



High Weald Joint Advisory Committee Biennial Review 2020-22

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



HIGH WEALD
One of the
AONB Family



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; Defra; Natural England; and organisations representing farming, forestry, community, business and recreation interests.

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

Foreword

Who will forget spring 2020? Overnight our lives changed and liberties we had all taken for granted disappeared. 'Stay at home' we were told, and we did. The roads were empty, town centres deserted and people were very scared. However, air pollution dropped, we could hear the birds singing, and walkers and cyclists moved onto the roads vacated by cars. People really appreciated how important beautiful green spaces, nature and the countryside are to their health and well-being.

The last two years have been challenging for all of us, particularly those who have been ill or lost loved ones to the pandemic. But throughout, the High Weald AONB Partnership and officer team have continued to work to conserve and enhance the outstandingly beautiful part of the countryside we call the High Weald.

We learnt how to work effectively as a team when we were all working from home. We grappled with the technology of virtual meetings and videos and used them to increase our partnership working and support to each other and external partners and land managers. More recently we have moved to a more hybrid working style, combining these technological advances with physical meetings where appropriate.

This report summarises the work we have been engaged in over the last two years – covering two annual review periods, 2020–21 and 2021–22. It illustrates how we adapted to the new working environment and highlights some of our achievements over this challenging period.

Sylvia Tidy and Pete Bradbury
Chairmen of the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee 2020–22

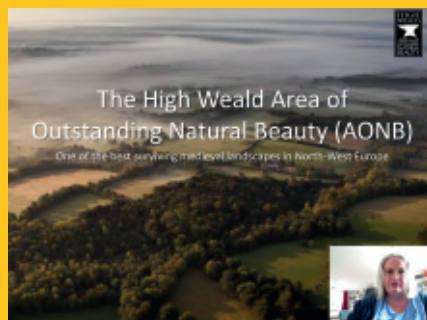


Pete Bradbury
Chairman of the High Weald Joint
Advisory Committee (JAC)

Working in partnership

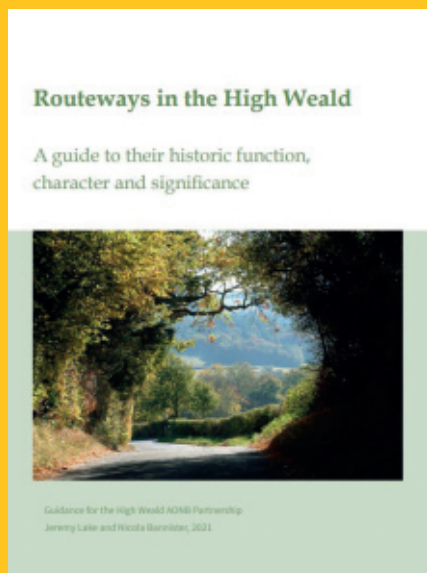
We would like to thank everyone who has worked with us over the last two years to connect people, protect beauty and restore soils and nature in the High Weald.





We created a video presentation on the management plan to help with induction of new local authority members and officers

We published guidance on routeways in the High Weald



1

Promoting the AONB Management Plan and providing advice and guidance

We provided advice through video presentations and virtual meetings.

Key activities:

- We recorded, edited and promoted a **video presentation on the management plan** to help with officer and councillor training.
- We gave **support to local authority planners** through virtual meetings to provide advice on planning issues.
- We worked with CPRE, the countryside charity (CPRE) to provide a **webinar to help people engage with planning proposals**, which was attended by over 70 people, recorded and made available online. The webinar was promoted via our website, our eNews bulletins and social media posts.
- We provided **virtual training on planning** in the AONB to local authority councillors.

During 2020–22 we provided responses to five national policy consultations and 33 local policy documents.

Responses were submitted to:

- **Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government** (now Department for Levelling Up, Houses and Communities) on various planning reforms including the Planning for the Future white paper





We provided comments on the government's white paper on planning reforms

1

Promoting the AONB Management Plan and providing advice and guidance

We responded to 269 development proposals



- **20 local plan documents:** for Crawley, Mid Sussex, Rother, Tunbridge Wells, Wealden, Kent, Lewes and Maidstone.
- **13 neighbourhood plans:** for Battle, Benenden, Burwash, Copthorne x 2, Cranbrook and Sissinghurst, Goudhurst, Horsted Keynes, Hurst Green, Lamberhurst, Brenchley and Matfield, and Tenterden and Wadhurst.
- **4 other consultations:** for Gatwick Airport, West Sussex Local Validation List, West Sussex Local Transport Plan and Kent Design Guide.

During 2020–22 we provided advice and comment on 269 development proposals and 81 felling licence applications, and we participated in 15 planning appeals including as a main party in a two-month public inquiry at Turnden, Cranbrook.

Key activities:

- We provided advice and comment on **144 development proposals:** 59 major, 66 minor and 19 others during 2020–21.
- We responded to **125 development proposals:** 64 major, 52 minor and 9 others during 2021–22.
- We responded to **20 consultations on proposed changes to public rights of way.**
- We responded to **81 felling licence applications**, a new area of consultation by the Forestry Commission.
- We participated in **6 virtual planning appeal hearings/inquiries** including as a Rule 6 party for a two-month Secretary of State 'call-in' planning inquiry at Turnden, Cranbrook. We also submitted additional written representations to 7 planning appeals and provided support to council witnesses at 2 planning appeals.





We participated in 15 planning appeals

1

Promoting the AONB Management Plan and providing advice and guidance

Heath lobelia



We continued to advise on approaches to nature recovery in the High Weald, focusing on informing spatial mapping exercises and promoting the benefits of regenerative agriculture techniques.

Key activities:

- **Research into regenerative agriculture (RA)** techniques and their application in the High Weald.
- **Working with demonstration farms** to show the practicalities of transition to RA farming methods.
- **Supporting farm improvement plans** to help guide transition from a conventional agricultural system to a RA system.
- Working with partners such as Natural England and the Local Nature Partnerships (LNP) to collate **information for emerging Nature Recovery Strategies** and input into government consultations.
- **Advising and sharing landscape data** through the respective LNP working groups to inform nature recovery opportunity mapping exercises in Kent and Sussex.
- Working with partners to develop a **woodland opportunity map** for Sussex.

During 2020–22 we advised over 140 organisations and local partnerships on the High Weald’s landscape – double the number of previous years due to the use of virtual meetings – and increased staff resources in water management.

We met and collaborated with the following organisations and groups:

- **35 meetings with the Defra group** (Defra, Natural England, Environment Agency and Forestry Commission), including engaging with proposals for Environmental Land Management (ELM) schemes and collaborative working around nature recovery and natural flood management.





Working with landowners to support regenerative farming

1

Producing the AONB Management Plan and providing advice and guidance

New virtual meeting technology enabled an increase in our partnership working



- **236 meetings with local stakeholders:** county, district/borough councils and parish councils; Ashdown Forest Conservators; National Trust; Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew; Sussex Wildlife Trust; University of Kent; West Sussex Local Access Forum; Wilder Horsham Project; Friends of the Upper Medway; Woodland Trust; National Trust; the Ramblers; CPRE; Plantlife; Southern Water; South East Water; South East Rivers Trust; Combe Valley Country Park Community Interest Company; Sussex Ornithological Society; Groundwork; Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) ; Hellingly Flood Forum; Ouse and Adur Rivers Trust; Waterweek (Hailsham) and local MPs.
- **17 partnership steering groups:** Agricollogy National Steering Group; Sussex Local Nature Partnership; Kent Nature Partnership; High Weald Network; Cuckmere and Pevensey Catchment Partnership and Combe Valley Sub Group; Sussex Flow (Cuckmere & Combe) Board; Pevensey and Cuckmere Cluster Test and Trial Group ; Eastern Rother Water Catchment Partnership; Medway Catchment Partnership; Community Rail Partnership; Sussex National Flood Management Practitioners Group; Hellingly Community Flood Forum; AONB Historic Environment Working Group; Agroforestry National Test and Trial (Soil Association) Group; Sussex Beaver Steering Group; UK Power Networks Regional Steering Group and High Weald Land Management Advisers Group.





Farming in Protected Landscapes panel meeting, Ashdown Forest Centre

Laying hedges



2 Co-ordinating action and enabling delivery of the AONB Management Plan

Land Management Programme

During 2020–22 we advised land managers and helped them develop and implement landscape restoration projects. This included providing support for applications to the Sussex Lund and Farming in Protected Landscapes grant schemes.

Key activities:

- During 2020–22 we carried out **356 site visits and meetings with land managers** – some of these were virtual meetings at times of the most severe lockdowns.
- We provided **additional written and oral advice to 166 land managers** to help them develop and implement landscape restoration projects.
- We ran **22 events with 188 attendees**, including farm cluster events, with a focus on advising on government environmental land management schemes and practices, regenerative agriculture, agronomy, carbon storage and rewilding.
- We quickly moved our successful farm cluster event programme to **virtual events and webinars** for farmers and land managers across the AONB. We **created videos** for use on Zoom and Teams, developed our video editing skills and engaged guest speakers for our virtual events. We also provided extensive support to land managers in using this new technology.





Our dung beetle event was popular with farmers

2

Co-ordinating action and enabling delivery of the AONB Management Plan

Explaining the value of soils



We administered the first part-year of the government's new Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) grant scheme of £1.7 million over 3 years. FiPL support projects that meet outcomes for climate, nature, people and place, and also conserve and enhance the AONB.

Key activities:

- We worked with Defra and AONB colleagues to **inform the new FiPL scheme**, which was launched in June 2021.
- We **promoted the new programme** extensively to the High Weald farming community using our website, eNews bulletins, personalised emails, social media and a mix of in-person and virtual events.
- We **set up a FiPL grant panel** and supporting systems to authorise grants under the scheme.
- We **advised 175 land managers** and helped them develop their projects so they would meet Defra FiPL criteria and AONB Management Plan objectives.
- We **recruited a project team** to help run the programme: a land management officer, senior administrator and interim project manager.
- We **contracted a part-time events co-ordinator** to develop and deliver a programme of free events and workshops to provide inspiration and guidance to land managers.
- In 2021–22 **18 grant awards totalling over £245,290** were made by the FiPL panel.
- Projects have included: setting up of regenerative agriculture systems; reinstating historic features such as hedges; managing deer to protect ancient woodland; infrastructure to enable conservation grazing of heath; and new public events focused on food and farming.





Helping communities plan restoration projects

2

Co-ordinating action and enabling delivery of the AONB Management Plan

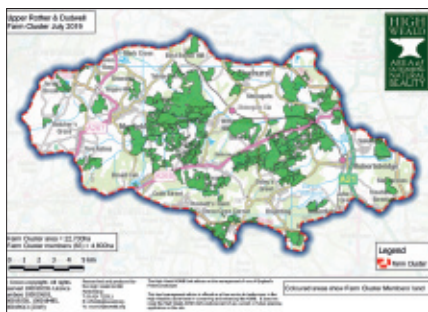


We administered Sussex Lund, the grant scheme of Lisbet Rausing and Peter Baldwin. Sussex Lund supports small-scale, practical projects that improve the landscape of the High Weald AONB and the hamlets, villages and towns in and immediately around it; it also supports projects that help people to experience and build connections to the landscape.

Key activities:

- In 2020–21 **49 grant awards totalling £210,730** were made by the Sussex Lund grants panel. Projects included enhancements for woodland, wetland, grassland, heath, amenity and access. The grants panel supported 2 collaborative projects that were submitted by the High Weald AONB team. One project enabled 22 members of the Upper Rother and Dudwell Farm Cluster to work together to install barn owl boxes across their holdings. The other project allowed three farmers in the Tillingham valley to strategically reinstate and restore historic hedges across their landscape.
- In 2021–22 **46 grant awards totalling £176,804** were made by the Sussex Lund grants panel. Projects included enhancing hedges, grassland, heath, woodland, orchards, wetland and ponds. Two were collaborative projects led by private landowners.
- **Sussex Lund was promoted extensively** to the High Weald AONB Partnership's many and varied stakeholders, via eNews, tailored promotional emails, social media, press and a mix of virtual and in-person events and site visits.
- In 2021, we held **4 Sussex Lund community events** in Ticehurst, Lamberhurst and Cuckfield, looking at previous successful Sussex Lund projects and inspiring potential new applicants to apply for the 2022 round of funding.





Farm cluster area

2

Co-ordinating action and enabling delivery of the AONB Management Plan

Woodland enhancements



We facilitated the Upper Rother and Dudwell Farm Cluster until September 2021, helping farmers, foresters and other land managers to work together to benefit soil, water, wildlife and historic features on their farms and across the wider landscape. We also facilitated the Prince's Farm Resilience Programme which helps farm businesses thrive, ensuring a diverse farming sector in the UK.

Key activities:

- **5 farm cluster events** including a celebration of the cluster's successes and preparation for new grant programmes
- A varied **programme of virtual events and workshops**, replacing in-person events during the COVID-19 lockdown. This included joint webinars with partners such as Plantlife and Natural England. Topics included carbon accounting, precision grazing and the forthcoming Environmental Land Management scheme. Many of these events were recorded, edited and uploaded to our YouTube channel for sharing with a wider audience
- **Managing a WhatsApp group** to provide support during the pandemic and to continue the collaboration between land managers after the facilitation of the cluster by the AONB team finished in September 2021. This group has now opened up to farmers from across the AONB and is a key communications channel
- **8 farm cluster eNews bulletins** during 2020–21 promoting events, new guidance and funding opportunities, and sharing other useful information
- Leading a **Prince's Farm Resilience workshop** on environmentally friendly farming (Jan 2021).
- **E-Surveyor early release trial** with visits to five cluster members to test software created to help landowners develop a grassland action plan using an interactive website and surveying apps under partnership project with Plantlife as part of Defra's ELM test and trial programme
- **Evaluation of the cluster** through a focus group on collaborative working with six members of the farm cluster under a partnership project with Plantlife as part of Defra's ELM





Restoring hedgerows to compensate for visual impact of overhead lines

2

Co-ordinating action and enabling delivery of the AONB Management Plan

AONB-wide deer management project set up



test and trial programme. The focal question of this group was ‘How do we encourage and incentivise collaboration for the delivery of public goods?’

We worked with land managers and partners to facilitate National Grid and UK Power Network schemes that underground or reduce the visual impact of their infrastructure and improve the visual quality of the surrounding landscape.

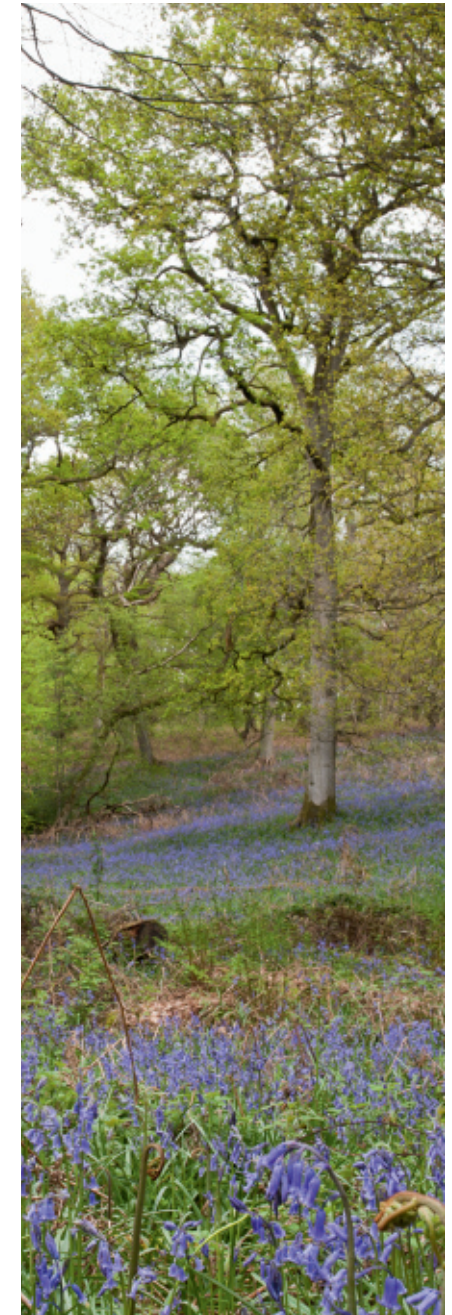
Key activities:

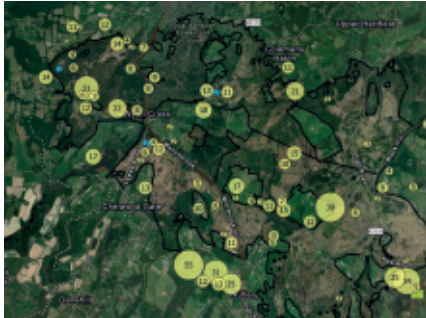
- The partnership managed **3 projects supported by the National Grid Landscape Enhancement Initiative** with a total value of £466,243: Beautiful Boundaries 1 (£199,860); Beautiful Boundaries 2 (£164,612); and Wonderful Woodlands (£101,771).
- The grants are enabling work by land managers on **24 holdings**, including new hedges (planting and fencing); hedge restoration (coppicing, gapping up and fencing); new hedgerow trees; managing woodland boundaries; and creating and enhancing woodland rides, glades and ponds.
- We worked with the UKPN regional steering group to gain approval for the undergrounding of lines at Sheffield Park and Bedgebury Forest.

We set up an AONB-wide Deer co-ordinator supported by the Woodland Trust. The project helps land managers control high deer numbers to protect wildlife in the area’s ancient woodlands, and to help establish woods, hedges and crops.

Key activities:

- Recruitment and induction of a **Deer Management co-ordination officer**.
- Establishment of a **High Weald Deer Liaison group** and agreement of a **project plan**.





Deer in the Ashdown Forest area

2

Co-ordinating action and enabling delivery of the AONB Management Plan

Trainee meadow maker Charlotte Gardener



- Data gathering and **analysis of deer accidents** across the AONB
- Setting up and running a **drone survey** to record deer locations, numbers, age and sex on and around Ashdown Forest.
- Supporting **2 x grant applications** to the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme for deer management infrastructure.

We worked with Plantlife on a partnership project, Meadow Makers, funded by the government's Green Recovery Challenge Fund. The project helped passionate people from around the UK undertake practical projects to create, rejuvenate and expand meadow habitats.

Key activities:

- **Working in partnership** with the Arnside and Silverdale AONB, Cumbria Wildlife Trust, Duchy of Cornwall, Herefordshire Meadows, Moor Meadows and Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust.
- Supporting **2 farms to transition from conventional to regenerative farming** methods, including the installation of new infrastructure to enable planned, holistic grazing to improve the health of the soil and encourage greater biodiversity on the farms overall.
- Recruiting and managing a **Meadow Makers trainee** providing an early conservation career opportunity: Charlotte Gardener, one of six trainees across the country, was appointed and hosted by the High Weald AONB team.
- Organising a third year of **waxcap surveys**, working with the Natural England Field Unit and Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre.
- Running an event for **National Meadows Day** at Wakehurst Place, taking photographs and video footage of meadows and producing **2 videos**, Meadow Makers methods and Meadow Makers meditation, and **2 written case studies**.



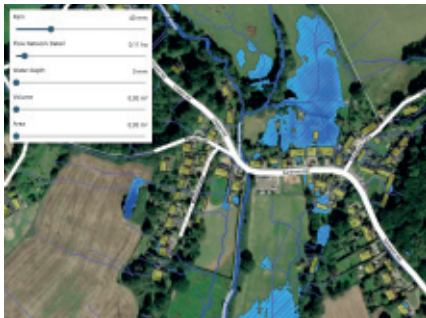


Installing leaky dams as part of natural flood management

2

Co-ordinating action and enabling delivery of the AONB Management Plan

Scalgo flood modelling map



We set up a Natural Flood Management (NFM) project in the Cuckmere catchment (High and Low Weald) to promote and develop projects that use natural processes such as leaky woody dams to reduce the risk of flooding and erosion. The project is funded by the Environment Agency and supported by a partnership of Sussex Wildlife Trust, South East Rivers Trust and South East Water.

Key activities:

- Recruitment and induction of a **Natural Flood Management project officer**.
- **30 site visits** in the target sub-catchments of Powdermill Stream and Upper Cuckmere to talk to residents and communities about their concerns regarding flooding to gain a better understanding land- and water-management issues which contribute to the problem, and to discuss potential solutions with landowners
- Follow-up visits and agreements with landowners in target areas to help the Environment Agency form a business case for implementation of natural flood management measures
- Analysis of the catchment using the **SCALGO flood modelling tool**, flood incident reports from partners and first-hand testimony from local communities
- Production of a **draft NFM scoping report** identifying areas of catchments where NFM measures are likely to be most effective in mitigating the impact of flooding
- Promotion of a **holistic multi-agency approach** to tackling flooding, working with flood-affected local communities through the Crowhurst and Hellingly Flood Forum, parish councils and individual local residents
- **A public lecture** on NFM for Waterweek in Hailsham – 16 participants
- **4 presentations** (including 2 online training sessions in flood modelling using SCALGO and Viridian tools) on NFM to partners and communities – 28 participants
- **6 days practical training** in the construction of leaky woody dams – 10 participants.





Welly Walk

2

Co-ordinating action and enabling delivery of the AONB Management Plan

Creating a landscape collage



Community Outreach Programme

High Weald Heroes (the partnership's school education programme)

During 2020–21 High Weald Heroes delivered 19 events for 10 schools involving 276 pupil and adult learning sessions (66 teachers and parents, 210 pupils). Numbers were lower than normal as there were no school sessions with pupils during COVID-19 restrictions.

In 2021–22 schools gradually opened up to visitors over the year although large groups such as assemblies were still mainly not possible. Despite the restrictions High Weald Heroes worked with 29 schools to hold 90 events involving 2,598 pupil and adult learning sessions (271 teachers and parents, 2327 pupils).

Key activities included:

- A **school grounds project** promoted habitat creation in school grounds for outdoor learning and biodiversity. This included site visits, advice on plans for habitat creation, a presentation delivered to staff in five schools and training in permaculture design.
- **9 seasonally linked video resources**, Nature Nugget films, were written, filmed on location and produced. These were promoted and available on YouTube for young families to watch before their daily walk and are now being used by the AONB team in their work with schools.
- Our **Heritage Schools programme**, in partnership with Historic England, was successful with five schools. Project outputs including a testimonial video of the overall project and a video created for each school of the children's literacy work read over footage of the High Weald. The project was used as a national case study by the Heritage Schools programme.
- Meetings with the **Community Rail Partnership** to develop a project linking rural and urban schools to enable access to the High Weald and encourage confidence in using sustainable transport.





Fruit picking

2

Co-ordinating action and enabling delivery of the AONB Management Plan



Teacher training

- **40 outdoor themed workshops/walks** involving 1,350 pupil and adult learning sessions, including: geography (18), historical welly walks (5), science (4), landscape-inspired poetry and art (2), heritage projects (7).
- **3 new Welly Walk** routes developed with schools and a welly walk leaflet launched.
- **38 indoor workshops** involving 792 pupil and adult learning sessions: history (8), rocks and soils (1), geography (10), John Muir Award (1), heritage project (10).
- **1 Heritage Schools teacher training** session delivered in partnership with Heritage Schools with 9 teachers; **12 general teacher advisory sessions** with 57 teachers; and **2 other training sessions** focused on delivering a Welly Walk
- **4 session plans** written for teachers to deliver.
- A **dark skies** walk with storytelling was delivered for the High Weald Walking Festival.
- **High Weald Heroes awards** were developed to encourage schools to further integrate developing understanding of the local landscape into their curriculum delivery.
- High Weald Heroes **logo and leaflet refreshed**, working with a designer.
- High Weald Heroes promoted to schools through regular Facebook posts and **5 newsletters** to all 88 existing High Weald Heroes schools. One new school was recruited.

We promoted the High Weald's dark skies, offering practical advice and support to local communities.

Key activities:

- **Dark skies presentation** to the AONB Partnership's officer steering group by Dan Oakley, dark skies ranger for South Downs National Park, discussing a lighting action plan and dark sky standards document.





Dark skies presentation to the AONB Partnership's officer steering group

2

Co-ordinating action and enabling delivery of the AONB Management Plan



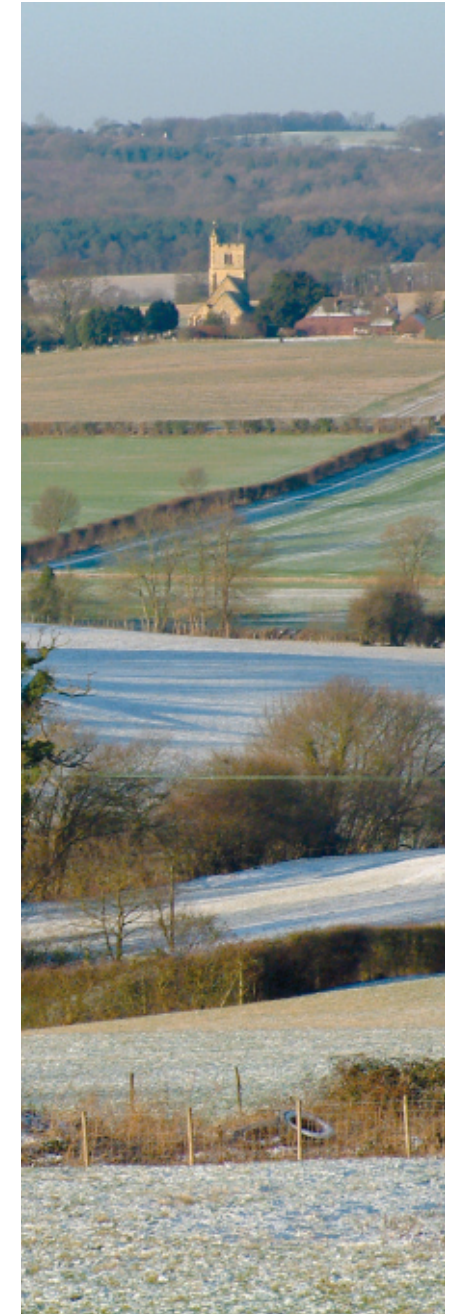
- **Updating of dark skies satellite data for 2015–19** working in partnership with CPRE, South Downs National Park and Kent Downs AONB. A report was produced: Sussex, Kent and Hampshire Dark Skies: A study into the changing patterns of light emission over time.
- Helping **7 parishes host dark skies community events**, training participants in gathering light meter data; light meter readings underway around Burwash, Dallington, Seddlescombe, Northiam, Ashburnham, Robertsbridge and Crowhurst
- **Production and promotion of High Weald Star Story video**, telling the story of Orion the Hunter and educating viewers about importance of the High Weald's dark skies and how to reduce light pollution.

We ran the third High Weald Walking Festival in September 2020. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the festival went 'virtual', with 50 free circular walks available to download from the website (www.highwealdwalks.org).

Due to the popularity of the circular walks, the festival returned with a hybrid format in September 2021, with a mix of guided and self-guided walks and with a new booking system to ensure numbers could be safely managed.

Key activities included:

- **Working with our festival co-hosts**, local branches of the Ramblers (High Weald Walkers, Battle Ramblers, Rother Ramblers and Mid-Sussex Ramblers), to curate the walks and develop the programme, avoiding busy, well-known routes and focusing instead on hidden gems and quiet areas
- **Liaising with a wide range of walking groups and individuals** to gain agreement for walks and for GPS data (as GPX files) to be used free of charge during the Festival
- **Developing a design template**, checking each route, proofing the directions and maps, and ensuring High Weald interpretation information was included. Each walk included the



Feedback

'Love your site, thank you so much for all the info. It's very hard to find circular walks unless you know someone who knows where they are – and now I feel with your website, I do'

2

Co-ordinating action and enabling delivery of the AONB Management Plan



**High Weald
Walking Festival**
11-19 September 2021

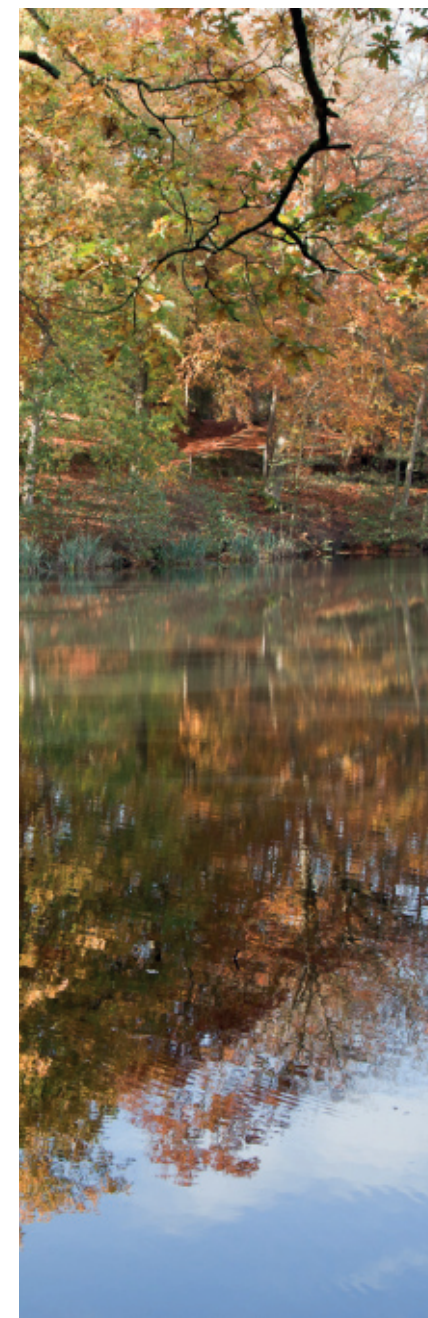
Get off the beaten track this Autumn and explore a beautiful, historic landscape. Guided and self-guided walks available.
www.highwealdwalks.org

latest government guidance on COVID-19 regulations and advice on staying safe and accessing the countryside responsibly

- **Researching and developing 6 Trails by Rails leaflets** to promote greater access to the AONB by outside visitors whilst promoting sustainable travel. The walks were successfully trialled at the High Weald Walking Festival 2020
- Managing and updating the **festival website** www.highwealdwalks.org and developing an interactive map and a platform enabling access to downloadable guides to 50 walks and GPX files
- Developing and **managing a public booking system** via Eventbrite for the 2021 festival's total of 35 walks.
- **Promoting the festival** to subscribers via eNews bulletins before, during and after the events.

Evaluation of the festival:

- A record **12,000 hits** to the festival website during September 2021
- **21,000 self-guided walk/gpx downloads** during September 2021
- Extensive Facebook promotion resulted in a total reach of over **155,000 people for 2020 and 2021 combined.**
- In 2021 we used an online feedback form to capture people's thoughts about the event:
 - **92.5%** of respondents (148/160) stated their experience of the festival was either Excellent or Good.
 - **87%** of respondents stated they felt they knew more about the High Weald AONB after taking part in the festival.
- The dedicated High Weald Walking Festival mailing list more than doubled from **under 1,000** to **2,300** people over the two years.



Feedback

'I really enjoyed getting to see parts of the AONB that I have not visited before. All the leaders were excellent, managed the groups very well and were extremely knowledgeable'

'Nice to be back out with a walking group again after the long covid restrictions'

2

Co-ordinating action and enabling delivery of the AONB Management Plan

'Many thanks for the variety of walks you've included, and their spread over the entire High Weald area. As you say, "something for everyone"'

'I see the festival as the highlight of the year. A great way to spend tax-payers money especially bearing in mind the spirit of volunteers who themselves enable these walks to reflect well on the councils involved. High praise to all volunteers, THANK YOU ALL. Mental health is a priority and events like this go a long way to helping people in this area'

During 2020–22, we increased public awareness of the High Weald's character and took action to conserve, enhance and enhance public enjoyment of the area through:

- We produced **17 eNews** sent to roughly **2,100 contacts** per mail, published **28 website news pages** and produced **11 news articles**.
- Our social media presence, with Facebook 'likes' increased by **120%** (to 2,496 likes) and Twitter followers by **15%** (to 3,103 followers) over the two years. Total Facebook reach for the two years was **more than 166,000 people**.
- Maintenance of **www.highweald.org** with **205,043 hits** in 2020–21 and **166,571 hits** in 2021–22. The increased web traffic in 2020–21 was largely to our guided walk pages, as people searched for outdoor activities during the COVID-19 lockdown. The five most-visited pages were: Walking, Walks on the Ashdown Forest, the High Weald Landscape Trail, Self-guided circular walks, and 3–5 mile walks
- Appointing a local web company to redesign and develop the High Weald AONB website. This work is ongoing and the new site is due to launch later in 2022.

COVID-19 Lockdown

- A **campaign of social media activity** to support High Weald farmers, growers, and producers during lockdown, including regular 'Supplier Spotlight' posts promoting meat boxes, dairy products, fresh fruit and veg boxes and organic wine
- Regular 'species-spotting' **social media posts** highlighting things to look out for when out on a walk in the High Weald landscape.
- **3 articles** on nature-focused mindfulness activities for people staying at home, including stargazing, nature journaling and how to 'put the wild your garden'
- **Communication** of latest government guidance about accessing the countryside safely and responsibly
- **Promotion** of the new High Weald Hero *Nature Nugget* video series for schoolteachers and home-schooling parents.





Partnership meeting

3

Championing the High Weald and protected landscapes

We helped AONB Partnership members and others work together to achieve the vision for the AONB through 28 meetings and related follow-up activities.

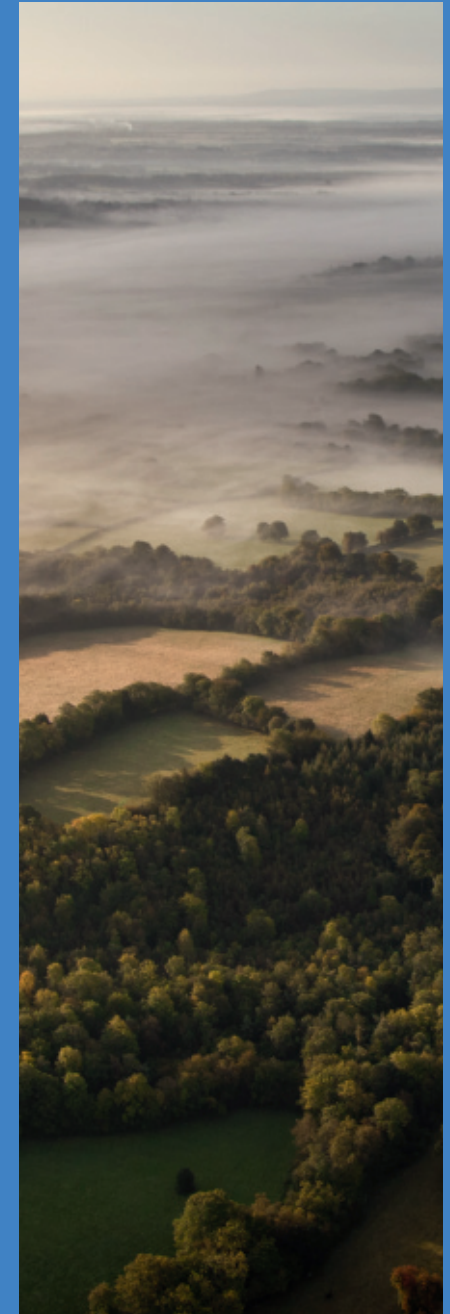
Key activities:

- **4 Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) meetings and 6 Management Board meetings** to:
 - agree the JAC budgets and organisational risks and mitigation;
 - discuss current projects and workstreams.
- **4 officer steering group** meetings.
- Raising awareness of the recommendations of Glover Review of Protected Landscapes with the High Weald's 11 MPs.
- An **AONB training session** for Rother District Council members.

We promoted the value of the High Weald AONB and other protected landscapes nationally and regionally, working with the National Association for AONBs (NAAONB), the South East and East Protected Landscapes (SEEPL) and national and regional task groups.

Key activities:

- Attendance at the **NAAONB** lead officers and **South East and East Protected Landscapes (SEEPL)** lead officer meetings; contributing to a joint representation to the government's consultation on its response to the Glover Review of Protected Landscapes.





We conserved and enhanced the AONB with financial support from others

3

Championing the High Weald and protected landscapes

We furthered public understanding and enjoyment of the AONB with support from others



- Administering and participating in the **South and East Protected Landscapes Planners meeting**, discussing and preparing joint responses to government consultations including on the planning white paper, changes to national planning policy and guidance, biodiversity net gain and the planning recommendations of the Glover Review and the government's response.
- Membership of the **Colchester Declaration Steering Group**, helping deliver capacity-building events (2) to achieve the targets of the Colchester Declaration.
- Representing AONBs at **Landscape Institute** and **Royal Town Planning Institute** events and working groups.
- Participation in the **NAAONB's communications group**, developing 'one' voice for AONBs through use of social media channels.
- Participating in **UKPN's South East and East Undergrounding steering group**.

We secured resources to deliver the AONB Management Plan through eight contracts in 2020–22.

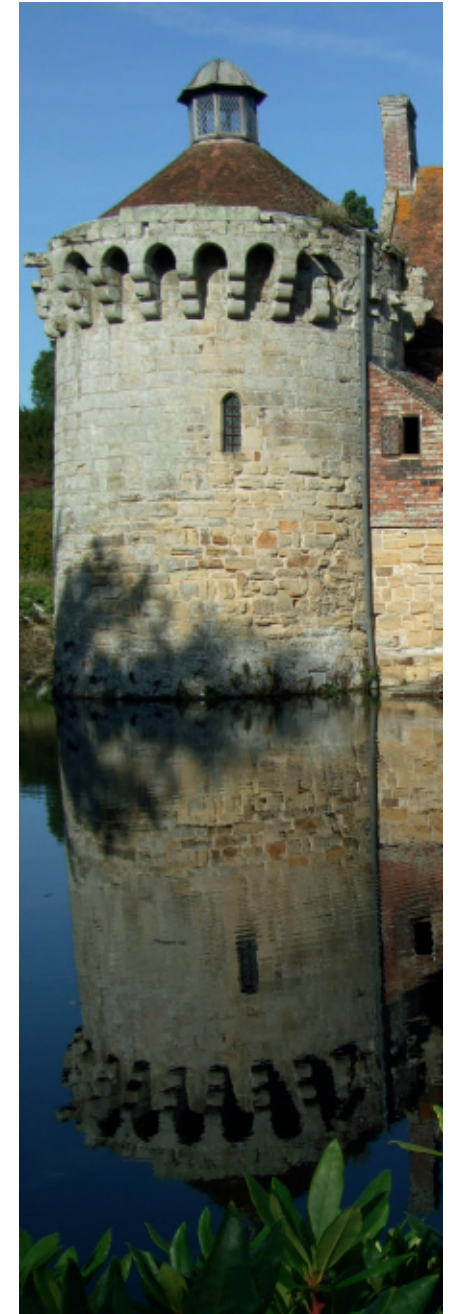
- Contributions from **Defra's Protected Landscape programme** for the partnership's work, totalling £277,463 per annum for 2020–21 and 2021–22.
- Contributions of £439,538 from the **Lund Trust** in 2020 and 2021 for developing, promoting and administering Sussex Lund, the grant scheme of Lisbet Rausing and Peter Baldwin.
- Contributions from JAC **local authority partners** totalling £83,700 per annum for 2020–21 and 2021–22.
- A contribution of £55,000 from **Plantlife** for delivery of the Meadow Makers project
- A contribution of £15,000 p.a. from the **Woodland Trust** for deer management co-ordination.
- Contributions of £32,500 per annum from the **Environment Agency** for the Cuckmere and Coombe Natural Flood Management Project.



3

Championing the High Weald and protected landscapes

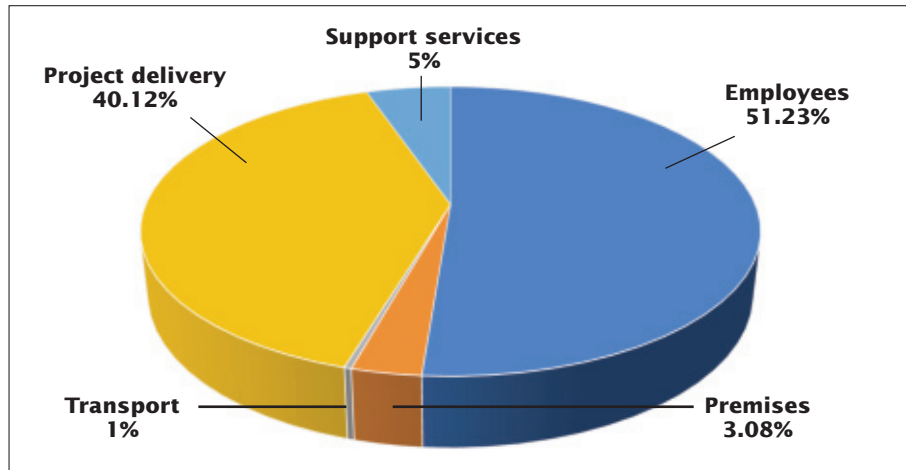
- Approximately £15,000 from the **Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund** for facilitating the Upper Rother and Dudwell Farm Cluster in 2020–21.
- Contributions from **National Grid's Visual Impact Assessment Landscape Enhancement Initiative** for delivery of three large-scale restoration projects.
- Contributions were also received from **local Ramblers groups** for the High Weald Walking Festival.



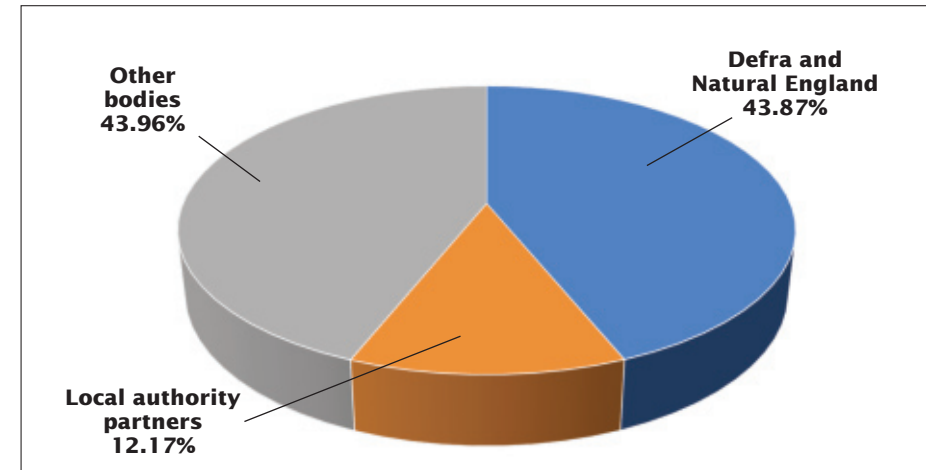
Financial summary

1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021

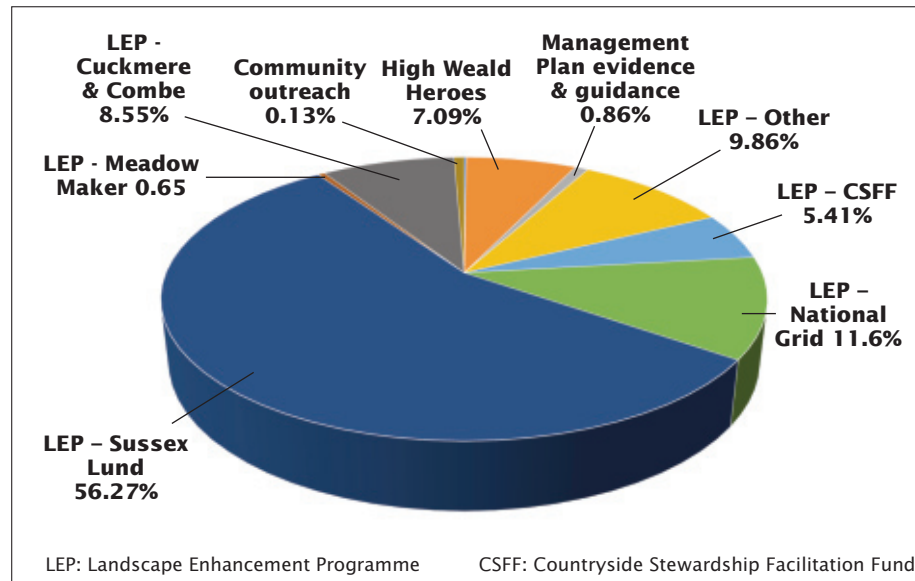
Gross expenditure £657,929



Gross income £687,580



Project expenditure £350,873



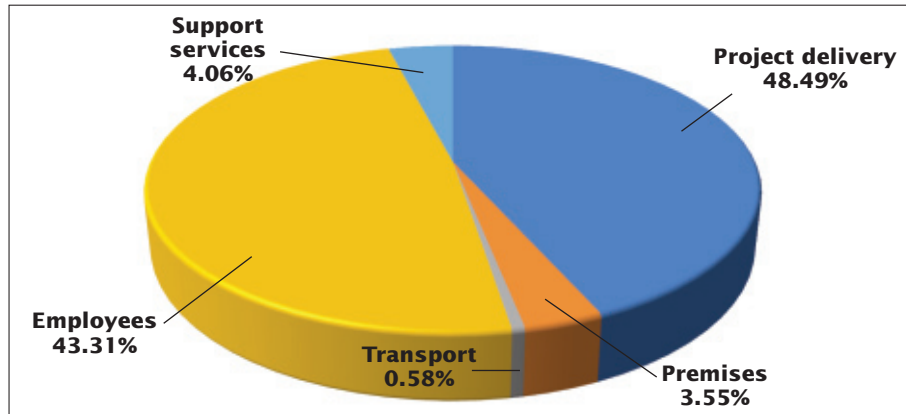
The final position for the year was a reserve of £204,000 in March 2021, which includes the addition of £22,600 in 2020/21.

Gross Expenditure		
Community outreach	0.13%	469
High Weald Heroes	7.09%	24,882
Management Plan evidence & guidance	0.86%	3,000
Landscape Enhancement Programme (LEP) - Other	9.86%	34,610
LEP - Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund	5.41%	18,989
LEP - National Grid	11.60%	40,711
LEP - Sussex Lund	56.27%	197,437
Project development	-0.43%	-1,520
LEP - Cuckmere & Combe	8.55%	30,013
LEP - Meadow Maker	0.65%	2,282
Total		£350,873

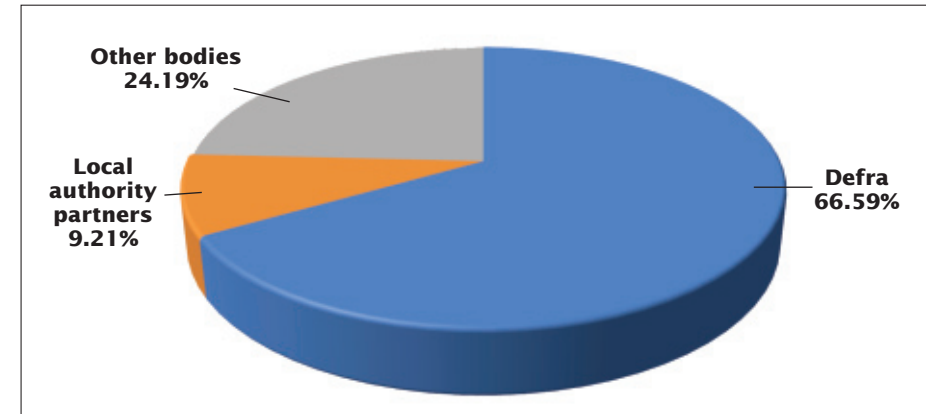
Financial summary

1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022

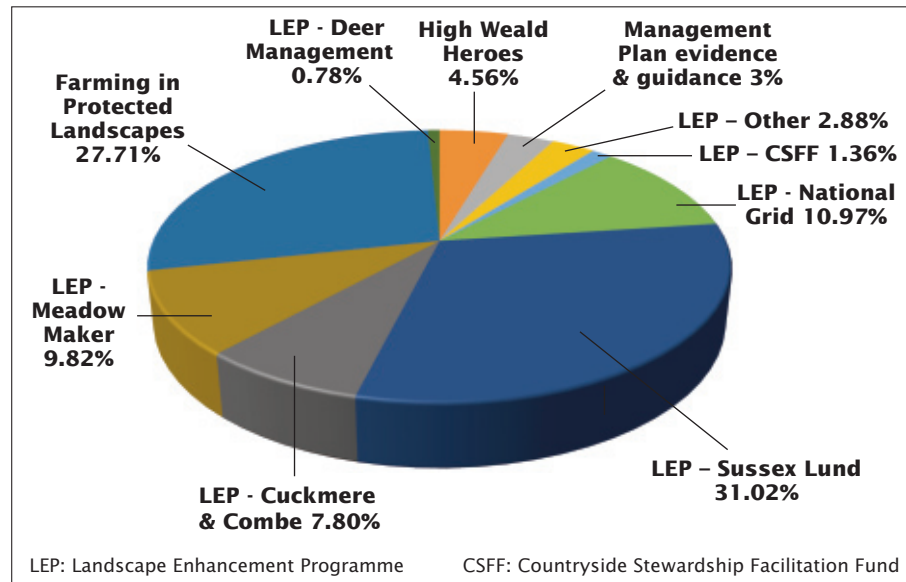
Gross expenditure £896,376



Gross income £908,426



Project expenditure £589,962



Community outreach		
High Weald Heroes	4.56%	26,922
Management Plan evidence & guidance	3.11%	18,325
Landscape Enhancement Programme (LEP) - Other	2.88%	16,974
LEP - Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund	1.36%	8,007
LEP - National Grid	10.97%	64,698
LEP - Sussex Lund	31.02%	183,006
Project development		
LEP - Cuckmere & Combe	7.80%	46,039
LEP - Meadow Maker	9.82%	57,928
Farming in Protected Landscapes	27.71%	163,466
LEP - Deer Management	0.78%	4,597
Total		£589,962

The final position for the year was a reserve of £223,300 in March 2022, which includes the addition of £12,100 in 2021/22.

High Weald Joint Advisory Committee

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

The primary purpose of the JAC is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the AONB.

It also:

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

The High Weald staff team works on behalf of the JAC to achieve these purposes, guided by the High Weald AONB Management Plan and in accordance with a three-year business strategy. An officer's steering group (OSG) supports the Management Board and JAC.

Representatives of the JAC, Management Board, OSG and staff team for 2020-220 were as follows:

Joint Advisory Committee (*also on the Management Board)

Representatives from the following organisations:

Natural England

L. Newland*

East Sussex County Council

Councillor Mrs S. Tidy*

Councillor Mrs E. Kirby-Green (from June 2021)*

V Pullan

West Sussex County Council

Councillor P. Bradbury*

D. Baker

High Weald
Joint Advisory Committee



Kent County Council

Councillor M. Balfour*
Councillor Mrs S. Carey (from June 2021)*
H. Shilver

Surrey County Council

Councillor Mrs L. Steeds
D. Greenwood

Wealden District Council

Councillor P. Dixon*
N. Bumpus

Rother District Council

Councillor J. Vine-Hall*
D. Russell

Hastings Borough Council

Councillor Mrs L. Levane
Councillor M. Evans (from June 2021)
M. Davidson

Mid Sussex District Council

Councillor P. Bradbury*
J. Hollingum

Horsham District Council

Councillor T. Hogben
M. Daly

Crawley Borough Council

Councillor I. Irving
R. Mosinghi

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council

Councillor Mrs J. Soyke
Councillor Dr L. Hall (from June 2021)
D. Scully

Sevenoaks District Council

Councillor M. Dickens
H. French

Ashford Borough Council

Councillor A. Pickering
S. Gilbert

Tonbridge & Malling District Council

Councillor D. Lettington
J. Knowles

Tandridge District Council

Councillor Mrs L. Lockwood
V. Riddle

JAC Co-optees

Woodland

Mr C. Harrison and Mrs J. Hull (from November 2021)

Community/Education

Mrs J. Davison*

Community/Economy

Mrs P. Mayson, Action in Rural Sussex (from October 2020)

Landowners

Mr T. Bamford, Country Land and Business Association

Farming

Mr W. White, National Farmers Union

Mrs S. Tidy from (May 2021)*

Clerk to the JAC

S. Nicholas

Treasurer to the JAC

J. Fisher



The AONB team

High Weald Joint Advisory Committee

High Weald AONB Staff Team

Advising on the management of one of England's Finest Landscapes

The partnership delivered its 2020/22 work programme with a staff team averaging 5 FTEs.

Core

Co-directors – Sally Marsh and Jason Lavender 1 FTE

Business manager – Gerry Sherwin 0.8FTE

Clerk to the JAC and support officer – Samantha Nicholas 0.8FTE

Planning advisor – Claire Tester 0.8FTE

Landscape officer – Sarah Brotherton 0.6FTE (from November 2020)

Communications officer – Emma White 0.6FTE

Projects

Education officer – Rachel Bennington (0.6FTE)

Land management project officer – Ross Wingfield

Land management project officer – Christine Meadows (0.6FTE, 0.2 FTE from November 2021)

Natural flood management project officer – Dean Morrison (from January 2021)

Meadow Makers trainee – Charlotte Gardener (April 2021 to March 2022)

GIS intern – Andrew Goswell 0.2FTE (August 2021 to March 2022)

Deer coordinator – Sandy Williamson 0.4FTE (from January 2022)

Land Management project officer (FiPL) – Tobias Jackson (from March 2022)

Senior administrator (FiPL) – Stephanie Mason 0.6FTE (from March 2022)

Training

Staff built their knowledge and skills in GIS, first-aid, habitat survey methodologies, writing for the web, producing accessible documents, oral history, developing arts projects and holistic land management.





The High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

The essential character of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) was established by the 14th century and the area is therefore 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** A faulted landform of clays and sandstones with outcrops of fissured sandrock and ridges running east-west, deeply incised and intersected with numerous gill streams forming the headwaters of rivers. A high density of extraction pits, quarries and ponds.
- **Settlement** A very high density of dispersed historic settlements of farmsteads and hamlets with late medieval villages founded on trade and non-agricultural rural industries. A dominance of traditional timber-framed buildings with steep roofs often hipped or half-hipped, and an extraordinarily high survival rate of farm buildings dating from the 17th century or earlier.
- **Routeways** Ancient routeways in the form of ridge-top roads and a dense system of radiating droveways, often narrow, deeply sunken and edged with trees, wildflower-rich verges and boundary banks.
- **Woodland** A great extent of interconnected ancient woods, steep-sided gill woodlands, wooded heaths and shaws, generally in small holdings with extensive archaeology and evidence of long-term management.
- **Field and Heath** Small, irregularly shaped, productive fields bounded by hedgerows and small woodlands predominantly of medieval origin and managed historically as a mosaic of small agricultural holdings typically used for livestock grazing. Distinctive zones of heaths and inned 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.

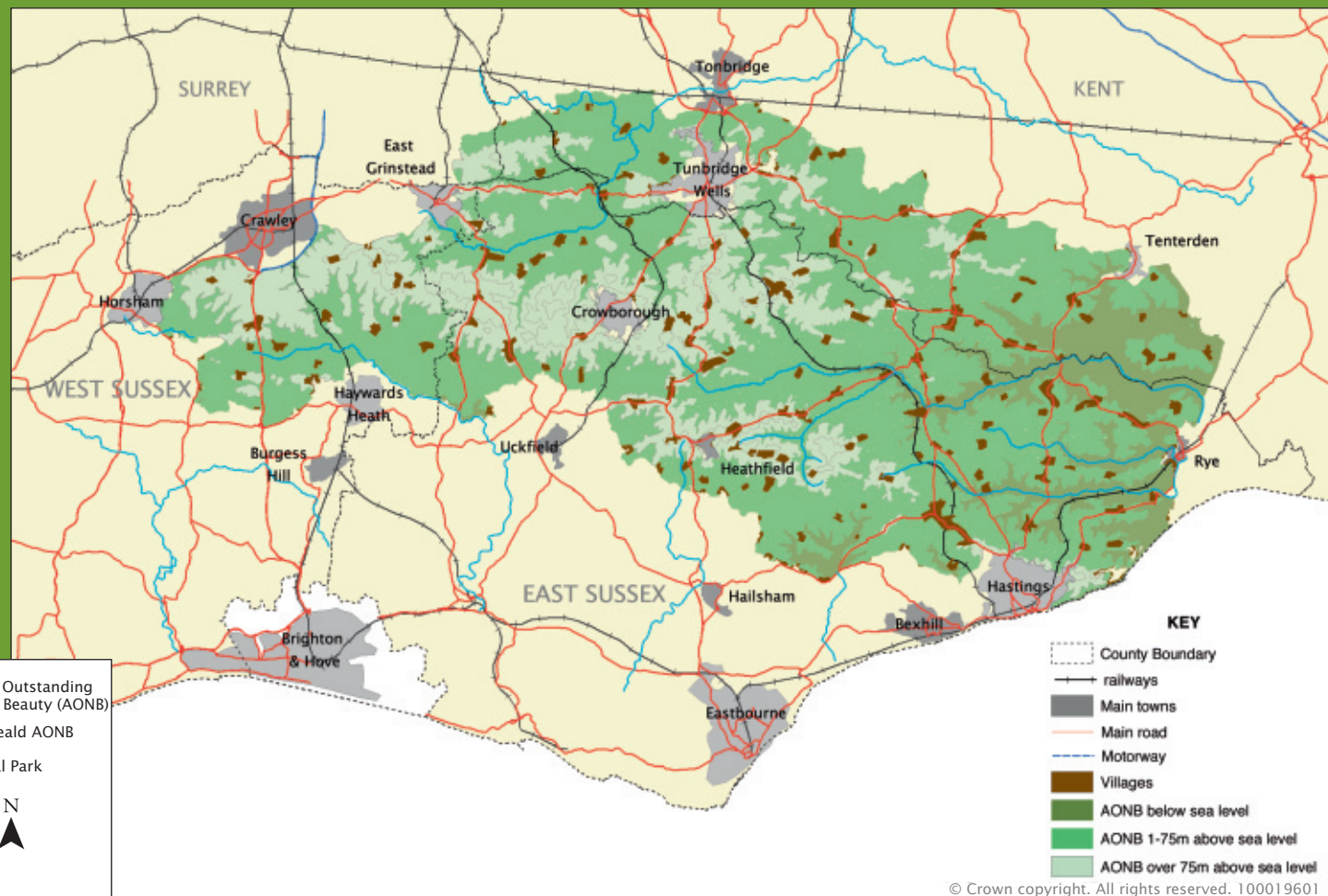
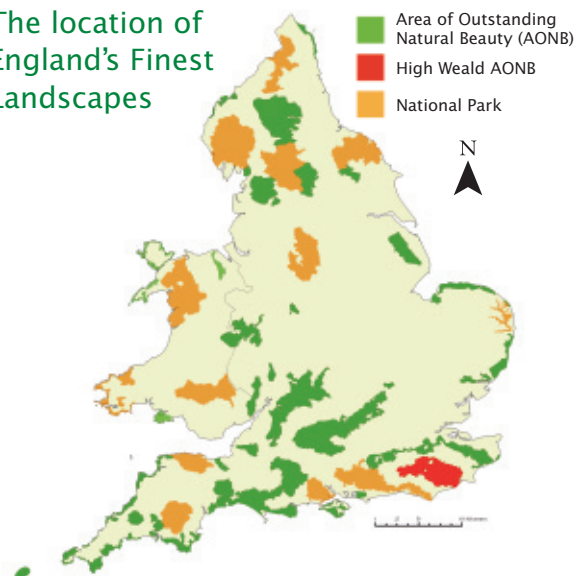


HIGH WEALD JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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

The location of England's Finest Landscapes



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Published by the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee September 2022
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