in their achievement. The programme offers a package of support that is responsive to individual school needs to enable HWH actions to be delivered in a way that suits the teachers. There is a strong emphasis on teacher training and engagement and filling gaps in school support materials to enable activities to continue beyond the life of the programme.



High Weald Heroes newsletter

Location of High Weald Hero Schools



Staplecross Primary School Open Day



■ Weald & Downs Ancient Woodland Survey

Updating the Ancient Woodland Inventory

Achievements 2008-09

Ashford Launch of the Revised Ancient Woodland Inventory

A revision of the ancient woodland inventory for the whole of Ashford borough was launched in December, the culmination of two years research. A seminar presented the findings to a mixed audience of local government officers, agency staff, parish and borough councillors, landowners and managers, conservation staff and volunteers. The recently opened Singleton Environment Centre in Ashford hosted the event which was followed by a buffet lunch. Ashford has about 14% of its area within the High Weald AONB (6% of the AONB). Within this area, the research identified 88 previously unrecorded parcels of ancient woodland (the original inventory mapped 45 sites). Many of these are small, broadleaved woods which collectively comprise a significant semi-natural habitat resource, as well as helping to support ecological networks at landscape scale. In the Borough as a whole the number of recorded ancient woodland sites increased 2½ times, a total gain of 354 ha.

Digital mapping of ancient woodland in Rother and Tonbridge & Malling completed

Digital mapping of all surviving ancient woodland for the district of Rother and boroughs of Hastings and Tonbridge & Malling was completed by the end of March. The mapping was a sizeable task and was a landmark in the project's development. In summary approximately 8000 ha in Rother & Hastings and 2500 ha in Tonbridge & Malling of previously designated Ancient Woodland was remapped to current digital Ordnance Survey standard. The mapping identified areas where a re-assessment of status is required based on a systematic review of large scale Victorian OS maps compared with recent aerial photography. A further c.1600 ha of old woodland not currently designated as ancient woodland was identified in Rother and Hastings, a further 770ha in Tonbridge & Malling.

Green Awards

Mid Sussex District Council, the JAC and other woodland inventory partners were presented with a 'Green Apple Award' at the House of Commons in November. The prestigious national award, which is in its 15th year, is made by The Green Organisation to reward organisations that tackle environmental issues. The Award recognised the partnership's work in protecting ancient woodland in the District through undertaking the ancient woodland survey.

Rationale

The Weald & Downs Ancient Woodland Survey has been working to record all ancient woodland in areas of the High Weald. Digital map data is being used, backed up by historical records and, where possible, ground surveys of woodland flora, archaeological and topographical features. Existing boundaries are verified and corrected making full use of available technologies, with areas of more recent and secondary woodland eliminated prior to ground survey by examination of historical maps and aerial photographs. Woodlands under 2ha in size are included for the first time. The methodologies developed for the Wealden pilot project have now been extended into neighbouring districts and are gradually being rolled out across the South East with the aim of creating a regional inventory.

Profile

Weald and Downs Ancient Woodland Survey

Purpose

To update and enhance the existing Ancient Woodland Inventory including woodlands under two hectares. The project aims to map and document all ancient woodland in the High Weald and to provide a robust evidence base upon which to assign ancient woodland status.

Partners

High Weald JAC, Forestry Commission, The Woodland Trust, Natural England, Sussex Wildlife Trust, Sussex Biological Records Centre and local authorities (see below).

Timescale

Wealden District: completed March 2006. Mid Sussex District: completed October 2006. Tunbridge Wells Borough: completed October 2007. Ashford Borough: completed December 2008. Rother District: started November 2007, to be completed November 2009. Tonbridge & Malling Borough: start November 2007, to be completed November 2009.

Launch of the Ashford Inventory



Profile

Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites Project

Purpose

To provide specialist management advice to landowners, land managers and forestry contractors on the restoration of Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites in the High Weald AONB.

Partners

High Weald JAC, Woodland Trust, Forestry Commission.

Timescale

December 2005 to August 2008, Phase II April 2009 to March 2011.

■ Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) Project

Improving and maintaining the ecological condition of plantations on ancient woodland sites

Mike Chapman, the Unit's PAWS Officer, left in early August to take up a post with a forestry management company. As a result phase 1 of the project ended 7 months earlier. However the success of the project resulted in funding being secured for a phase 2, with the project area being extended to include the South Downs.

Achievements April – August 2008

- 1 x final report for phase 1. Phase 1 achievements included: demonstration of the effectiveness of using GIS to identify priority sites; 465ha of previously unmanaged PAWS gradually being restored to native broadleaved woodland; landowners of a further 1,033ha of PAWS receiving advice and input on gradual restoration; 854ha of PAWS having been surveyed and the condition of remnant ancient woodland features recorded.
- 2 x information notes on the Biomass Heating Installation at Beacon Community College, Crowborough and The Hoathly Hill Community Wood Fired District Heating System.
- Funding secured from the Woodland Trust, the Forestry Commission and South Downs Joint Committee for continuation for a further 2 years with phase 2 to operate across both the South Downs and the High Weald.
- Successful appointment of a new project officer.

Rationale

Ancient woodland sites in the AONB cover around 22,000 hectares or approximately 15% of the total land area. The High Weald therefore contains almost 6.5% of the total ancient woodland area in England. Over a third of the High Weald's ancient woodland sites have been replanted with plantations of trees that would not naturally grow on these sites, particularly conifers. Many of these plantations have been abandoned. The resulting dense, unmanaged stands are of limited value for wildlife, yet many still contain the relics of the original semi-natural woodland.

The objective of the High Weald's PAWS (Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites) project is to protect and restore these areas. A Project Officer works with woodland owners providing expert advice on returning plantations on ancient woodland sites to their original, natural broadleaved tree cover. A gradual approach to transformation is preferred, whereby sensitive woodland plants can adjust slowly to changing light levels as the planted trees are removed. Other important actions are open space management to retain and enhance rides and glades within woods, mapping and protecting relic archaeological and ecological features and controlling invasive exotic species.

Conifer removal with working horses



■ Weald Meadows Initiative (WMI)

Action for valued grasslands, for now and for the future

This nationally acclaimed project was successful in achieving all of the targets for the second year of phase IV funding, due for completion in September 2009.

Achievements 2008-09

Conserving and enhancing the wildflower grasslands resource

- 15 sites surveyed in preparation for the harvesting of Weald Native Origin Wildflower and Grass Seed.
- Seed harvesting from six species-rich meadows overseen.
- 21 site visits in the Heathfield/Battle Ridge and 15 site visits in the wider High Weald.
- Management, enhancement and creation advice supplied to the managers of 527 ha of grassland via a range of other mediums.
- 131kg of Weald Native Origin Seed (WNOS) dried, cleaned and stored.
- 67 kg of WNOS re-sown on 12.09 hectares across 33 sites in the High Weald.
- 64 landowners provided with management, enhancement & creation advice and support. Fifteen of the landowners diversifying their grasslands were new WMI contacts.
- the results of 141 survey records (summer 2007) delivered to 50 of the 68 meadow owners with an offer of a site visit and support in 2009. Thirty two of those contacted received a customised letter & 49 grasslands were prioritised for a follow up visit.
- Joint working and liaison with Natural England on 25 sites.
- New project to improve the coverage of Barn Owl nest boxes across unimproved and semi-improved grasslands in the Weald developed with Colin Shawyer of Wildlife Conservation Partnerships.

Weald Meadows Initiative Small Grant Scheme

- Liaison with 15 landowners interested in the grant scheme, with 6 applications and 3 grants finally awarded.
- 18 grassland sites benefited from grants totalling £21,856. The projects were as follows:

Theobalds Farm – for fencing to allow grassland restoration by grazing. As a result the site has been accepted into the Environmental Stewardship Higher Level Scheme which will enable long term management.

Baldwins Farm – for fencing to bring two fields back into good management. This may enable them to be accepted into the Environmental Stewardship Higher Level Scheme in future.

South East Water – for the purchase of small pedestrian machinery including a mower, hay-rake, coupler and mini-baler. Initially the machinery will be used on up to 16 South East Water sites (including Sites of Special Scientific Interest) benefiting up to 268 ha of species-rich grassland. The machine will also be available to landowners with sites adjacent to South East Water sites through WMI training days in the summer of 2009.

Policy and research

- 10 sites added or amended on GIS to feed into the draft High Weald AONB grassland strategy.
- Data and comment fed into the Kent Habitat Action Plan (HAP) process for Lowland Meadows and Tunbridge Wells Local Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) process.

Profile

Weald Meadows Initiative

Purpose

To ensure the long term survival of the irreplaceable species-rich grassland of the Heathfield to Battle Ridge and the wider Weald and secure their productive and economic use.

Partners

High Weald JAC, High Weald Landscape Trust, The Tubney Charitable Trust, INTERREG IIIB 'Lifescape Your Landscapes', Natural England, the Environment Agency and East Sussex County Council, Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) and Agrifactors (Southern) Ltd.

Timescale

Initiated 1996, Phase IV July 2006 – September 2009.

New project to increase the number of Barn Owl boxes





Common Spotted Orchids

- 5 meadow owners contacted for permission to pass on species data to D. Blakesley of Wildlife Landscapes for comparison with roadside vegetation along the A21 in Kent & Sussex. The study was for East Malling Research on behalf of the Highways Agency.

Furthering landowner/public understanding and enjoyment

- Production of meadows web clip on whole crop methodology, for landowners/contractors added to the 6 existing clips.
- The development of the Weald Meadows Group, a partnership made up of the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew at Wakehurst, Sussex University and the WMI to champion meadows. The main thrust of the partnership was designing and developing information for a 'Vanishing Meadows' exhibition in the summer of 2009.
- 6 x landowners courses and 1 x advisors course delivered as follows:

Enhancement and Management Workshop for landowners on 11 June 2008 at the Beech Estate. Thirty three landowners and 6 speakers, including Charles Flower a former farmer and with 15 years practical wildflower growing experience, were involved with the workshop. Feedback from participants included 'fascinating and informative', 'a perfect venue' and proved that a workshop was ideal with the practical elements of the course deemed the most interesting. As a result of this day 11 landowners requested a WMI visit, further information or ongoing support.

Introduction to Neutral Grasses in their Vegetative State on 22 April 2008 at Rolfs Farm in Mayfield. A course to improve advisers grassland identification skills by teaching techniques to identify grasses in a vegetative state. Nine advisers attended the half day session. All participants stated that the course had been an extremely useful session, as it had provided an incentive for all participants to start surveying early and allowed individuals to get their 'eye in' for grasses in good time.

The Big Pull Saturday 5 July at Rocks Farm, Beech Estate, Lakehurst Lane, Ashburnham. An opportunity to meet the High Weald Landscape Trust and Friends of the High Weald and hear from the WMI why ragwort should be controlled but conversely how valuable the species is for hundreds of insects. The talk was followed by some attendee participation – hand pulling. The evening event was attended by 16 landowners and was rounded off with a BBQ in the beautiful Bunce's Barn and a hawk and owl display.

Meadows & Woodland Butterfly Walk Thursday 10 July at Baldwin's Farm, Mountfield, Battle. 23 landowners went in search of butterflies around the farm which is located on the edge of the Darwell Reservoir and has recently been brought back into management under the Higher Level Stewardship Scheme.

Farm & Meadow Butterfly Walk Saturday 19 July Swallowtail Farm, Hobbs Lane, Beckley. 24 landowners went on a guided walk on the small but diverse smallholding which took in meadows, green lanes, ponds and ancient woodland.

Butterfly Walk



Barn Owl and Wildflower Grasslands Wednesday 13 August at Stocklands Farm, Stocklands Lane, Hadlow Down, East Sussex. 21 landowners joined owners, farmers and naturalists Bob and Anne Spencer in their barn and SSSI meadows, accompanied by a talk by barn owl expert, Jenny Cutcheon.

Weed Control – Machinery & Chemicals for Species Rich Grassland Wednesday 10 September at Chantlers Farm, Cowden, Edenbridge Kent. 22 landowners attended and participated in discussions focused on perennial weeds in grasslands, with support from consultants and Natural England. Jonathan Latham demonstrated the use of specialist machinery including a mini-baler which was funded by the WMI in 2007. Feedback gathered from this event recorded that all participants 'would find the knowledge gained beneficial in managing any weed control in their species rich grassland and that the course was excellent with the expert input really adding value to the course.'

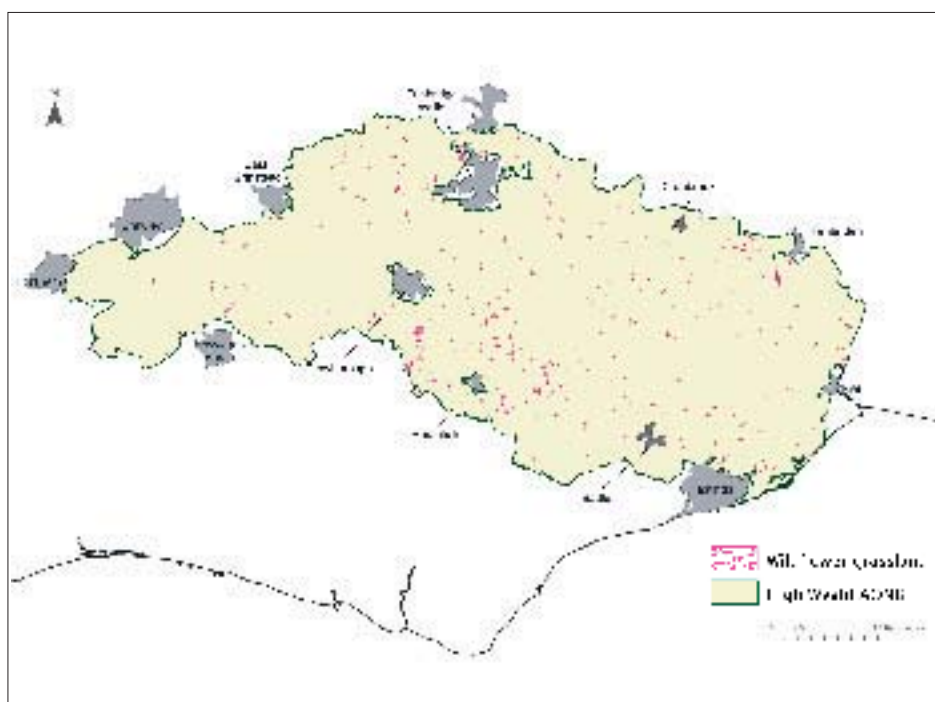


Machinery demonstration

Rationale

As they are man-made habitats, wildflower grasslands require ongoing traditional management (hay cutting and grazing) to maintain their rare flora and fauna. Much of the WMI work in 2007-08 has concentrated on surveying the resource for future proactive advice and promoting meadow products and innovative engagement mechanisms that help support ongoing management.

Wildflower Grasslands in the High Weald



Profile

Historic Farmsteads Project

Purpose

To develop an understanding of High Weald farmstead character and survival, identifying patterns at a landscape scale and providing a framework for more detailed archive, site survey and guidance.

Partners

High Weald JAC, English Heritage, Natural England, West Sussex County Council, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council.

Timescale

Initiated April 2006, ongoing.

Historic Farmsteads Project

Achievements 2008-09

New web-based toolkit to help with the development of historic farmsteads

A trial web tool to guide owners, agents and public authorities through the various aspects of historic farmsteads was developed and published on www.highweald.org.

The tool, based on the English Heritage Assessment Framework, provides video guides, commentary, illustrations and demonstrations on various aspects of historic farmsteads. It includes their landscape context, historic change, rare and important features, farmstead type and advice on what options and activities are possible that will help to retain and enhance their historic character. The tool follows a number of stages and provides a depth of advice and background on these important components of the High Weald landscape.

Working with the High Weald AONB Unit and English Heritage the Assessment Framework Pilot and tool were piloted by a developer seeking to develop a farmstead in Kent.



New web-based toolkit on farmsteads



Rationale

The aims of this project are to provide a consistent understanding of farmstead character and survival at a landscape scale of the High Weald AONB and the areas of East Sussex and West Sussex outside the AONB, in order to inform policy and interpretation. The collation and analysis of data in this project will then be applied to a range of scenarios, including:

- land use policy and planning (including Supplementary Planning Documents).
- the development of Historic Environment Records.
- inform local development frameworks and to provide the context and guidance for applications relating to individual historic farm buildings.
- the sustainability of rural settlements, building on the results of a pilot project being undertaken for the AONB Unit by Land Use Consultants (due to report in December 2005).
- the targeting of Higher Level Environmental Stewardship in the High Weald and to assist landowners, managers and advisors with applications and Farm Environment Plans. This will be piloted in this project, and then taken forward in a separately funded partnership in 2006 with the High Weald AONB and FWAG (the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group) in partnership with Characterisation Team, summarised in Annexe 1.

■ Rother Woods Project

Achievements 2008-09

In its first year the Butterfly Conservation's Rother Woods Project, which is hosted by the High Weald AONB Unit, achieved the following.

- Identification and contact with over 80 landowners and managers.
- 40 site advice visits.
- Woodland improvement grant applications of £40,000 through support to woodland owners.
- Over £12,000 secured for management work to improve the ride network at Beckley Woods.
- 16 different events, attended by over 290 adults and 80 children.
- A contribution of over 600 hours of volunteer time.
- 5,000 butterfly sighting records for submission to the County Recorders and Records Centre.
- the recording of 27 butterfly species (half of all UK species), including 3 UK BAP (Biodiversity Action Plan) priority species – White Admiral, Grizzled Skipper and Dingy Skipper.
- the recording of 416 moth species recorded including 3 Red Data Book moths, 2 UK BAP species and 7 Nationally Scarce species.

Profile

Rother Woods Project

Purpose

To tackle declines in woodland biodiversity by supporting active and sensitive woodland management and promoting the requirements and value of butterflies and moths.

Partners

Butterfly Conservation (lead), High Weald JAC, Heritage Lottery Fund, Tubney Charitable Trust, Forestry Commission.

Timescale

November 2007, ongoing.



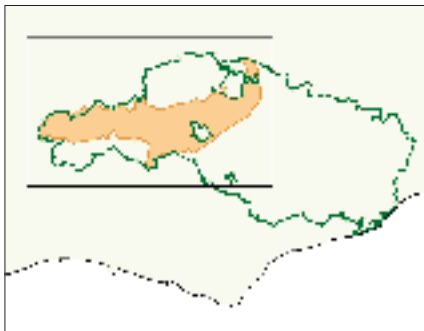
Silver Washed Fritillary

Rationale

The Rother Woods demonstration area contains some of the richest woodland biodiversity in the country – it is a stronghold for many declining woodland bird species such as the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, and encompasses a site with one of the richest moth fauna of any site in the UK as well as a dwindling population of the Pearl-bordered fritillary. However individual sites are vulnerable and require protection from neglect, agricultural encroachment and fragmentation. The Project aims to tackle the decline in woodland diversity by supporting active woodland management through a combination of: funded management in key target areas, advice and grant support for woodland owners, training for woodland managers and public engagement, including recruitment and training of volunteers.

School visit to Brede High Woods





Location of the Weald Forest Ridge Landscape Partnership Scheme

■ Securing Funds

The focus of the Unit's bidding activity in 2008-09 was funding to enable roll out of High Weald Heroes (see page 15) and the Plantation on Ancient Woodlands project (see page 18) and successful submission of the stage 2 bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund to secure release of the £2million grant provisionally offered for the Weald Forest Ridge Landscape Partnership Scheme (see page 14).

High Weald Heroes

3 significant funding bids were submitted, to the Natural England-led Access for Nature Scheme, the Big Lottery Fund's Family Learning Scheme and the Heritage Lottery Fund's Your Heritage programme. The success of the latter was advised in May 2009.

Weald Forest Ridge Landscape Partnership Scheme

The Stage 2 bid for the Weald Forest Ridge (WFR) Landscape Partnership Scheme was submitted on time, at the end of April, to the Heritage Lottery Fund.

The application contained detailed proposals for 28 individual projects, led by 18 delivery partners, and grouped into 5 programme areas: covering landscape-scale connectivity, archaeology, learning and celebrating heritage, reconnecting people and place and scheme management.

July saw the detailed appraisal questions arrive from the HLF. Given the size and scale of the multi-partner, multi-project Scheme; the questions were relatively straightforward; showing the benefit of the significant time investment by the WFR Partnership in developing the Stage 2 bid. Responses were gradually provided over the summer, and all but one were successfully resolved.

The HLF Regional Committee that considers stage 2 Landscape Partnership Scheme applications approved the Scheme at the end of September bringing a five-year development period led by the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee to a close. The approved Scheme value was £3,225,430 with an HLF grant award of £1.92 million, or 60% of total costs.

Plantations on Ancient Woodlands Project

Funding was secured from the Forestry Commission, South Downs Joint Committee and the Woodland Trust for phase II of the project, renamed The Ancient Woodlands Restoration Project. Working in partnership with CRPF (the French lead partner), the Forestry Commission and Kent County Council, a funding bid was submitted to the INTERREG IIIb programme to support work around multi-functional forest management in the face of climate change, to include funding to enable extension of the project for a further year. The Unit was advised that the bid was successful in July 2009.

Sustainable Tourism in the South East's Finest Landscapes

Working in partnership with other AONB representatives in the region, the SEAONB Policy Manager and a consultant, a £1million region-wide project to foster greater value from tourism, both economically and environmentally was developed. A funding bid was submitted to SEEDA in April 2009.



■ The Sustainable Development Fund (SDF)

The High Weald JAC secured a sum of £55,000 to operate the High Weald SDF for a fourth year. Grants ranging from £540 to £9400 were awarded to 14 projects by a panel of Unit officers, JAC members and community representatives. Three projects focused on heritage management, 1 on public access, 4 on school education, 3 on land management guidance and 3 on the rural economy.

Achievements 2008-09

- 27 enquiries or expressions of interest were received and responded to.
- 16 applications were considered by the grants panel.
- 14 grants were awarded and 14 projects completed.
- An overall spend of £125,000 on projects was achieved.
- 3 local authority partnerships, 1 parish council, 2 private companies/business partnerships, 4 charities and 2 schools were grant recipients.
- 15 primary schools and 2 secondary schools were involved in SDF projects.
- 1535 school children initially benefited from the SDF projects.
- 19 voluntary groups were directly involved in/helped deliver SDF projects.
- 83 Businesses participated in the SDF projects. This included 18 local suppliers who provided goods and services to SDF projects; 17 local farms who participated in 2 of the projects; 30 local producers who were involved with the Really Local Produce leaflet; and 18 exhibitors who took part in a Woodfuel Awareness Seminar.
- 16 new partnerships/groups were created by the SDF.
- 240 new contacts were made through SDF events.
- 4 projects held open days which publicised SDF.
- 17 training and awareness sessions were held as a consequence of the projects including: 4 educational walks; 1 twilight 'how to grow your own' school training session; 2 days of in-school curriculum activities; and 11 training sessions for volunteers, farm owners, and teachers.
- 2 new landowner advisory sections on established websites raised awareness and 1 website was rejuvenated to include High Weald information.
- 5000 leaflets were produced publicising the High Weald AONB.
- 5 press releases and 8 newsletters for local communities/businesses were issued.
- 8 of the projects will continue to develop with volunteer support.
- 9 projects would not have happened without SDF funding.

Profile

Sustainable Development Fund

Purpose

The Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) grants are used to bring social, environmental and economic benefits to protected areas by funding projects that develop and test new methods of achieving a more sustainable way of life in AONBs.

Partners

SDF is a national grant scheme awarded by Natural England, a government body responsible for the natural environment, on behalf of Defra (Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs). In the High Weald, SDF is administered by the High Weald JAC.

Timescale

Annual grant awarded from 1 April 2008 – 31 March 2009.



Woodfuel Awareness Day

Broadwater Forest access improvements



S D F P R O J E C T S

Organisation	Project Name	Project Description	SDF Grant Award
Kent High Weald Project	The High Weald Farming Story	The High Weald Food Story aims to build long term links with schools and farms, largely focusing on urban areas. A Farming Educational Best Practice Guide has been developed which gives practical help and guidance to the farmers who would like their local school to visit their farm. Primary schools have visited the pilot farm and in future will be able to take other year groups in different seasons.	£3,565
Kent High Weald Project	My Space, My Place	Year 6 children from five High Weald Heroes schools produced their own local Welly Walks. The walks have been used for field trips for the whole school and to encourage the wider community to enjoy and take an interest in their local environment.	£4,200
Tunbridge Wells Borough Council	Review of Kent List of Historic Parks	This project reviewed the Tunbridge Wells listing of Historic Parks and Gardens in Kent and established an approach for roll out to other Local Authorities. 14 volunteers signed up at the opening event in 21 October 2008 and were involved in the 28 sites surveyed.	£9,375
FWAG (High Weald)	Water auditing on farm	Six High Weald farms have been audited in order to collate best practise information on water conservation. Web-based land management advice for other farmers, landowners and for domestic users interested in the topic has been added to www.highweald.org	£3,900
Kent High Weald Project	The High Weald Energy Story	The project was initiated to provide the local landscape context with which children can think and learn about sustainable energy choices. Over 350 children from local primary schools learnt about the High Weald Energy Story. Year 6 students in six primary schools experienced a classroom based workshop on the history of sustainable energy in the High Weald and an outside workshop experience at Bedgebury Pinetum on 17 March 2009. This was coordinated by the Kent High Weald Partnership and High Weald AONB Unit in collaboration with the Bedgebury educational team, Commonwork, Greengauge, and students from The Skinners' School and Angley College.	£6,000
RSPB	Enhancing visitor access at Broadwater Warren	A sympathetic parking area was created to give greater access to the general public and information boards were produced.	£7,150

Providing financial support for delivery of the High Weald AONB Management Plan

Organisation	Project Name	Project Description	SDF Grant Award
Butterfly Conservation	Urgent restoration of habitat network for butterflies and moths at Beckley Wood	Over 1.5 miles of forest rides have been widened creating a total of 5 acres of open space and woodland clearings. This has been achieved with the support of 30 volunteers, who have contributed a total of over 200 hours of their own time to the project. The Forestry Commission is committed to maintaining this work in the long term with the support of the volunteers.	£7,786
Action in Rural Sussex	Really Local Produce Directories	Production of a local produce directory centred on Ardingly, Lindfield, Balcombe, Cuckfield and Turner's Hill area, to help strengthen the local food economy and to link the landscape to the producers.	£4,946
Debbie Bartlett	Coppice Cutter Signs	Production of outdoor signs, for use by coppice workers, to explain the importance of wood coppicing for wildlife and to promote local woodland products.	£1,500
High Weald AONB Unit	High Weald Habitat Management Pack	Adaption of web based Kent Downs Land Management Pack into a High Weald Habitat Management Advisory Pack for www.highweald.org	£1,900
Angley College	Young Farmers	Purchase of gardening equipment for the development of a 'grow your own garden site' to support courses at Angley College and a project at Sissinghurst and a local nature reserve	£1,000
Hawkhurst Town Council	Guide to Hawkhurst Heritage Trail	Hawkhurst Community Project designed, produced and distributed a new guide for the Hawkhurst Heritage Trail which is part of a wider programme to promote Hawkhurst 'the crossroads of the High Weald'. The guide will be available through local shops, Tourist Information Centres and be available on the renewed website www.hawkhurst-happens.org.uk	£3,000
Weald Woodnet	Woodfuel Awareness Days	240 individuals attended a two day seminar to further awareness of wood fuel. It was held on February 27 & 28 at the Woodland Enterprise Centre and organised by Plumpton College. The seminars were aimed at domestic and small community users.	£750
Rye Primary School	Rye Community School – Ancient Woodland Habitats	A fun packed ancient woodland habitat day was created for the primary school children of Rye Community School. The day focused on the Anglo-Saxon period looking at woodland archaeology and the native flora and fauna. The event was in partnership with Butterfly Conservation and ESAMP and aimed to improve children's understanding of their local environment, many of whom had not visited a wood before.	£540

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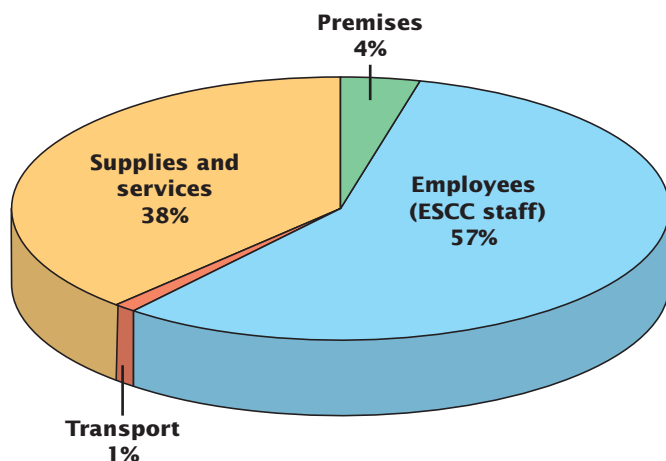
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FINANCIAL SUMMARY

1 April 2008 to 31 March 2009

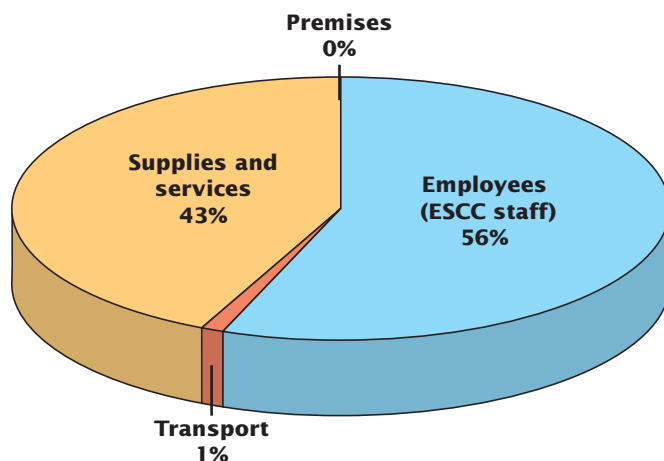
Total Expenditure

Gross expenditure £692,000



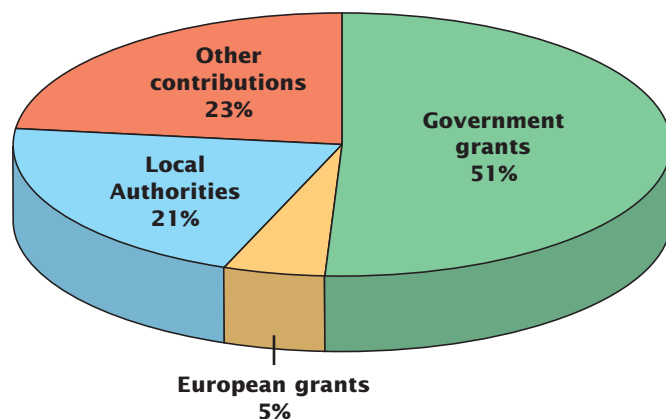
Project Expenditure

Gross expenditure £339,000



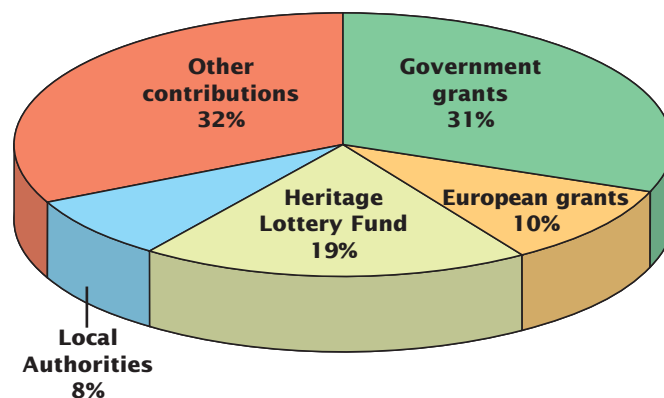
Total Income

Gross income £695,000



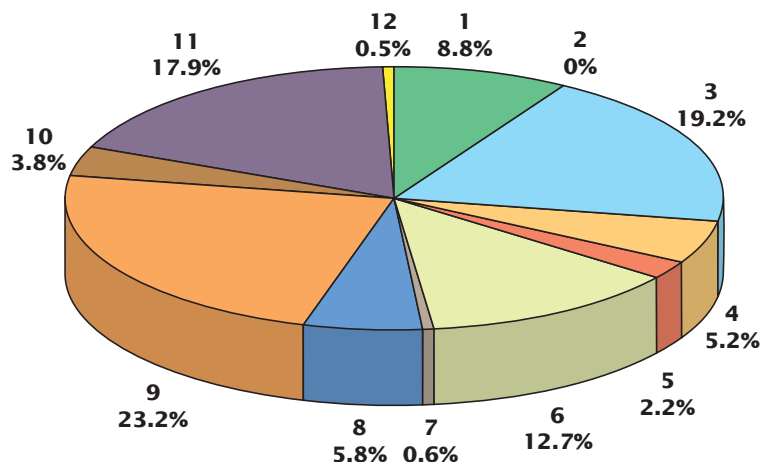
Project Income

Gross income £339,000



Expenditure by Project

Gross expenditure £339,000



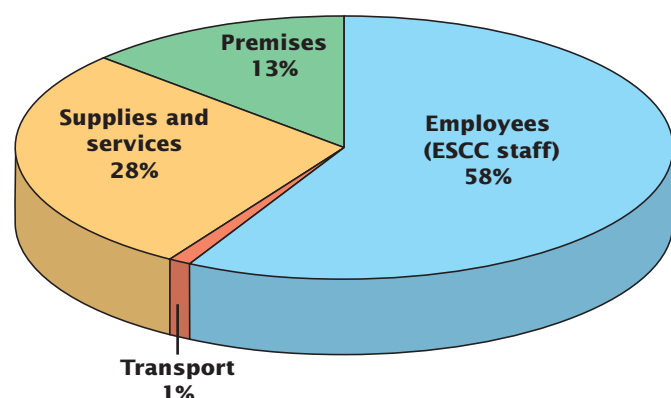
Key:

- 1 Action in Rural Sussex
- 2 Lifescapes administration
- 3 Weald Meadows Initiative
- 4 Plantation on Ancient Woodlands Project
- 5 Historic Farmstead Project
- 6 Weald and Downs Ancient Woodland Survey
- 7 Ashdown Forest Interpretation Project
- 8 High Weald Heroes
- 9 Weald Forest Ridge Landscape Partnership Scheme
- 10 Green Living Project
- 11 Sustainable Development Fund
- 12 South East AONBs Regional Activity

1 April 2008 to 31 March 2009

■ Core Expenditure

Gross expenditure £352,000



Core supplies and services included:

Office costs – rent, rates, utility bills, office equipment including IT purchases, stationery, photocopying, postage, website management and telephones.

Communication costs – publication production and distribution costs (primarily for the High Weald Anvil and annual review), event attendance and other miscellaneous promotional expenses.

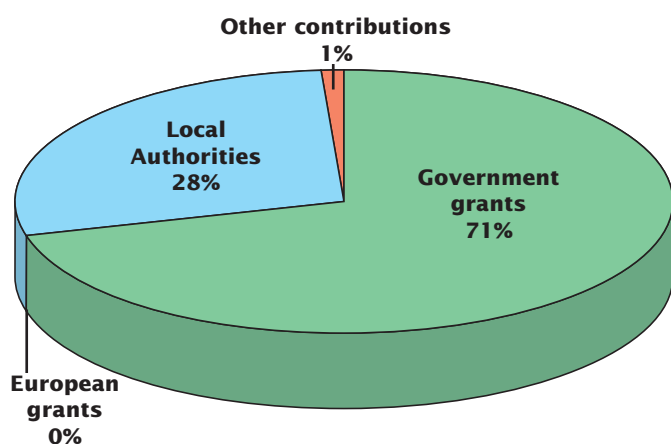
ESCC support costs – IT, personnel and finance services.

Local authority core contributions were as follows:

	£000s
East Sussex County Council*	21.5
ESCC accommodation	13.2
Kent CC*	13.3
West Sussex CC*	9.3
Surrey CC	2.8
Wealden DC*	6.9
Rother DC*	6.9
Mid Sussex DC*	5.4
Tunbridge Wells BC	6.4
Horsham DC	4.5
Sevenoaks DC*	3.5
Ashford BC *	0.9
Hastings BC**	1.4
Tandridge DC	2.1
Tonbridge & Malling BC **	0.3
Crawley BC**	0.3

■ Core Income

Gross income £356,000



The Joint Advisory Committee received its income from Natural England, local authorities and other bodies as follows:

Natural England	£360,081
Local authority partners	£127,233
Heritage Lottery Fund	£64,438
Other bodies	£143,185

Other bodies included English Heritage, the Environment Agency, Forestry Commission, Heritage Lottery Fund, High Weald Landscape Trust, the Woodland Trust and others.

The local authority contributions reflect the balance of their land area within the AONB. Those marked with * also made a contribution of £2,000 (** £300) to the Partnership Enabling Funding 2008-09.

The final position for the year was a reserve of £52,904 at 31 March 2009, which includes the £3,482 surplus for 2008-09.

HIGH WEALD JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Working together to care for one of England's Finest Landscapes

JAC Co-optees

Recreation/Leisure

Mr A Betts,
Forestry Commission

Community/Economy

Mr J Leggett,
Action in Rural Sussex

Landowners

Mr R Ashby, Country Land and
Business Association (until
autumn 2008); Mr B Underwood,
Country Land and Business
Association

Farming

Mr R Froggatt,
National Farmers Union

JAC Management Board

Councillor Mrs S Tidy
Councillor B Kentfield
Councillor B Acraman
Councillor J Davison
Councillor Mrs E Kitchen
Natural England Representatives

Clerk to the JAC and Board

Michaela Frost, Gemma Barlow

■ Membership 2008-09

The Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) is composed of an officer from Natural England, councillors from the 15 local authorities who fund AONB work and five representatives co-opted from Forum member organisations to represent community, recreation, nature conservation, farming and forestry interests. A Management Board assists the Unit with the JAC's work between JAC meetings. An Officers Steering Group advises the Management Board and JAC.

Representatives of the JAC, Management Board and OSG for the year April 2008 – March 2009 were as follows:

Chair – Councillor Mrs S Tidy

Vice-chair – Councillor B Kentfield

Officers Steering Group Chair – David Phillips

Natural England

James Seymour
Joanne Spickett

East Sussex County Council

Councillor Mrs Sylvia Tidy
Simon Hickmott (until autumn 2008); Virginia Pullan

West Sussex County Council

Councillor B Acraman
Jackie Lewis

Kent County Council

Councillor Roy Bullock
Elizabeth Holiday; Kate Phillips

Surrey County Council

Councillor K Rimington
Mike Dawson

Wealden District Council

Councillor Jonica Fox
David Phillips

Rother District Council

Councillor B Kentfield
Frank Rallings (until summer 2008); Tim Hickling

Hastings Borough Council

Councillor M Lock
Tim Cookson; Murray Davidson

Mid Sussex District Council

Councillor C Hersey
Ian Burton (until autumn 2008); Alma Howell

Horsham District Council

Councillor Mrs E Kitchen
Helen Sissons (until autumn 2008); Catherine Howe

Crawley Borough Council

Councillor Brenda Burgess
Andrew Gudrun (until autumn 2008)

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council

Councillor E Thomas
David Scully

Sevenoaks District Council

Councillor Ms J Davison
Caroline Lingham

Ashford Borough Council

Councillor R Taylor
Danielle Brough

Tonbridge & Malling District Council

No member representative
Jenny Mentz

Tandridge District Council

Councillor M Sydney
Paul Newdick

■ Purpose, Role and Functions

Purpose

The primary purpose of the JAC is to

- conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the AONB.

The JAC will also:

- increase understanding and enjoyment by the public of the special qualities of the AONB
- seek to foster the economic and social well-being of local communities within the AONB.

In general terms the JAC is guided by national policies set out for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, primarily by Natural England or any successor body.

Role

The JAC is primarily an advisory body (not a planning authority or an executive body) acting as a catalyst and facilitator in making recommendations to its constituent bodies and other organisations on policies and the allocation of resources in relation to the protection and enhancement of the AONB.

The JAC prepares the AONB management plan, for adoption by the local authorities, and oversees its implementation. The JAC also plays a significant part in developing an image and sense of identity for the AONB and developing and supporting initiatives for conservation within it.

Extracted from *The High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee Constitution*
Adopted 13 July 2005

Functions

On behalf of the JAC, the High Weald AONB Unit delivers the following core functions in the context of the AONB Management Plan and in accordance with a 3-year business strategy.

- Developing a vision and strategy for AONB management.
- Preparing, with constituent local authorities, a AONB Management plan as required by the CroW Act.
- In the early stages of AONB development, promoting the vision and strategy to distinguish the AONB from adjacent countryside.
- Implementing, and co-ordinating implementation by others, the Management Plan.
- Co-ordinating or advising on local authority services in the AONB, to go beyond the normal level of countryside management.
- Monitoring and reporting on progress against management plan targets.
- Accessing resources for undertaking management activities, including external financing, project development and proposals and providing matching funding for special projects.
- Tapping into advice and liaison with AONBs at a national level.
- Providing an internal management role to coordinate AONB protection.
- Promoting the value of the AONB to the community.
- Developing an involvement by the community in the management of the AONB.
- Providing planning advice and related activities.
- Seeking additional funds to assist with delivery of management activity.

Extracted from *Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty: a guide for AONB partnership members*

■ Staff 2008-09

Core staff remained constant at 5.6FTE with consultants used to support core delivery given the vacant Interpretation and Finance officer posts. Project staff fluctuated between 3.4FTE and 5.4FTE. Two staff left in August 2008: Mike Chapman to pursue a career with a regional forestry management company; and Gemma Swallow to take up a teaching post at the new Rye Primary School. Ruth Dawson joined the team as the Weald Forest Ridge Project Officer in January 2009.

Core

Co-Directors – Sally Marsh (0.6FTE)/ Jason Lavender (0.6FTE)

Business Manager – Gerry Sherwin (0.8FTE)

Policy and Research Officer – Andrew Shaw

Research Officer – Ruth Childs

Administrator – Kerry Baldwin (0.5FTE)

Team Support Officer – Samantha Nicholas (0.8FTE)

Project

Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites Officer – Mike Chapman
(until August 2008)

Weald Meadows Officer – Dawn Brickwood

GIS and Habitat Mapping Officer – Philip Sansum

GIS Access and Habitat Mapping Officer – Matt Grose (0.4FTE)

Project Officer, INTERREG and Education – Gemma Swallow
(until August 2008)

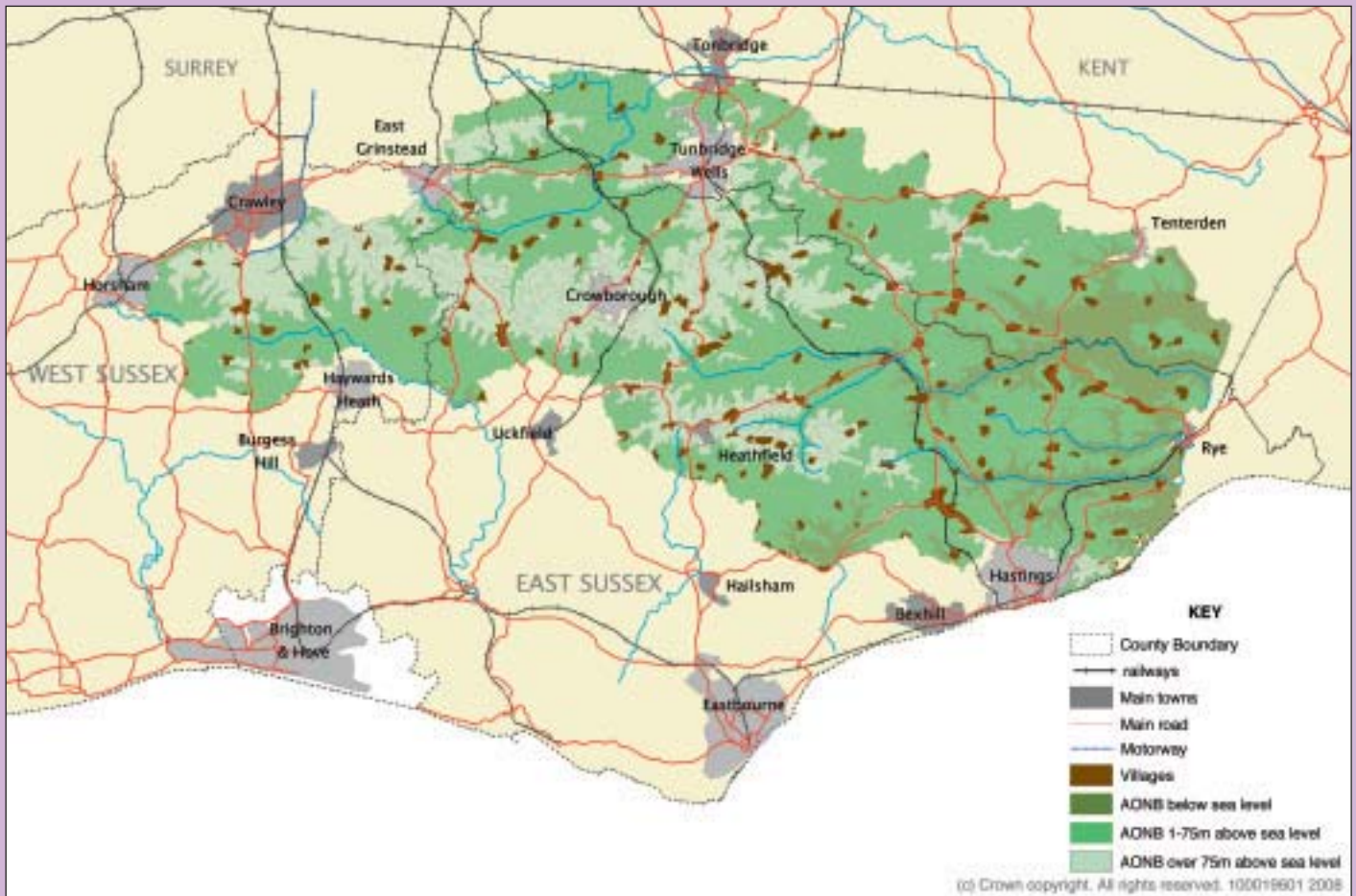
Weald Forest Ridge Manager – Simon Aguss

Weald Forest Ridge Project Officer – Ruth Dawson (from January 2009)

- **Designation** The High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) designation was confirmed by the Secretary of State for the Environment in October 1983. The first AONB to be designated was the Gower in 1956 and the most recent the Tamar Valley in 1995.
- **Size** The total area of the High Weald AONB is 146,170 hectares (1,461 square kilometres). This makes the AONB the largest in South East England and the fourth largest in England and Wales (the largest being the Cotswolds AONB at 2,038 square kilometres and the smallest being the Isles of Scilly AONB at 16 square kilometres). Currently there are 38 AONBs in England and Wales covering about 13% of the area.
- **Administration** The designated area extends across parts of four counties (Surrey, East Sussex, West Sussex and Kent), 11 districts or boroughs, and 99 parishes.
- **Population** The population of the High Weald is around 124,880 with a density of 0.85 people per hectare. The population is high for a designated landscape but, compared to urban areas and the neighbouring parts of rural West Sussex and north Kent, it is lowly populated. It is still essentially a rural area. The boundary excludes urban areas such as Tunbridge Wells town and Crowborough, but includes Battle (population over 6,000) - the largest built-up area within a landscape of scattered villages and dispersed settlement.
- **Built environment and settlement** The High Weald has a dispersed settlement pattern of farmsteads, hamlets, and small villages. There are around 100 villages but 38% of the population lives in the countryside outside villages.
- **Landform – highest point** The highest ridge of the High Weald AONB rises to 223m (732ft) above sea level on Ashdown Forest and 225m (738ft) at Crowborough Beacon, on the edge of Crowborough Common. As a comparison, the highest point of the eastern South Downs directly opposite the High Weald is Firle Beacon at 217m (712ft) above sea level.
- **Agriculture** For hundreds of years, agriculture has been concentrated in small livestock farms. It is still the main AONB land use accounting for 67.5% of the total area in 2007. Between 1990 and 2006 mean farm size declined from 45 to 35.7 hectares. In 2006 41.5% of the farm workforce was comprised of part-time farmers. Only around 4,800 people are now employed in agriculture, out of a total estimated population of 124,880.
- **Woodland** By Domesday in 1086, the High Weald was the most wooded natural area in England. The total area of woodland in the AONB today is 35,905 hectares, or 24.5% of the total AONB area – compared with the national average of about 9% of the total area. 17.6% of the AONB is Ancient Woodland, in other words over half of all the High Weald's woodlands are ancient. The High Weald AONB represents only 1% of England yet it has 3.39% of England's woodlands, making it one of the most densely wooded landscapes.
- **Wildlife conservation value** There are 51 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) within the AONB, totalling 5535.49 ha in area. There are 198 Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI) totalling 10,291.8 ha in area.
- **Archaeological and architectural value** There are 91 Scheduled Ancient Monuments within the AONB and 64 conservation areas in built-up areas (containing many of the 5174 listed buildings).
- **Visitor attractions** There are 92 visitor attractions within the AONB, including 9 National Trust Properties and 2 Country Parks.
- **Public rights of way** Several long distance paths cross the AONB: High Weald Landscape Trail, Weald Way, 1066 Country Walk, Saxon Shore Way, Vanguard Way and Sussex Border Path. The total length of footpaths is 2063 kilometres.

HIGH WEALD AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY

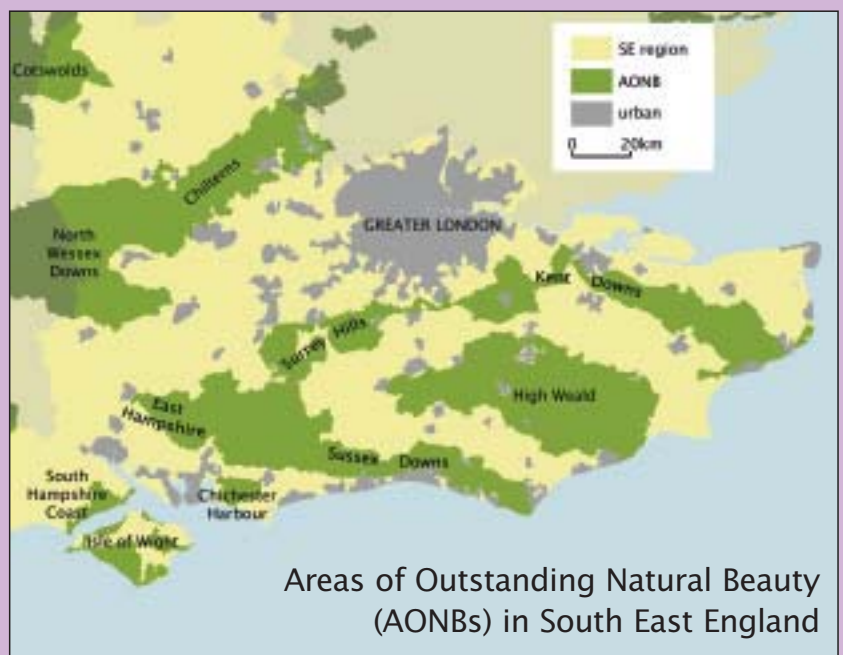
Location



High Weald AONB Unit

Woodland Enterprise Centre
Hastings Road
Flimwell
East Sussex TN5 7PR
Tel: 01580 879500
Fax: 01580 879499
Email: info@highweald.org
Web: www.highweald.org

The annual review is published by the High Weald AONB Unit on behalf of the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee (JAC).



Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) in South East England