

The High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)

One of England's Finest Landscapes



The High Weald is a historic countryside of rolling hills draped by small irregular fields, abundant woods and hedges, scattered farmsteads and sunken lanes.

It was designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in 1983.

The High Weald AONB Management Plan 2004: a 20-year strategy

Adopted March 2004, reviewed 2008 and re-adopted March 2009

2nd Edition

Produced by the High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee, under the *Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000*, on behalf of:

Kent County Council
Surrey County Council
East Sussex County Council
West Sussex County Council

Ashford Borough Council
Crawley Borough Council
Hastings Borough Council
Horsham District Council
Mid Sussex District Council

Rother District Council
Sevenoaks District Council
Tandridge District Council
Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council
Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
Wealden District Council



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Foreword

The High Weald is an ancient, subtle and much valued landscape. Its essential character was formed by the fourteenth century, has survived major historical events and sweeping social and technological changes, and remains recognisable today. Now the area faces new pressures, many of which lie outside local influence: climate change and globalisation of agriculture are obvious examples. But taking action to care for the High Weald is something that all of us – public bodies, land managers, the area's 120,000 residents, and its many visitors – can contribute to: indeed, we have a duty to conserve this nationally important landscape for future generations to enjoy.

The High Weald AONB Management Plan is an important document. It rolls forward the first statutory plan produced under the *Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000* for this unique and special area. As required by the Act it sets out local authority policy for the AONB and will be used to assess how public bodies, statutory undertakers and holders of public office fulfil their duty to have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the High Weald.

We need to take a long view, to aspire to policies that go beyond the short term. The High Weald AONB Management Plan identifies and focuses on the fundamental components of natural beauty that have made the High Weald a distinct and homogenous area for at least the last 700 years, and sets out clear 20-year objectives to fulfilling the purpose of designation. We hope that everyone with an interest in the future of the AONB can contribute to achieving these objectives and securing the survival of a vibrant High Weald.

The High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee has prepared this plan on behalf of the 15 local authorities in which the High Weald lies, but it could not have done so without the help of many people. We would like to thank all those who have contributed and urge everyone with an interest in the area to help us turn this plan into action.

The 2008 review of the plan has affirmed the long view of the 20 year vision, and this revised version of the plan retains the overall approach and intent of the 2004 plan. We have of course updated the plan, particularly to reflect new and changing circumstances, not least climate change, but also new government agendas, policy and the creation of Natural England. The plan continues to set out the objectives against which actions that affect this precious landscape should be judged and sets out the management guidelines that are so important in conserving and enhancing the High Weald.



Councillor Sylvia Tidy
Chair 2005 – 2009
High Weald AONB
Joint Advisory Committee



Contents

Foreword	1
Contents	2
Statement of significance	3
1 How to use this plan	4
2 Management Plan Vision	5
3 Consultation	6
4 Introduction	7
5 Responsibility for the AONB	8
6 Role of the AONB Management Plan	10
7 Approach adopted by the AONB Management Plan	12
8 Format of the Plan	14
9 An Outstanding Area	15
Socio-economic facts and figures	15
Open-air recreation and tourism facts and figures	16
Agriculture facts and figures	16
Forestry and woodland industry facts and figures	17
Natural environment and landcover facts and figures	18
Nature conservation facts and figures	18
Built and historic environment facts and figures	19
Maps	20
Part 1: Natural Beauty	
Geology, Landform, Water Systems and Climate	22
Settlement	24
Routeways	26
Woodland	28
Field and Heath	31
Part 2: Public Understanding	
Public Understanding and Enjoyment	34
11 Implementation	38
12 Monitoring and Evaluation of the Management Plan	39
References	40
Select bibliography	40

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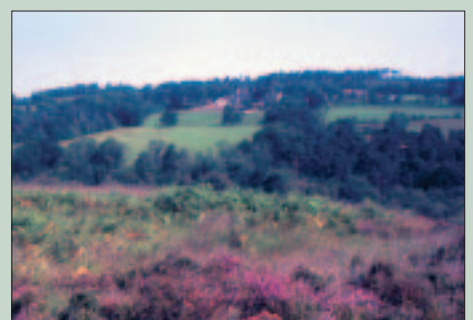
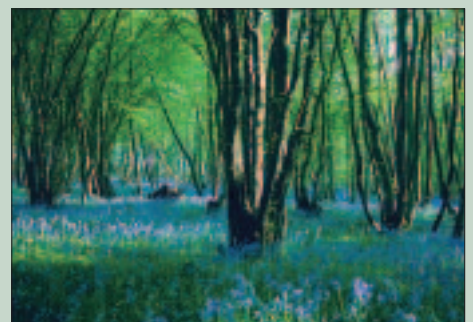
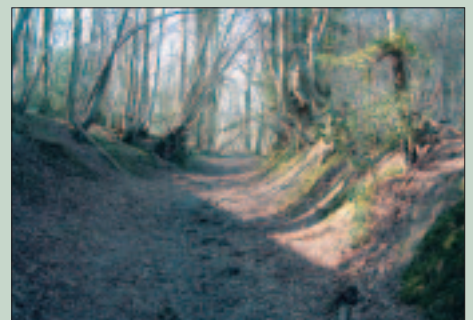
Statement of Significance: Natural Beauty of the High Weald defined

The character of the High Weald

Time depth and objective analysis has defined the High Weald AONB as characterised by dispersed settlement particularly historic farmsteads; ancient tracks and routeways; an abundance of ancient woodland, wooded heaths and shaws with a heritage of woodland industries and iron working and small, irregularly shaped and productive fields. These are all draped over a deeply incised and ridged landform of clays and sandstones with numerous gill streams, and are closely related to socio-economic characteristics that have roots extending deep into history. The essential character of the High Weald 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: This fundamental and largely immutable character is the essence of the natural beauty of the AONB and the AONB Management Plan is structured around the five key components of this character:

- **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 and 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:** the 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; within which can be found 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, a rich and varied biodiversity, and local populations of key threatened species.



1 How to use this plan

The AONB Management Plan is a strategic plan for a large landscape managed by many different individuals and organisations.

Management objectives are provided for each component of natural beauty and for public understanding and enjoyment.

Objectives are defined as qualitative statements that indicate a desired trend.* These are the long term aims and outcomes the Plan is trying to achieve to meet the purpose of designation and the 2024 vision for the AONB.

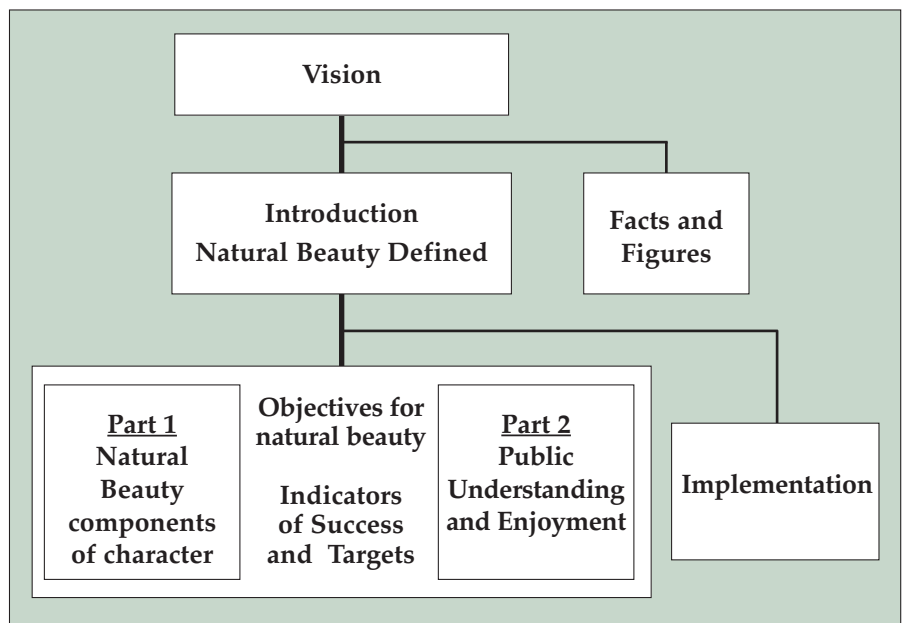
Each management objective has **Indicators of Success**. They describe the direction of travel management should take to achieve the objectives. Movement along this path can be used to judge the performance of the Plan.

The **Targets** are the current set of ambitions for the next 5 years (2009–2014). They are quantitative and qualitative targets and represent milestones on the intended direction of travel, and are specific and discreet actions or events that can be assessed to show success in moving towards the appropriate outcomes.

* Reviewing Targets and Indicators for the Ecosystem Approach. Final Report. Defra Project Code NR0119

1.1 The Plan is divided into a number of sections: the Introduction, a facts and figures section with other supporting information, and an implementation section. The main part of the plan however deals with Natural Beauty; The Components of Natural Beauty, and Public Understanding and Enjoyment. The Natural Beauty section reflects the primary purpose of designation, to conserve and enhance natural beauty, and details the components of natural beauty and objectives for their management, the Public Understanding and Enjoyment section concerns people, and how they interact with and respond to landscape. This section sets out how the demands for recreation can be met and how the actions and behaviours of individuals and communities can help conserve and enhance the AONB.

1.2 The Objectives together with Indicators of Success and 5 year Targets are effectively the plans policies, and provide the strategic direction for AONB management. These are the criteria against which actions and activities that have an effect on the AONB should be judged. Public bodies can use these criteria to assess whether their actions or activities meet the duty placed on them by Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000) to ‘have regard’ to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB.



1.3 You can use this Plan to generate new projects and programmes that will contribute to AONB objectives or to assess the extent to which any proposals affect the area’s natural beauty. To use this plan consult the separate components, checking (or auditing) your proposed actions, activities or plans against the Objectives, Indicators of Success and Targets. Supporting guidance, advice and information is available from the AONB Unit to assist this process.

2 Management Plan Vision

A 20 year vision for 2024

- The High Weald will be valued by those living, working and visiting the area as a nationally important protected landscape. They support the purpose of AONB designation and the High Weald AONB partnership as advocates for the area.
- A significant and increasing proportion of the landscape will be maintained under 'traditional' land management practices, carried out by people connected to the land through work, lifestyle and leisure and who are living predominantly local lives.
- The landscape will demonstrably show the benefits of appropriate management in its ancient woodland cover, extent of meadows and heathland, the condition of its routeways, sandrock and river systems, biodiversity and the integrity of landscape features that combine to create its qualities of Natural Beauty.
- The adoption of river restoration policies, maximising opportunities for natural processes to take place has expanded the functional flood plains along rivers and demonstrated reduction in flooding and increases in biodiversity, water quality, and amenity value.
- An increasing number of households will have been accommodated without compromising the characteristic historic settlement pattern. Strong planning policies and a sound understanding of the dynamics of sustainable communities have influenced development. Environmental building technologies have improved the construction of buildings and the High Weald now supports 'green' designs using local materials.
- In woodland, local markets for wood to support conservation management, coupled with rising demand for wood fuel and an increasingly skilled workforce, have led to improved confidence in growing high-quality timber.
- Land is managed through diverse activities that are supported and nurtured where they deliver public benefits. Remaining full-time farmers specialise in high-quality products valued by local people. Part time farmers with a second income manage much of the land and support a contracting industry skilled in conservation management. There is a thriving population of small-holders and co-operatives who graze livestock or grow specialist crops.
- The links between people, their communities and businesses, and the land has strengthened. The landscape now provides a range of ecosystem goods and services. Many residents grow their own food; are involved in small-scale production; have joined community land management initiatives; are employed in small businesses utilising products from the local landscape; and buy local products. Most residents and visitors enjoy informal and sensitive open-air use of the AONB and benefit from a rich, protected, well-understood and celebrated cultural heritage.

The role of the AONB vision

- The 20-year vision for the AONB describes how the High Weald could look in the future.
- It takes a realistic and practical view that faces up to the likely demographic changes that increase demand for housing, lifestyle and technological changes, increase in traffic, climate change, and the decline of traditional farm businesses.
- It envisages environmental, social, and economic developments in the High Weald that support the primary purpose of designation: the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty.
- Environmental sustainability is at the heart of this vision. This means maintaining the capacity of natural systems; minimising resource consumption; and protecting and improving the quality of the natural and historic environment.

A Review of the AONB Management Plan 2004 together with the stakeholder survey and consultation responses can be found at the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee's website www.highweald.org

3 Consultation

For the review and revision of the 2004 management plan a range of consultations and assessments were undertaken.

- Stakeholder survey, over 60 major stakeholders, land managers, public bodies and 100 parish councils were surveyed for the review stage
- Major users of the plan such as the local authorities, parish councils, and environmental agencies were actively involved in the review through the Joint Advisory Committee, Officer Steering Group and direct consultation
- Public consultation on the draft revised plan included 255 stakeholders, parishes and interested parties and copies of the plan were available in 26 public locations (council offices, libraries)
- All papers and reports and updates have been promoted on the High Weald AONB website
- Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Appropriate Assessment processes have also been undertaken in support of the review
- The processes of consultation and SEA undertaken for the review are intended to meet the criteria under PPS12 (para 6.3) to enable the Plan to be equivalent to supplementary guidance within the planning system
- The Plan has been reviewed and approved through the Joint Advisory Committee and will be formally adopted by local authorities as part of the statutory processes required by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

4 Introduction

Purpose of the designation

4.1 The *National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949* legislated for the designation of AONBs and National Parks. Their purpose was to be similar, to conserve and enhance natural beauty although National Parks were also to be areas that afforded opportunity for open-air recreation and were to be close to centres of population. There have been minor changes to the aims of both types of designation since 1949. The primary purpose of AONB designation and subsidiary purposes, in effect qualifications of the primary purpose are those defined in a Countryside Commission statement 1991, restated in 2001.¹

- The primary purpose of designation is to conserve and enhance natural beauty.
- In pursuing the primary purpose of designation, account should be taken of the needs of agriculture, forestry, other rural industries and of the economic and social needs of local communities. Particular regard should be paid to promoting sustainable forms of social and economic development that in themselves conserve and enhance the environment.
- Recreation is not an objective of designation, but the demand for recreation should be met so far as this is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty and the needs of agriculture, forestry and other uses.
- The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 reaffirms the primary purpose of AONBs to conserve and enhance natural beauty and sets out responsibilities for their management and for the production of AONB Management Plans.

'Natural Beauty' defined

4.2 The primary purpose of AONB designation remains rooted in natural beauty. The term was enshrined in the 1949 act when a Romantic idea of scenic value still prevailed.² Landscape study has advanced since then, most notably through the widening of archaeological and ecological interest from individual sites to landscape-scale systems. Despite its widespread usage in legislation 'Natural Beauty' has never been formally defined. Government guidance relating to AONBs provides a useful non technical definition: "Natural Beauty" is not just the look of the landscape, but includes landform and geology, plants and animals, landscape features and the rich history of human settlement over the centuries³

Designation enacted

4.3 The first of the 41 AONBs of England and Wales was designated in 1956 the most recent in 1995. Together these AONBs amount to 15.6% of the total land area: in the counties of Kent, Surrey, East Sussex and West Sussex, AONBs account for 41.1% of the total land area. The Designation Order for the High Weald AONB is dated 4th December 1980, and the date of the Confirmation Order is 23rd October 1983. It is the fourth largest AONB and the second most administratively complex.



"My family roots are in the Weald, so I know that it represents much more than just a beautiful landscape but is also a place rich in wildlife, with strong cultural identity and enormous opportunities for recreation. Altogether, a perfect place for people to engage with their natural environment"
Andrew Wood, Executive Director, Natural England



"The High Weald AONB is a fine example of a medieval landscape with a wealth of cultural heritage, nationally important habitats and strong links with rural communities and visitors. The AONB management plan is key to ensuring this designated landscape is conserved and enhanced for future generations"
Alan B Law, Director, Natural England South East Region

5 Responsibility for the AONB

Introduction

5.1 Unlike National Parks, AONBs do not have authoritative bodies with their own planning or development control functions and other executive powers. Instead, responsibility for the designated purposes is concentrated in the hands of the local authorities – 15 in the case of the High Weald. A duty of care also lies with government departments and agencies, statutory undertakers, and, on grounds of good citizenship at least, with individuals – especially those who own or manage the land.

The Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000

Section 82 reaffirms the primary purpose of AONBs

Section 84 confirms the powers of local authorities to take appropriate action to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of AONBs

Section 85 places a duty on all public bodies and statutory undertakers to ‘have regard’ to the ‘purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty’

Section 86 establishes a process for creating AONB conservation boards

Section 89 creates a statutory responsibility for local authorities and conservation boards to produce and regularly review AONB management plans

Government, public bodies and agencies

5.2 Governmental responsibility for AONBs takes several forms: designating AONBs; providing a legislative and policy context wherein the purposes can be met; and direct involvement, guidance and funding of AONB initiatives. The government’s responsibility for AONBs is substantial. The Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000 sets out the procedure for future designation (by Natural England) and incorporates significant measures designed to address increased pressures on protected landscapes that had rendered the provisions of the 1949 act inadequate. Government policy encompasses the 1991 Countryside Commission policy statement on AONBs and reaffirms the special treatment for AONBs in other major policy areas: the significance of AONBs in the context of land use planning is considered in PPS7 and the South East Plan; the rural white paper (Defra, 2000)⁴ sets out the key role of AONBs in the wider rural policy context; the England Rural Development Programme (ERDP) describes how the government is implementing the ‘second pillar’ of the Common Agricultural Policy – the Rural Development Regulation – in England, and its SE regional objectives include ‘better managed landscapes in AONBs and National Parks’⁵ (the ERDP is directed by Defra and supported by bodies that include the Government Office for the South East (GOSE), the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA), the Forestry Commission, Natural England, English Heritage, and the Environment Agency); the Regional Economic Strategy for South East England 2002-2012 (SEEDA) recognises the contribution of AONBs to sustainable economic growth; the English Tourism Council strategy for rural tourism stresses the importance of mechanisms for co-ordinating action at a local level, with AONBs given as an example.⁶ The Forestry Commission is committed to ensuring that its work reflects the distinctive nature of each AONB and helps deliver the priorities identified in AONB management plans.

5.3 In addition to its statutory role, Natural England provides the government’s direct involvement in the management of AONBs through interpretation of legislation and national policy; guidance on management of AONB partnerships; commissioning research; representation on AONB Joint Advisory Committees and Conservation Boards; and majority funding of Joint Advisory Committee and their staff units.



“Clear and concise objectives for managing the High Weald help ensure that much-needed economic regeneration in the region forms part of the AONB management plan”
Valerie Carter, SEEDA

Local Planning Authorities

5.4 Since the 1949 act, local planning authorities have been central to achieving the purpose of AONB designation, and their responsibility has been reaffirmed by the CRoW Act, in which they are empowered to ‘take all such action as appears to them expedient for accomplishment of the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty’ of the AONB.

Other relevant authorities

5.5 The CRoW Act requires that relevant authorities, in addition to government and local planning authorities, should ‘have regard’ to the purpose of AONBs: these include statutory undertakers, community and parish councils, and holders of public office.

The High Weald AONB JAC and Unit

5.6 The need for active measures to conserve and enhance AONBs led to the setting up of partnerships of representatives, Joint Advisory Committees (JAC). A JAC was established for the High Weald AONB in 1996, evolving out of the executive of the High Weald Forum. The High Weald AONB JAC is a partnership of all 15 local authorities, Natural England, and organisations representing land management, community, business and recreation interests. The main role of the High Weald JAC and Unit, is to plan and implement AONB management via the AONB management plan.⁷ This includes co-ordinating and demonstrating protection and management of the AONB; promoting the purpose, significance and character of the AONB; advising and guiding stakeholders; seeking funding to assist management activity; undertaking or commissioning research to further understanding; and monitoring the condition of the AONB.

Land managers

5.7 Although they are influenced by government policy and land-use planning, land managers have the greatest influence on the AONB. This influence predates the AONB by millennia, and has long been linked to a conscious sense of responsibility for the countryside, the rural society and the economy. This duty has been undermined during the 20th century by changing economics, shrinkage of the land-based workforce and intensification of agriculture (partly driven by production-linked policy and subsidy), but is still enacted by many land managers, increasingly supported by their advisers and countryside managers.

Local authorities follow government legislation, policy and advice and have developed their responsibility in regard to the High Weald AONB to include:

- land use planning that takes account of the purpose of AONB designation, land use strategies and development control decisions, underpinned by policies in Local Development Frameworks and the South East Plan that directly refer to the AONB and, indirectly, support the designation through protecting key features of the area and the importance of the character of the countryside.
- pursuing the purposes of AONB designation through other policy, work areas, and partnerships. Examples include: community strategies; biodiversity action plans; advice; landscape and building design; grants; land purchase; countryside management services; Rights of Way maintenance; and provision of affordable housing.
- establishing, and part-funding, a partnership and staff unit to help protect the AONB and focus action, in the form of the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) and the High Weald AONB Unit.
- production of an AONB management plan, a statutory requirement since the CRoW Act 2000, which ‘formulates their policy for the management of the area of outstanding natural beauty and their functions in relation to it’.³

What the management plan does:

- defines the natural beauty, or defining character, of the AONB, and identifies the changes, and pressures for change, that have an impact on natural beauty
- presents an integrated vision for the AONB
- presents agreed ‘policy’, in the form of an objective-led approach, to secure this vision
- identifies indicators of success and targets to support objectives
- provides tools, guidance, and supporting information
- identifies the means by which the condition of the natural beauty of the AONB can be monitored

Production of policy and guidance

The Plan does not propose individual policies to address contentious development issues. Instead it sets out a framework within which the impact of development issues can be assessed against the interests of the AONB. As and when such issues threaten the intrinsic natural beauty of the High Weald or the achievement of AONB objectives then the High Weald JAC will seek to produce appropriate guidance rooted in the management plan.

6 Role of the AONB Management Plan

The role of the Plan

6.1 The management plan formulates policy for the management of the AONB and fulfils a legal requirement placed on all local authorities under the CRoW Act. It provides a transparent and accessible means by which all public bodies can ensure that they are exercising their duty to have regard to the purposes of designation; and provides a means of focusing and furthering the contributions of all stakeholders in the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty.

6.2 This focus of the management plan means that it also has a role as an advocate for what is best for the AONB within the strict terms of its designation. While aware of the wider realities – such as pressure for major development – it cannot balance the purposes of designation against non AONB concerns such as national defence, or regional economic regeneration. When these concerns are considered by those charged to do so, the management plan has an important role as the main articulation of what matters in terms of the purpose of the AONB.

Role in relation to other plans

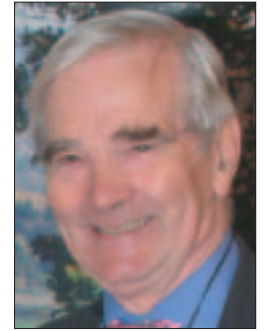
6.3 This focus on the primary purpose of designation needs emphasis for it is the key to understanding the relationship between the AONB management plan and other plans and strategies that influence management of the AONB.

6.4 Local planning authority development plans, and the national and regional policies that shape them, already provide a considerable level of protection for the character of the AONB. The AONB management plan will inform future development plan policy, and assist in the implementation of existing policies, especially those that seek to conserve and enhance hitherto undefined ‘character’. This relationship applies to some other plans (such as community strategies and local transport plans), whereas with others (such as local Environment Agency plans, the England Rural Development Plan and Biodiversity Action Plans) it has an advisory role. Also, it will inform and focus Local Agenda 21 plans, parish appraisals, village design statements and parish plans.

6.5 The Management Plan has a specific role to play in relation to Town and Country Planning (the ‘Planning’ system). As a statutory document, local planning authorities (LPA) must take the plan into account when developing their Local Development Frameworks (LDF). The Plan can help to inform and develop policy in LDF’s, defining character, local distinctiveness and specific advice on landscape related matters, and can be used to assist in determining planning applications. The Management Plan is a ‘material consideration’ in terms of deciding a planning application and has been tested through the appeal system. The plan can thus be very influential in the planning process and also assists LPA’s in fulfilling their duty under section 85 of the CRoW Act to have regard to the designation when deciding planning matters.

The Plan's audience

6.6 The management plan as a document will be read most by the AONB partnership, other policy makers and funding agencies. As a process, however, it has been targeted at a wide audience, with derivative and interpretative publications, and, ultimately, the objectives and actions themselves serving the broadest community.



"The High Weald AONB Management Plan complements but doesn't duplicate development plans: it provides detailed guidance and is a useful tool for us"
Councillor Michael Sydney, Tandridge District Council, High Weald AONB JAC

The Making of the High Weald

defines the major processes that have helped shape this landscape. It suggests that human colonisation and transhumance (the seasonal movement of animals from the Downs into the High Weald) is the key to the early history of most of the High Weald and its legacy dominates the landscape

Time depth analysis

Time depth analysis involves exploring the historic depth of the present day landscape; researching the extent, integrity and coherence of surviving features. The time depth approach is different from some landscape character assessments. It is not concerned with the fleeting moment and it does not try to describe the purely visual qualities of the landscape. Instead it seeks to understand how people have created the landscape in relation to its underlying geology, landform and the prevailing climate focusing on the historical processes that have changed the High Weald from the unpopulated area it was 10,000 years ago to the very human and cultural landscape we see today.

Understanding how the High Weald has been created by people over time has allowed us to draw some important conclusions of direct relevance to the management of the area today. Ensuring the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the High Weald is largely dependant upon safeguarding the traditional interactions between people and their landscape. Understanding these interactions and providing advice and guidance on the best actions to conserve the special landscape of the High Weald lies at the heart of this management plan.

7 Approach adopted by the AONB Management Plan

Character and time depth

7.1 The approach of the Plan is underpinned by an understanding of the history of the landscape and forces that have shaped it. 'The Making of the High Weald' and other studies in support of this management plan have provided **time-depth and objective analysis** so that the 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.

Defining the natural beauty of the High Weald

7.2 The Plan defines Natural Beauty in terms of five key components that form the fabric of the landscape we see today. The character of these components was formed by the interaction of man and nature over time and has survived major historical events and social and technological changes leaving us a landscape which appears essentially medieval in character yet encompasses the survival of many features from many different time periods. The character of the High Weald and the five key components of natural beauty are defined in the Statement of Significance. The loss, damage or deterioration of any of these components would fundamentally alter the character and quality of the natural beauty of the High Weald.

Features of local and national importance

7.3 Interweaving and enriching the combination of the fundamental components of the AONB's natural beauty are a myriad of details that form people's everyday experience of the High Weald. Many of these features have a value that is not intrinsically related to their location in the High Weald, while others – such as some agricultural land uses – appear to be quite transitory when set against the long history of the High Weald, yet have a value that often lies in their lifelong familiarity to individuals. Locally distinctive features include: hop gardens, orchards, oast houses, windmills; tranquillity, dark skies; abbeys, castles, churches; local shops and services; quality of public areas; treescape, veteran trees; ancient monuments; historic parks and gardens often centred on sandstone outcrops; species, e.g. high brown fritillary habitat in woodland; ponds, pits, archaeological features; relics of the iron industry; military features including Battle of Hastings site; the cliffs and coast; traditional weatherboarding. The 1994 landscape assessment for the High Weald identifies many of these details and is supplemented by local authority landscape character assessments, parish and village plans and appraisals, and Historic Landscape Character (HLC) studies. Some features have a value at a regional, national and international scale, for example: scheduled monuments, many listed buildings and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

European Landscape Convention

7.4 The plan adopts both the European Landscape Convention and the World Conservation Union (IUCN) definitions of landscape which endorse the cultural nature of landscape, mans interaction with nature and traditional land management as key issues and parameters for understanding and interpreting Natural Beauty.

Ecosystems services approach

7.5 The Plan also adopts the concept of an Ecosystem Approach which is defined as the integrated management of land, water and living resources that promotes conservation and sustainable use in an equitable way, and which recognises that people with their cultural and varied social needs are an integral part of ecosystems. "Taking an ecosystem approach perspective to natural resource management, therefore, necessitates indicators and targets that provide this cross-sectoral, holistic perspective." (Defra) This approach supports the evidence based, objective led focus of this Plan.

Objective-led management

7.6 The plan articulates a concise, internally consistent, and well-reasoned series of management objectives based on the components of character. These reflect and meet the need for a focused, positive, and comparatively simple objective-led approach both within the AONB partnership and amongst other stakeholders. This approach allows the management plan to be used by all stakeholders as an objective and non-political tool for assessing the AONB perspective on wider matters, such as large-scale development, and for major policy changes. Moreover, it allows partners and the wider community to generate original ideas and approaches in the knowledge that they are meeting the objectives of the AONB. The methods by which objectives can be met are provided by indicators of success and their related measurable targets.

The European Landscape Convention was ratified by the UK government in 2006. Under Article 1 it defines "landscape" as:

'An area as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and human factors.'

This definition reflects the idea that landscapes evolve through time, as a result of being acted upon by natural forces and human beings. It also underlines that a landscape forms a whole, whose natural and cultural components are taken together, not separately.

The World Conservation Union (IUCN) recognises AONBs as Category V protected areas and describes them as:

'An area of land, with coast and seas as appropriate, where the interaction of people and nature over time has produced an area of distinct character with significant aesthetic, ecological and/or cultural value, and often with high biological diversity. Safeguarding the integrity of this traditional interaction is vital to the protection, maintenance and evolution of such an area.'



“Having a management plan and all the supporting material and guidance available on the internet makes it accessible to a wide range of stakeholders spread across and beyond what is an unusually large and populous AONB”
Councillor Brian Kentfield, Rother District Council

8 Format of this plan

Policy structured around purpose and character

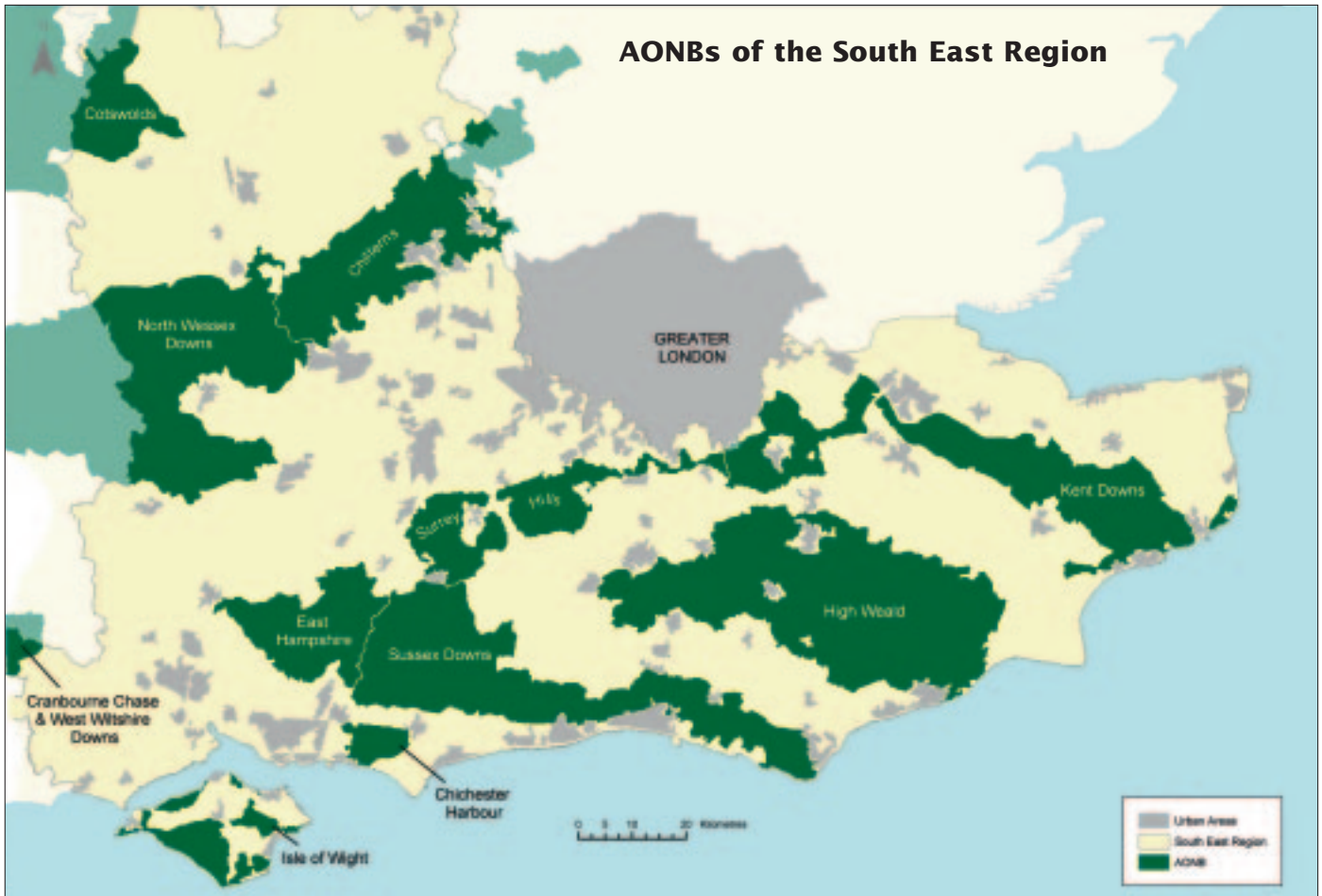
8.1 The purpose of AONB designation provides a guide to the structure of the plan. Thus, the main part of the plan is devoted to conserving and enhancing natural beauty. Within this, there are themes concerned with each of the five defining characteristics of the AONB. These sections cover geology, landform, water systems and climate; settlement; routeways; woodland; and field and heath. This serves several purposes: it reiterates the primary purpose of designation; places the key components of natural beauty at the centre of AONB management; emphasizes the AONB role in understanding, rather than purely describing a visual expression of, character; and removes potential confusion that would be caused by following the format of quite different documents, such as development plans and rural strategies. A second part of the plan focuses on public understanding and enjoyment. This phrase was coined by the CRoW Act and serves as an effective term for, and a reflection of current interpretation of, the recreational purposes of AONB designation.

Supporting material and electronic delivery

8.2 This management plan is founded upon a raft of specially produced supporting studies and consultation, and delivers up-to-date tools, data, guidance notes and priority maps to assist implementation. These are too expansive to incorporate within the plan itself without rendering it unreadable and unusable. To facilitate access to such a wealth of material, the format of the management plan has been designed so that its primary usage will be on-line: this will enable easy access to broad underpinning studies (such as The Making of the High Weald), detailed research supporting individual objectives (such as those relating to river restoration), shorter topic papers, and comprehensive strategies, guidance and tools. A website (www.highweald.org) provides user-friendly access to, and downloads of, these documents and data sets, and to links to on-line statutory plans and strategies. This approach allows the management plan itself, in both in its printed and on-line versions, to be a concise document, accessible to a wide range of stakeholders, and easy to use.

9 An Outstanding Area

This section of the plan provides key facts and figures that profile the social, economic and environmental facets of the AONB.



Regional context

9.1 The High Weald AONB is one of 11 AONBs in the South East, that together account for 33.4% of the region. The population surrounding the AONB is high: 873,000 people live in wards wholly or partly within 5km of the AONB; the UK's second largest airport is within 4km; the Metropolitan Greenbelt extends into the north of the AONB, covering 7.7% of the area; the AONB is crossed by two trunk roads (A23 and A21) linking London and the built-up Sussex coast; and the AONB is adjacent to areas of economic success (e.g. Crawley/Gatwick); priority areas for urban regeneration (especially Hastings), and Ashford one of the governments four growth areas announced through the sustainable communities plan in 2003 and Maidstone is one of 29 growth points announced in October 2006. This context highlights the pressures (including those of development) on the AONB as well as its benefits to the surrounding urban areas (such as providing open-air recreation, potable water supply, local produce, and an environment that is attractive to businesses and their workers).

Administrative areas and the High Weald: breakdown of the 1461 sq km of the AONB by county, district and borough

Local authority	% of AONB in local authority	% of local authority in AONB
East Sussex	60.19	50.99
Hastings	0.37	17.63
Rother	29.29	82.60
Wealden	30.53	53.36
West Sussex	13.68	9.87
Crawley	0.03	1.05
Horsham	2.46	6.77
Mid Sussex	11.19	48.96
Kent	25.41	10.21
Ashford	5.69	14.34
Sevenoaks	4.05	16.00
Tonbridge & Malling	0.07	0.39
Tunbridge Wells	15.61	68.88
Surrey	0.70	0.61
Tandridge	0.70	4.11



“The High Weald is beautiful because the landscape is evidence of work. That work has always been concordant with the nature of the place and that combination should be the target of any plan”

Adam Nicolson, resident and journalist

Key pressures on agriculture:

- Poor quality soils
- low farm gate prices
- a global and strongly competitive market
- increasing regulation
- lack of infrastructure, e.g. abattoirs
- increasing oil prices, with knock-on effects on fuel, pesticides and fertilisers
- threats from disease, often linked to climate change
- ageing farming population
- unusual proportion of buildings to land (due to small holding size), increasing value to non-agricultural use
- high land and property values driving farm sales out of agriculture
- uncertainty arising from CAP reform

Socio-economic profile

9.2 The society and economy of the High Weald is one of contrasts. The AONB combines high affluence and a large commuting population, with low productivity, few jobs, and real deprivation.

■ Key socio-economic facts and figures:

- Total population of 124,880 – one of the largest for an AONB
- Population density in the High Weald is 0.85 people per hectare
- There is widespread broadband coverage across the AONB
- There are 103 villages and two towns in the High Weald, of which Battle has the largest population; over 6,000

Tourism is an important industry in the area. Regional analysis suggests that a significant proportion of the AONB has a level of tourism activity that is above average. This is defined as greater than 10% employed in accommodation; visitor numbers greater than 0.5 million; above average density of attractions; and an above average density of accommodation establishments. Whilst being a major contributor to the AONB, small-medium tourism enterprises are also facing specific challenges in the current economic climate.

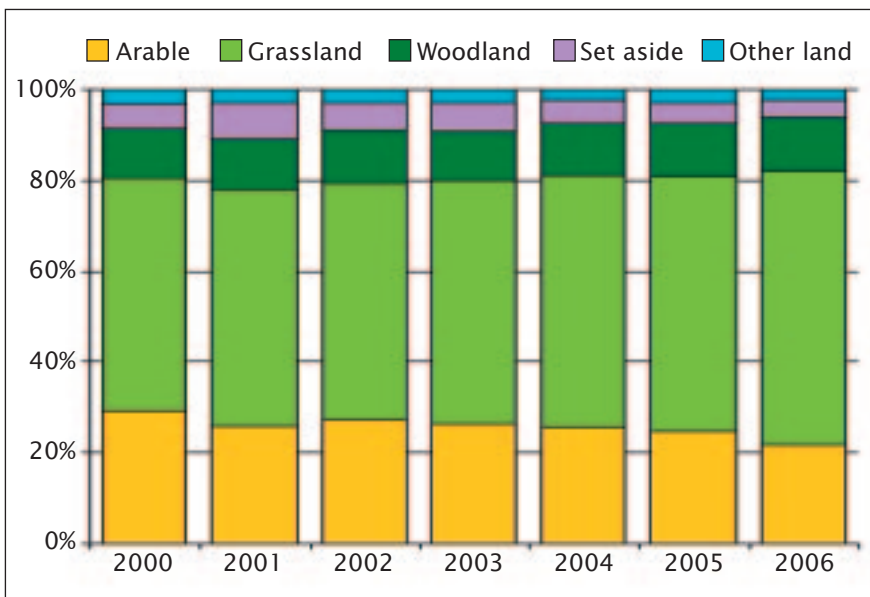
■ Key open-air recreation and tourism facts and figures:

- 2063km footpaths
- 332km bridleways
- 56 major visitor attractions
- 3 tourist information centres
- 61 countryside sites
- 462 accommodation providers

Agriculture remains the main industry directly related to management of the natural beauty of the AONB, despite the rapidly decreasing extent of farmland and changing farm gate prices, income and profitability.

■ Key agriculture facts and figures:

- There were 3003 farm holdings in the AONB in 2006
- In 2006 there was an agricultural labour force of 4863
- 41.5% of the farm workforce comprises part-time farmers in 2006
- The total farmed area in the High Weald has increased to 64.79% in 2006, an increase of 3.69% since 2000, it is now just below 1990 levels
- Mean farm size declined from 45 to 40 to 35.7ha between 1990, 2000 and 2006
- 43% of farms were classified as ‘other’ in 2006, another increase
- 29,099ha of farm holdings are under agri-environment scheme (winter 2007) an increase of 11,352ha since 2004



Graph showing proportion of land use in agricultural holdings (source – June Agricultural Census)



“The woodlands of the High Weald are a good source of sustainably managed hardwoods: we use them for much of our work”

David Green, High Weald Furniture

Forestry, like agriculture, is a rural industry directly related to the management of a significant proportion of the High Weald’s natural beauty. In this case, the decline has already happened, for the industry collapsed in the 20th century. The woods remain, however, and with them the need and potential for a revitalised industry.

■ Key forestry and woodland industry facts and figures:

- 24.6% of the High Weald AONB is woodland
- 8.61% of woodland today is in active coppice
- In addition to active coppice 49.7% of the woodland is broadleaved
- 13.4% of the woodland comprises coniferous plantation, and this is associated with large woodland blocks that offered better commercial scale of operation when planting took off in the early 1900s
- 8.9% of woodland is owned by the Forestry Commission
- 8.3% of woodland is designated as SSSI
- 11,484ha (29.3%) of woodland is on agricultural holdings
- There are six wood chip boiler heating systems in operation in the High Weald AONB
- The boilers range from 40kW to 1MW with a total heating capacity of approx 1.6MW. Estimated annual fuel requirement for the existing boilers is approximately 1600 tonnes. The 1MW system is at the Crowborough Beacon School, this has been operational since February 2007. At the time of commissioning this was the largest wood chip boiler in any school in the UK
- More boilers are planned, and three were commissioned in schools and National Trust properties in summer 2008

Key pressures on forestry and woodland industry:

- global market favouring cheap imports of timber and woodland products
- fragmentation of woodlands into small parcels, through sales to private leisure market
- lack of markets for low-grade broadleaved timber, particularly coppice, which has led to a consequent decline in rotational woodland management
- new woodland owners lacking understanding of woodland management and industry
- increasing regulation
- ageing woodland workforce and consequent loss of skills
- poor soils limiting quality of hardwood timber
- small woodland size limiting economies of scale
- low incomes for woodland workers and many small businesses lacking capital to invest
- climate change
- squirrel and deer

Key pressures on ecology:

- agricultural intensification
- demand for increased food/biomass production
- deterioration, fragmentation and loss of habitats
- lack of traditional grazing of heathlands and grasslands
- suburbanisation of the High Weald; loss of native hedgerows to walls or fencing, non-native hedges and garden expansion leading to piecemeal loss of key habitats
- Species pressure e.g. deer grazing woodland, spread of non-native invasive species of flora and fauna
- Climate change; ability of habitats and species to adapt to change
- Diffuse pollution affecting water systems e.g. gills
- Threat to and extent of existing wetland resource (reedbeds, fens, flood plain meadows) and their connectivity

Environmental profile

9.3 The environment of the High Weald is what makes the area outstanding. It comprises physiographic and geological features, water systems, climate, flora, fauna, land cover, buildings, transport infrastructure, boundaries, and archaeological monuments.

■ Key natural environment and landcover facts and figures

- the AONB is dominated by 3 lithologies: 37% of the area is clay, 24% sandstone and 37% silty sandstone
- there are 50km of sandrock exposures, comprising natural formations and exposures in road cuttings and disused quarries
- outside the gypsum mine at Mountfield, mineral extraction is limited to 5 small-scale brickworks
- 17.6% of the High Weald is ancient woodland, of which, 68.8% is Ancient Semi Natural Woodland (ASNW)
- 1.5% of the High Weald is in horticulture (mainly orchards, soft fruits and hops) concentrated in the north east
- The High Weald has 1930.5ha of Heathland, 65.5% of which is on Ashdown Forest
- 38.8% of the High Weald is agricultural grassland
- 14.2% of the High Weald is arable
- The High Weald has 655 hectares of species-rich unimproved lowland meadows and dry acidic grassland
- the AONB has a coastline of 9.7km, 6.2km of which has cliffs
- the AONB is covered by 8 major water catchment areas, Rother, Ouse, Medway, Arun and Adur, Cuckmere, Romney Marsh and Pevensey levels.
- the High Weald has more than 10,000 ponds concentrated on the clay, with some on the silty sandstone
- there are 5 reservoirs in the AONB, the largest being Bewl Water

■ Key nature conservation facts and figures

- There are 50 SSSIs – an area of 5110ha (3.49% of the AONB)
- There are 202 Local Wildlife Sites covering an area of 10,663ha (7.29% of the AONB)
- Ashdown Forest (3207ha) and Hastings Cliffs (184ha) are Special Areas of Conservation, protected under the European Habitats Directive
- Ashdown Forest is a Special Protection Area (SPA) and is protected under the European Birds Directive
- National and local BAP priority species in the AONB e.g. dormouse, soprano pipistrelle, barn owl (Sussex LBAP), nightjar, great-crested newt, stag beetle, pearl-bordered fritillary and water vole
- lack of funding for meaningful management of woodland, especially for conservation purposes
- Priority Habitats (HAPs) relevant to the AONB:
 - Ancient and/or species-rich hedgerows
 - Lowland beech and yew woodland
 - Lowland dry acid grassland
 - Lowland heath

continued

Key nature conservation facts and figures continued

Lowland meadow
 Lowland wood-pasture and parkland
 Mixed broadleaved woodland and plantations
 Old orchards
 Standing open water
 Wet woodland

■ Key built and historic environment facts and figures

- 103 villages and two towns covering 4,826ha (3.3% of the AONB)
- 45,888 houses, 38% of which are in the countryside outside villages
- 4875 Grade II listed buildings, 247 Grade II* and 81 Grade I listed buildings
- 7.7% of the AONB is adopted Green Belt,
- there are 57 medieval parish churches
- the ruins of 5 major religious houses survive, including Battle Abbey
- 61 historic parks and gardens in the High Weald
- timber, tile, brick, Kentish ragstone, sandstone are the main traditional local building materials of the AONB
- 111 scheduled monuments, 6 iron-age hill forts, 22 iron-working sites, 21 moated sites, and 4 castles
- 8 Grade I, II, II* listed buildings and scheduled monuments in the High Weald are on the English Heritage Buildings at Risk Register 2008
- There are 2250km of roads in the AONB

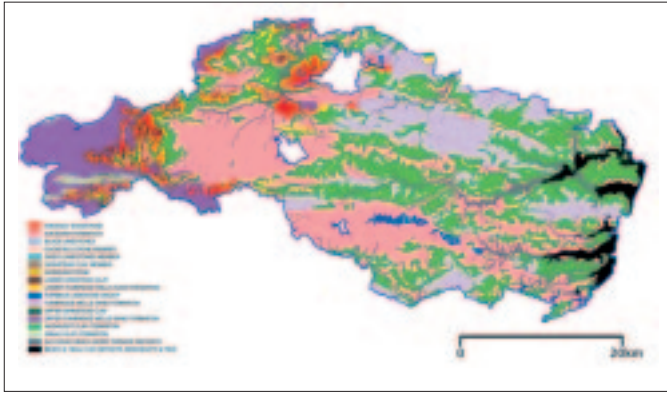
Key pressures on the historic environment:

- increased house building through demographic change and allocation
- increasing use of private cars, resulting in more traffic on rural lanes and in villages, less local employment, and less use of local shops and other services
- sub-urbanisation of property, including creation of large residential curtilages
- damage to historic buildings, historic routeways, boundaries, and archaeological monuments through lack of awareness, plough damage, poor maintenance or management and insensitive re-use

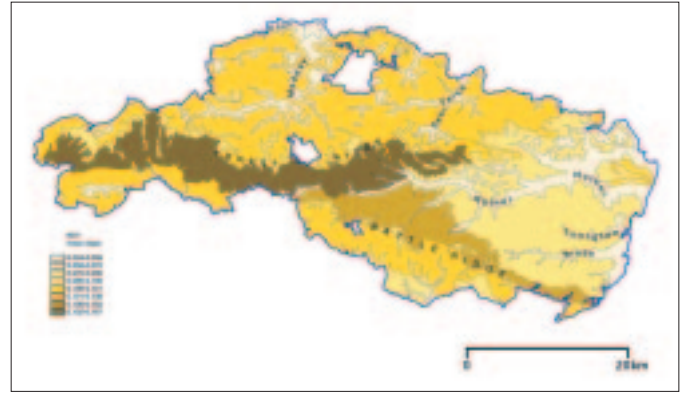


“The High Weald is a mosaic landscape – a complex mixture of different and mostly small-scale habitats – and this is where much of its wildlife value lies” Dr Tony Whitbread, Sussex Wildlife Trust

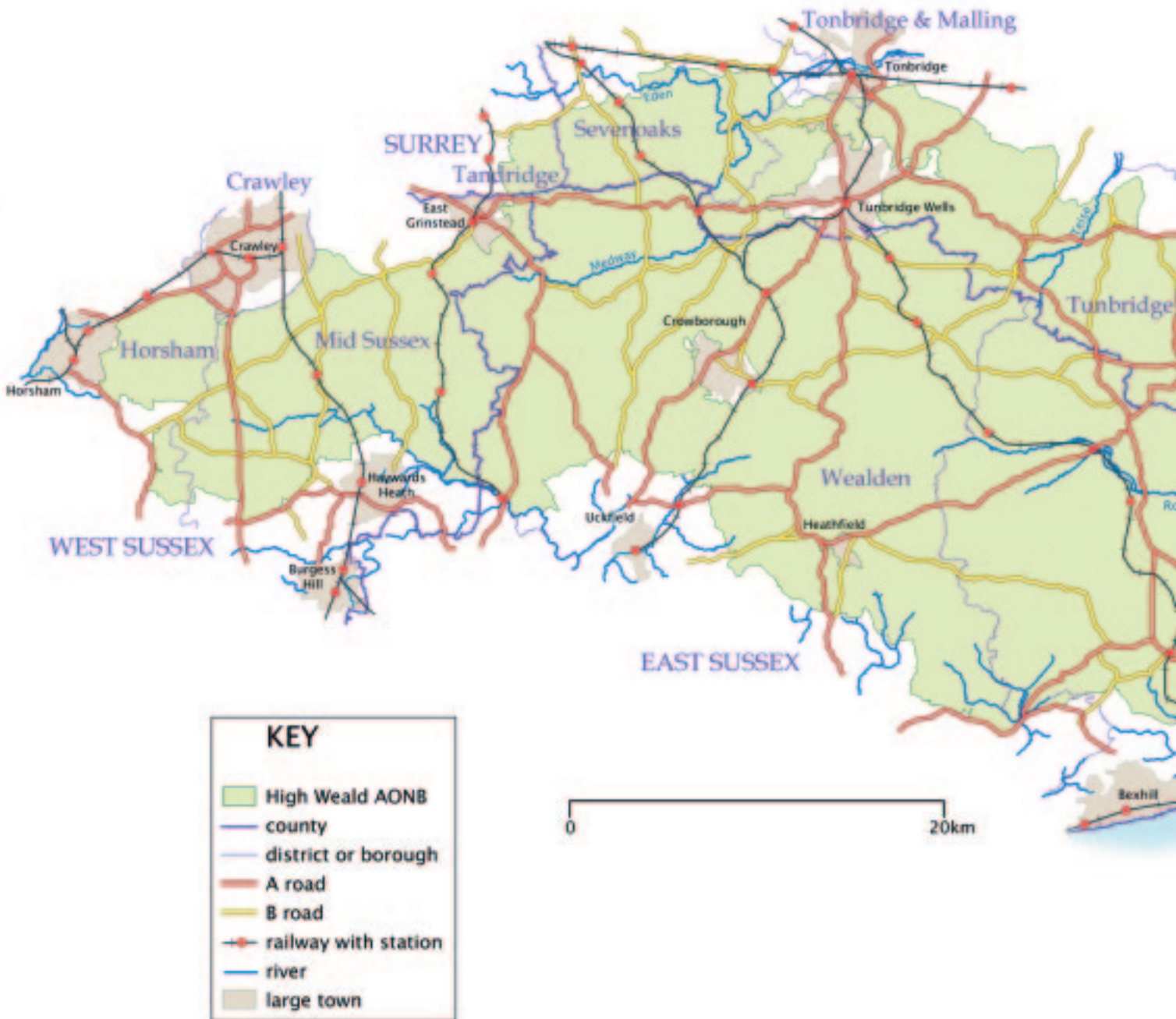
AN OUTSTANDING AREA

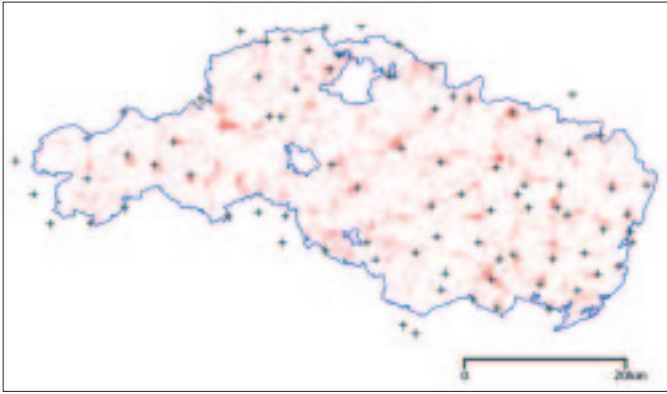


The geology of the High Weald AONB. Based on 1:50,000 digital data, by permission of the British Geological Survey

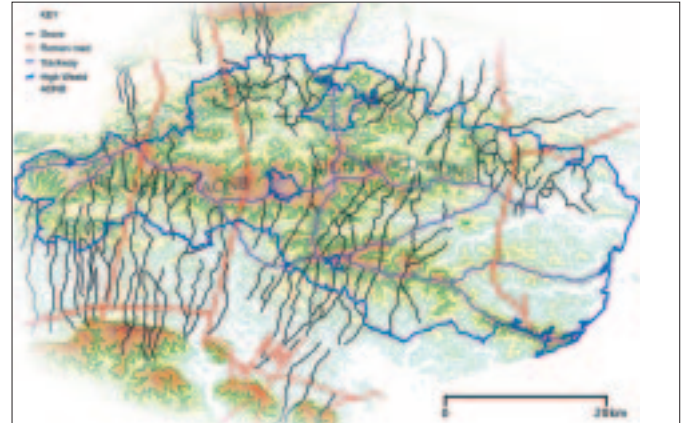


The landform of the High Weald, showing slopes and the names of the main river valleys and ridges:
The Making of the High Weald





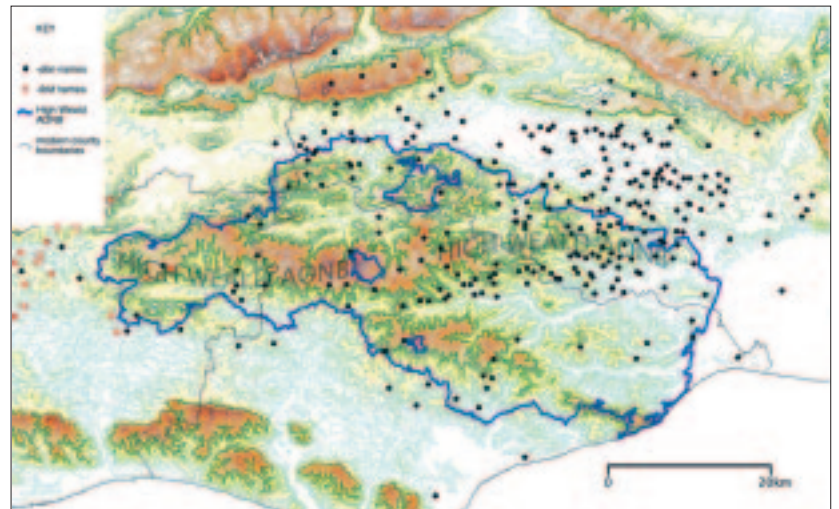
Settlement pattern in the High Weald – modern households and medieval parish churches: *The Making of the High Weald*



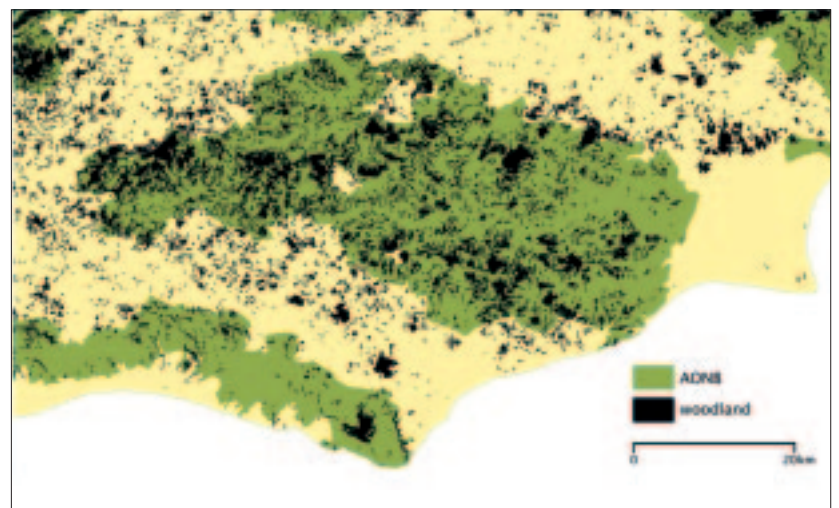
The pattern of ancient routeways in and around the High Weald: *The Making of the High Weald*



Woodland in and around the High Weald: National Inventory of Woodland and Trees (Forestry Commission)



Origins of High Weald settlement – place-name evidence for Anglo-Saxon *dens* and *folds*: *The Making of the High Weald*





Geology, landform, water systems and climate: character defined

The High Weald AONB is characterized by a 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.



"I look forward to the Environment Agency and the High Weald AONB working to pursue our shared goals for community, biodiversity, flood risk and enjoyment of this area's natural beauty. Together we can help to conserve and enhance this important cultural landscape for the future"
Harvey Bradshaw, Southern Regional Director, Environment Agency

Geology, landform, water systems and climate

Vision for geology, landform, water systems and climate

A landscape in which sustainable land management takes care of the natural resources of geology, soil, landform, and water systems, whilst delivering a wide range of social, economic and environmental benefits. The approach to land management will take account of, indeed will be partly stimulated by, climate change and rising sea levels.

Since the entire AONB is an important water catchment, much of the vision can be realised through the adoption of river restoration policies that seek to maximise opportunities for natural processes to reduce flooding; improve water quality; reduce soil erosion; increase biodiversity and amenity value; and encourage environmentally responsible land management and agriculture.

Top 5 issues for for geology, landform, water systems and climate

- Understanding and responding to action to mitigate and adapt to climate change and its impact upon key landscape features and biodiversity
- Poor aquatic systems – failing to meet their potential as a water resource or for water quality, biodiversity and amenity
- Climate change and rising sea levels – increasing the propensity to flood and highlighting unsustainable aspects of land and water management
- Poor understanding of the benefits of adopting river restoration policies – that can utilise natural processes to reduce flooding, improve the aquatic systems, increase amenity value, provide ecosystem services, and reduce costs of maintaining the current systems
- Threats to sandstone outcrops – inappropriate use, management, and neglect of key geological features and the ecology that they support

Objectives for geology, landform, water systems and climate

G1 Objective: To restore the natural function of river catchments

Rationale: to protect the built-environment and human life by safe water conveyance within river catchments, whilst increasing the range of ecosystem goods and services (e.g. improving the aquatic ecosystems and water resource provision and mitigating the effects of increasingly frequent and high peak flows) provided by the river catchments of the AONB.

Indicators of success

- i)** reduction in the rate at which flood waters pass down the middle and upper reaches of the AONB's catchments, and reduction of excessive sedimentation due to water run off and flood flows
- ii)** shift in the balance between the quantity of floodwater conveyed directly to the outfalls and the quantity diverted into temporary storage on the floodplains

Targets for 2014

- a)** integrated water and land management strategies for river catchments within the AONB complementary with the Water Framework Directive
- b)** provision of advice on the management of the AONB to ensure that River Basin Management Plans fulfil the Environment Agency's statutory duty
- c)** land use measures fully attuned to the requirements of river restoration, contributing to an ecosystem services approach
- d)** one or more river restoration schemes delivered
- e)** advice and support provided to land managers regarding sustainable water management

G2 Objective: To protect the sandstone outcrops of the AONB

Rationale: to maintain the nationally important geological exposures; to conserve the fern, moss and liverwort communities they support; and to protect their value as some of the most significant sites of prehistoric archaeology in the AONB

Indicators of success

- i)** no loss of sandstone outcrops
- ii)** favourable condition achieved at important outcrops including Hastings Cliffs SAC

Targets for 2014

- a)** no change in extent from 2004 baseline
- b)** important outcrops identified and management plans produced that accommodate sensitive use for climbing where appropriate and reflect the sensitivity of sandrock communities to changing microclimate

G3 Objective: Climatic conditions and rates of change which support continued conservation and enhancement of the High Weald's valued landscape and habitats

Rationale: To reduce locally arising greenhouse gas emissions and allow the High Weald to play its role in mitigating climate change, whilst ensuring the landscape is best prepared for the impacts of climate change including enhancing habitat interconnectivity and developing adaptable land management systems

Indicators of success

- i)** a low carbon economy in the High Weald
- ii)** Appropriate land management practices in place that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and store carbon
- iii)** robust land management systems in place that are flexible and responsive to the changing conditions associated with a warming and less predictable climate

Targets for 2014

- a)** widespread use of renewable energy appropriate to the local landscape
- b)** new developments meeting carbon neutral standards
- c)** wherever practical local needs (e.g. food, materials, energy) being locally produced
- e)** guidance on transition to a low carbon economy
- f)** study to understand impacts of climate change on key AONB features
- g)** guidance provided on the potential impact of mitigation and adaptation measures on the AONB landscape
- h)** enhanced existing ecological networks in the High Weald



**Settlement:
character defined**

The High Weald AONB is characterized by dispersed historic settlements of farmsteads and hamlets, and late medieval villages founded on trade and non-agricultural rural industries.

Settlement

Vision for settlement

A landscape in which the distinctive and historic pattern of settlement of the High Weald is protected in a way that positively contributes to the natural environment and improves the connections between settlements and the countryside. Appropriately worded land use planning policies within relevant development plans ensure that settlements retain their distinctiveness and individual historic buildings, conservation areas and buried archaeological remains are conserved and enhanced as appropriate

This vision can be realised through new resources, and the application of planning policies and guidance that seek to control development on the basis of an understanding of rural sustainability; promote the traditional pattern of High Weald villages; maximise environmental design and construction quality including, where appropriate, by the use of traditional and local construction materials; minimise resource consumption and promote alternative forms of energy; support appropriate businesses (especially those based on and supporting productive use of land, and community objectives); and the enhancement of the historic environment.

Top 5 issues for settlement

- Need for greater understanding – e.g. of the dispersed settlement pattern of the High Weald, and the connections between settlements and the countryside
- Loss of rural function – becoming dormitories for commuting or places of retirement
- Suburbanisation – erosion of AONB character through extension of curtilages, inappropriate modifications, or treatments, of boundaries and buildings
- Inappropriate new development – e.g. large-sized residences failing to meet needs of local community
- Inappropriate design and building materials – architecture not respecting AONB character, quality and objectives



“Dispersed settlement of farmsteads and hamlets is such a highly distinctive and key feature of the High Weald, that we need to work together to consider how we can protect and enhance this characteristic in the context of broader rural sustainability”

*Jeremy Lake, Inspector,
Characterisation Team, English Heritage*

Objectives for settlement

S1 Objective: To reconnect settlements, residents and their supporting economic activity with the surrounding countryside

Rationale: to understand and enhance the synergy of the local economy, society and environment, and the symbiosis with the surrounding countryside, that defines sustainable rural settlement. To provide opportunities for economic activity that supports other land management objectives of the management plan and AONB designation.

Indicators of success

- i)** better understanding of the role of dispersed settlement in sustainable management of the AONB
- ii)** increase in the range of skills and economic activity related to local landscape products
- iii)** a reversal of the decline in farmsteads engaged in land based economic activity

Targets for 2014

- a)** partnership project to develop guidance for sustainable rural communities in areas of dispersed settlement
- b)** development of guidelines and active support for domestic scale renewable energy applications
- c)** 15% growth in local food producers and outlets
- d)** dedicated provision for affordable housing for key workers and, especially, land-based workers
- e)** 15% growth in local goods and services derived from the landscape
- f)** development of guidance directed at achieving mixed use settlements with capacity to respond to future demands for local food production and the processing of local landscape products for materials and energy use

S2 Objective: To protect the historic pattern of settlement

Rationale: to protect the distinctive character of towns, villages, hamlets and farmsteads and to maintain the hinterlands and other relationships (including separation) between such settlements that contribute to local identity.

Indicator of success

- i)** better understanding of the capacity for change within historic farmsteads and small settlements
- ii)** development schemes respecting and reinforcing the historic settlement pattern

Targets for 2014

- a)** a study to identify and characterise small rural settlement
- b)** policy reflecting the distinctive settlement character of the AONB
- c)** an awareness of historic settlement patterns influencing development decisions by Council or on appeal
- d)** English Heritage guidance on re-use and redevelopment of historic farmsteads in the Weald adopted

S3 Objective: To enhance the architectural quality of the High Weald

Rationale: to protect and enhance the architectural identity of the High Weald, and to re-establish the use of local materials as a means of protecting the environment and adding to this distinctiveness.

Indicators of success

- i)** improvement in condition and setting of historic environment
- ii)** better design of new buildings and alterations, and wider use of locally-sourced materials

Targets for 2014

- a)** recognition and inclusion of historic rural buildings in the HER and heritage designations.
- b)** guidance produced on historic built form and development respecting historic character
- c)** Identify locally distinctive features in partnership with communities
- d)** High Weald specific design guidance produced that enhances the public realm, promotes high specification design, local materials, local distinctiveness, best environmental practice and sustainable construction techniques
- e)** craft skills to maintain historic features and buildings



Routeways: character defined

The High Weald AONB is characterized by 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.

Routeways

Vision for routeways

A landscape in which the character of the distinctive lanes and Rights of Way is protected and a balance achieved between the comparative quietness and rurality of the roads of the High Weald and their function as communications central to the economic and social well being of the area. The management will take account of, and indeed is partly stimulated by increasing road traffic, safety concerns, increased leisure activities (riding, cycling, walking and off-road driving), under use of many Rights of Way, and expanding development.

The vision can be realised through refinement of existing policies and designations that seek to protect archaeology and ecology, and that restrict ribbon development, and through refinement of policies and guidelines that seek to respect the character of lanes and Rights of Way by encouraging use of sympathetic surfacing materials and boundary types; reducing unnecessary use of highway furniture; and by promoting selected walking, cycling and riding routes.

Top 5 issues for routeways

- Traffic – car and lorry numbers increasing on the network of narrow lanes, with implications for safety, non-vehicular use, and tranquillity
- Threat – from RoW diversion and uncontrolled loss and damage to unidentified features
- Suburbanisation – introduction of non-native species, inappropriate boundaries and gates, and intrusive highway engineering
- Poor understanding – of the resource and the management needed to conserve the roads and non-vehicular routeways, for their ecology, archaeology, and their potential for informal recreation and non-vehicular transport
- Lack of protection – the vast majority of ancient routeways in the High Weald have no protection, leaving them exposed to mis-management



“It is so easy to take the ancient lanes of the High Weald for granted: those of us involved in highway maintenance and planning must try to rise to the challenge of ensuring that we keep their character”

Dale Foden, Head of Highway Operations, East Sussex County Council

Objectives for routeways

R1 Objective: To maintain the historic pattern and features of routeways

Rationale: to maintain routeway boundaries that form a part of the habitat mosaic of the High Weald; to maintain this key component of what is a rare UK survival of an essentially medieval landscape; to maintain a routeway network that has a symbiotic relationship with settlement location, hinterlands, and identity; and to protect the individual archaeological features of the historic routeways.

Indicators of success

- i)** increased protection for and awareness of the best preserved examples of networks of historic routeways
- ii)** historic street furniture retained
- iii)** the undeveloped nature of rural lanes maintained
- iv)** increase in non-motorised use of rural lanes and tracks

Targets for 2014

- a)** the best examples identified through research project and protected through national heritage designations
- b)** partnership working with Highways Authorities to develop a design code for rural lanes
- c)** historic routeways included in Rights of Way Improvement plans so that they become part of the overall access planning for the AONB
- d)** turnpike-related features (e.g. milestones) and timber finger posts identified, retained and maintained
- e)** Study to identify the potential role of historic routeways in sustainable transport and communication planning including opportunities for 'shared space' initiatives and promotion of cycling as a mode of transport
- f)** new guidelines adopted by LAs throughout AONB to promote use of characteristic boundaries and the reduction of the impact of intrusive highway engineering and signage
- g)** archaeological research to understand the historic features of routeways and their conservation

R2 Objective: To enhance the ecological function of routeways

Rationale: to improve the condition and connectivity of habitats along routeways for wildlife.

Indicators of success

- i)** favourable ecological condition achieved along routeways
- ii)** better protection secured for routeways of ecological value

Targets for 2014

- a)** key types of ecological feature of routeways identified and guidelines for good management produced and promoted
- b)** subsidy and support mechanisms targeted at ecology of routeways
- c)** routeways of ecological importance identified and protected through designations such as SNCI and designated verge



Woodland: character defined

The High Weald AONB is characterized by the great extent of ancient woods, gills, and shaws in small holdings, the value of which is inextricably linked to long-term management.



“The High Weald has far more woodland than any other AONB and, more importantly, over half of this is classed as Ancient Woodland – areas especially important for landscape and wildlife. Working with partners, the Forestry Commission is seeking to support woodland owners with the most effective combination of grants and advice within the framework of this management plan”
Alan Betts, Regional Director, Forestry Commission, South East England Conservancy

Woodland

Vision for woodland

A landscape in which the nationally important assemblage of ancient woodland in the High Weald is managed to maximise its full wildlife, landscape and historical value. Within this, connectivity between woodland and other habitats is enhanced, archaeology protected, sensitive use for leisure and recreation encouraged, and traditional woodland management active in producing high-quality timber and valued underwood to supply the local markets.

This vision can be realised through strategic focusing of management on key woodland areas (built on better understanding); through new initiatives and policies that seek to support the development of a thriving woodland industry; stimulating new markets for bulk use of coppice; supporting better marketing of local timber and coppice products; increasing understanding and enjoyment of the High Weald’s woodland; and providing expert advice to land managers.

Top 5 issues for woodland

- Neglect – e.g. lack of management and poor stock, deer and pest control e.g. grey squirrel
- Extent of non-native species. For example, 36% of woods in the AONB are plantations on ancient woodland (PAWS). Other non-native species include invasive rhododendron, cherry laurel and sycamore.
- Fragmentation – the poor connectivity, increasing isolation, fragmented ownership, and small size of many woodlands is degrading their ecological value and potential productivity
- Collapsed timber market – its drastic decline over the last 50 years has led to a lack of woodland management, decline in local woodland industries, and the loss of skilled woodland workers
- Poor understanding – of ecology and historic environment in the High Weald woodlands, and the nature and extent of the management required to bring them into favourable condition on a landscape scale under a changing climate.

Objectives for woodland

W1 Objective: To maintain existing extent of woodland and particularly ancient woodland

Rationale: to maintain irreplaceable habitats for biodiversity, to maintain a key component of the cultural landscape, and to maintain contribution to carbon storage

Indicator of success

- i)** no further loss of ancient woodland

Targets for 2014

- a)** no loss of ancient woodland from 2004 baseline
- b)** planning applications complying with PPS9

W2 Objective: To enhance the ecological functioning of woodland at a landscape scale

Rationale: to increase the viability of the woodland habitat for wildlife, by identifying and extending the area of appropriately managed woodland to link and enhance isolated habitats and species populations, providing greater connectivity between woodlands and other important wildlife areas, and helping to facilitate species' response to climate change.

Indicators of success

- i)** favourable condition for wildlife achieved in important woodland areas, focusing on appropriate management for key habitats and species
- ii)** increase in connectivity
- iii)** appropriate restoration of Plantations on Ancient Woodland
- iv)** increase in woodland sites under active management

Targets for 2014

- a)** The extent of key woodland types and UK BAP priority woodland habitats identified and mapped
- b)** appropriate advice and support mechanisms in place for key woodland habitats and species
- c)** decline in key species reversed through landscape-scale species analysis, leading to focussed management in critical areas
- d)** relevant Habitat Action Plan commitments fulfilled by partner organisations
- e)** landscape-scale management strategies for damaging and/or invasive species agreed
- f)** supporting ecological information for Ancient Woodland Inventory sites registered with Local Record Centres
- g)** identify key mechanisms for, and potential of, actions to increase habitat connectivity at a landscape scale
- h)** best practice forestry guidelines regarding implementation of EU habitat regulations (e.g. bats, dormice, newts)
- i)** 90% of PAWS sites being gradually restored and in grant schemes and/or with site management plans
- j)** Promotion and advice in support of Forestry Commission grants and management plans targeted in High Weald woodland.
- k)** Application of research to understand the role of trees and woodlands in a changing climate and impact of climate change on them (including the protection of soil and water resources; carbon storage; habitat connectivity and green infrastructure) to land management policies and practices

W3 Objective: To protect the archaeology and historic assets of AONB woodlands

Rationale: to protect the historic environment of the AONB woodlands.

Indicators of success

- i)** increased identification, recording, management, promotion and understanding of woodland archaeology
- ii)** improved management and understanding of the historic environment
- iii)** increase in appropriate level surveys within woodlands
- iv)** increased number of HER records for woodland

Targets for 2014

- a)** system and processes established to identify and record archaeological sites (historic assets) found within woodlands
- b)** recording and inclusion of woodland archaeology (historic assets) in Historic Environment Record
- c)** development of a research framework for understanding the contribution of woodland archaeology to inform future best practice for its management
- d)** to develop processes to ensure that archaeological surveys are undertaken prior to projects and works in wooded sites.
- e)** To undertake an assessment of potential registration of additional historic assets arising to meet the requirements of emerging heritage legislation.

W4 Objective: To increase the output of sustainably produced high-quality timber and underwood for local markets

Rationale: to achieve the most effective management that will deliver the other objectives for woodland, to contribute to sustainable domestic timber production, to support a working countryside, to contribute to UK and international targets for renewable energy, and to reduce the dependency of the UK on non-sustainably managed woodlands.

Indicator of success

- i)** a growing woodland industry supporting sustainable woodland management within the AONB
- ii)** increase in number of skilled woodland workers

Targets for 2014

- a)** new products and markets developed for locally-sourced timber and underwood
- b)** woodfuel and wood use marketing to connect local woodland owners with local demand
- c)** Coordination of woodfuel projects to maximise benefits and opportunities for sustainable woodland management
- d)** landscape-scale strategies for pests and diseases such as grey squirrels agreed and implemented
- e)** appropriate training and apprenticeship schemes for woodland workers
- f)** vocational training in schools and colleges to support careers in woodland management and timber processing and utilisation



Field and Heath

Vision for Field and Heath

A landscape in which the distinctive and historic pattern of fields is managed to maximise its full landscape, historic and wildlife value, and in which the special qualities of grassland and heathland habitats are enhanced and maintained by skilled land managers. Agricultural land is productive, whilst also contributing to sustainable land management and providing responsible access and enjoyment by the public.

This vision can be realised through new initiatives and policies that seek to maintain and expand traditional land-management skills, stimulate markets for local products, support a local infrastructure for productive farming, and provide expert advice to land managers.

Top 5 issues for field and heath

- Declining extent of agriculture – land falling out of productive use into amenity and residential use, with consequent suburbanisation and neglect changes in farming payment schemes
- Collapse of profitability of farming due to fall in farm gate prices (driven by the global market) and uncompetitive nature of High Weald agriculture (small holdings with poor soils) – resulting in lack of straightforward farm businesses, exits from agriculture, lack of successors to existing farms, increased reliance on non-land based diversification and incomes
- Lack of infrastructure supporting agriculture and land management – e.g. absence of abattoirs supporting a predominantly grazed landscape
- Declining skills – an ageing and shrinking workforce with the traditional skills necessary to maintain the features of the open land of the AONB
- Environmental degradation – neglected fields and heaths scrubbing up, increasing run-off and agrochemical inputs, loss of key habitats (e.g. meadows and heaths), and damage to historic features (e.g. field boundaries and field pattern, and archaeological sites and monuments)

Field and heath: character defined

The High Weald AONB is characterized by 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; within which can be found distinctive zones of heaths and inned river valleys.



“Farming has always struggled in the High Weald – and now is as bad a time as any – but well-managed and productive land remains the key to the future of the AONB”

Bob Tidy, farmer and East Sussex County Council councillor

Objectives for field and heath

FH1 Objective: To secure agriculturally productive use for the fields of the High Weald, especially for local markets, as part of sustainable land management

Rationale: to contribute to sustainable domestic food and non-food agricultural production, to support a working countryside, and to reduce the dependency of the UK on non-sustainably managed agricultural land and the need for long-distance transport that produces air pollutants causing harm to health and the environment

Indicators of success

- i)** increase in local food produce and sustainably produced non food products that add value to the farm-gate enterprise.
- ii)** increase in environmentally responsible and biodiversity rich farming practices facilitating profitable farming enterprise
- iii)** increase in grazing animals (cattle and sheep) contributing to land management

Targets for 2014

- a)** expansion of schemes that support sustainable farm-gate enterprise and profitability
- b)** increase in cooperative enterprises such as farm machinery rings
- c)** support and promotion of ecologically responsible farming and food production (e.g. local meat)
- d)** active financial support of, and partnership working with, farmers markets, and other local food outlets
- e)** Research to understand the role and needs of small producers, smallholders and part time farmers
- f)** schemes to increase the value of grazing livestock (e.g. marketing and branding to add value)

FH2 Objective: To maintain the pattern of small irregularly shaped fields bounded by hedgerows and woodlands

Rationale: to maintain fields and field boundaries that form a part of the habitat mosaic of the High Weald; and to maintain this key component of what is a rare UK survival of an essentially medieval landscape.

Indicator of success

- i)** increase in area covered by Environmental Stewardship for field boundaries, old meadows and pastures,
- ii)** maintain extent of and prevent further loss or degradation of existing historic field boundaries
- iii)** increased protection for small fields (under 2ha)

Targets for 2014

- a)** ensure relevant features of field and heath are included within Environmental Stewardship targeting
- b)** mechanisms and supporting advice to achieve appropriate long term land management (e.g. grazing animals)
- c)** no loss or degradation of existing historic field boundaries and field patterns
- d)** development approved or refused by Council or on appeal based on status of historic field patterns
- e)** Surviving field systems and features identified by Historic Landscape Characterisation and other research informing Environmental Stewardship targeting and development control decisions

FH3 Objective: To enhance the ecological function of field and heath as part of the complex mosaic of High Weald habitats

Rationale: to improve the condition and connectivity of fields and heaths and their associated and interrelated habitats (such as hedges, woodlands, ditches, ponds and water systems) for wildlife

Indicators of success

- i)** maintain extent and prevent further loss or degradation of unimproved grassland and heathland
- ii)** increase in all unimproved grassland and heathland sites in favourable condition
- iii)** traditional land management skills and practices retained
- iv)** locally designated sites (e.g. SNCI, LWS, SINC) appropriately managed and expanded/enhanced

Targets for 2014

- a)** 100% retention of unimproved and semi-improved grassland sites
- b)** long term management of key heathland sites secured
- c)** enhance, buffer and connect existing grassland sites using Weald Native Origin Seed where appropriate
- d)** restoration of species rich grassland and heathland sites supporting national and local Biodiversity Action Plans
- e)** conservation grazing schemes promoted
- f)** ecological habitat networks to assist vulnerable species adapt to climate change including connectivity beyond the AONB
- g)** advice and support promoting environmentally responsible farming practices
- h)** wider markets for meadow hay
- i)** vocational training and long term support targeted at traditional land management skills
- j)** expert advice on specialist habitats and features of the AONB made available to all land managers
- k)** HAP targets achieved, including SSSI and SNCI/LWS/SINC commitments
- l)** locally designated sites surveyed and support for appropriate management provided

FH4 Objective: To protect the archaeology and historic assets of field and heath

Rationale: to protect the historic environment of the AONB other than the pattern of fields: i.e. the individual archaeological features

Indicators of success

- i)** increased identification, recording, management, promotion and understanding of archaeology in field and heath
- ii)** improved management and understanding of the historic environment
- iii)** increase in appropriate level surveys within field and heath
- iv)** increased number of HER records for field and heath
- v)** increase in Higher Level Stewardship agreements promoting historic environment

Targets for 2014

- a)** system and processes established to identify and record archaeological sites (historic assets) found within field and heath
- b)** recording and inclusion of field and heath archaeology (historic assets) in Historic Environment Record
- c)** a single management plan produced for the Ashdown Forest
- d)** To undertake an assessment of potential registration of additional historic assets arising to meet the requirements of emerging heritage legislation.
- e)** archaeological features identified through Historic Landscape Characterisation (Sussex) and Historic Landscape Survey
- f)** economic incentives to support sensitive fencing of historic boundaries



Public understanding and enjoyment today

The High Weald population recognizes and values many of the components of natural beauty, especially the small woods, fields and the vernacular buildings. They identify the impact of traffic, development and the loss of traditional management skills as the major threats to the area. Most use the AONB for open-air recreation, predominantly for walking along its footpaths and rural lanes, and in woodland. Traffic, rubbish and lack of non-car transport are significant in marring enjoyment of the AONB.



“Managing this landscape is complex and knowing how we can all do our bit is important”
Keith Datchler, resident and land manager

Public understanding and enjoyment

Vision for public understanding and enjoyment

An AONB in which public understanding and the pursuit of enjoyment are increased in a manner that leads to more sustainable lifestyles and actions that protect and enhance the natural beauty of the High Weald.

This vision can be realised through promotion of leisure activities and education that increases understanding and enjoyment of the character of the High Weald and that reconnects people with the land; stimulation of cultural activities that celebrate the character of the area and its icons – major historic events, artistic or literary creations, and famous people; support for conveniently and regularly available local products; curtilage design guidance for residences; initiatives that channel visitors towards locations with the capacity and infrastructure to support ‘green’ tourism activities; and support of non-car transport that reduces traffic increases on lanes and maintains the comparative tranquillity and remoteness of the area.

Top 5 issues for public understanding and enjoyment

- Limited, fragmented and inconsistent information on, and interpretation of, the AONB
- Low awareness amongst residents and visitors of the action they can take to care for the area
- Quality – the area’s Rights of Way (RoW) and visitor services infrastructure needs to be developed to meet needs and demands for higher standards
- Lack of integration – amongst visitor information and service providers
- Traffic impacts

Objectives for public understanding and enjoyment

UE1 Objective: To increase opportunities for learning about and celebrating the character of the High Weald

Rationale: to help develop a commitment amongst residents, visitors and businesses to the conservation and enhancement of the AONB

Indicators of success

- i)** increased participation of residents in community events that develop understanding of the rural environment
- ii)** increased amount of high quality (particularly character-based) AONB information and interpretation material
- iii)** Increase in scope and coverage of character-based education programmes

Targets for 2014

- a)** new character-focused AONB events established
- b)** joint working between tourism, countryside, arts and education sectors to develop and promote a programme of AONB events
- c)** new and stronger links established between land managers and the area's residents and visitors
- d)** information and interpretation guidelines for the AONB developed and promoted
- e)** organisations and visitor service providers actively providing information on and interpreting, the AONB and its character
- f)** increased promotion of the AONBs local distinctiveness in tourism sector marketing activities
- g)** AONB profile raised at all major countryside sites, attractions and visitor information centres
- h)** High Weald character-based education resources developed and promoted to schools
- i)** new site-based education resources, in particular self led-activities for teachers
- j)** development of High Weald character-based adult learning activities

UE2 Objective: To increase the contribution of individuals to the conservation and enhancement of the AONB

Rationale: the actions of the 124,000 population of the High Weald, and those living within 5km of the AONB, have a significant impact on the AONB

Indicators of success

- i)** increased residents' understanding of the positive role individuals can play in conservation of the High Weald
- ii)** increased action by local residents
- iii)** increased residents' practical involvement in the care of the AONB
- iv)** improvement in the maintenance of the rural character of AONB properties

Targets for 2014

- a)** Caring for the High Weald Charter promoted to residents, visitors and businesses
- b)** increased number of LA21 activities that make links to the AONB context as well as the global and local context
- c)** programme established to increase the links between consumers, local products and the High Weald landscape
- d)** district and local projects that promote and enable residents and businesses to undertake such activities as: using less water; reducing, reusing, recycling etc.
- e)** increase in direct purchasing of local products
- f)** development and promotion of a training and events programme that offers opportunities for all to develop skills in countryside crafts and management
- g)** increase participation of residents in local and national wildlife surveys and monitoring
- h)** improved control of invasive species
- i)** production and promotion of AONB guidelines on maintaining the rural character of properties
- j)** loss of natural property boundaries halted

UE3 Objective: To increase community involvement in conservation and enhancement of the AONB

Rationale: the diverse communities with an interest in the AONB have a significant role in generating new initiatives, and protecting and enhancing local features and distinctiveness

Indicators of success

- i)** communities actively identifying what they value in their local countryside and participating in setting priorities for its sustainable management
- ii)** increased number of community led initiatives that enable sustainable patterns of behaviour
- iii)** Community support to enable environmental projects in place across the AONB
- iv)** increase in number of schools signed up to High Weald Heroes and taking action

Targets for 2014

- a)** The role of existing consultation mechanisms, such as parish appraisals to facilitate this reviewed, and new mechanisms piloted where appropriate
- b)** new initiatives developed to assist the public express their knowledge and understanding of local distinctiveness
- c)** community projects to change driver's attitudes and behaviours
- d)** maintenance and increase in farmer's markets
- e)** Increased community awareness and support for the High Weald Landscape Trust
- f)** Maintenance and development of AONB character-based grant schemes
- g)** Countryside management services maintained and expanded

UE4 Objective: Integrated management of the resources for informal open-air recreation to facilitate 'green' use by residents and visitors

Rationale: to meet demand for recreation and ensure that this is consistent with the primary purpose of conserving and enhancing natural beauty, by providing and promoting the infrastructure – with particular attention to quality, ease of access, location and appropriate facilities – to maximise opportunities for positive enjoyment, appreciation, and understanding of the character of the AONB

Indicators of success

- i)** quality of the Rights of Way (RoW) network improved in areas close to towns, villages, visitor attractions and within AONB rural tourism hubs (areas with a high concentration of visitor services and products)
- ii)** increased range of high quality access opportunities that meet the needs of all users
- iii)** development of key strategic links in the Rights of Way network for all walkers, cyclists and riders
- iv)** improved links between promoted informal access opportunities and public transport provision
- v)** integrated approach to the development and promotion of 'green' tourism

Targets for 2014

- a)** 100% of network in key areas meeting basic RoW standards
- b)** 20% of networks in key areas meeting higher standards (e.g. stiles replaced with kissing gates)
- c)** all promoted routes meeting higher route standards
- d)** AONB promoted routes given high priority for appropriate maintenance in Rights of Way Improvement Plans
- e)** understanding of the needs of existing and potential leisure users through consultation exercises
- f)** new promoted access opportunities for users with impaired mobility
- g)** identification, development and promotion of High Weald viewpoints
- h)** High Weald long-distance bridle route maintained
- i)** SE Toll ride network expanded to create links and fill gaps in the bridleway network
- j)** permissive paths and footpaths created to improve links between villages and attractions
- k)** service providers producing and implementing 'green' travel plans
- l)** information on public transport links provided for all visitor products
- m)** visitor management plans produced for sensitive sites and areas
- n)** identification, development and promotion of a range of new AONB high quality visitor products (e.g. themed short break 'green' itineraries)

continued

UE4 continued

- o) visitor business networks setting and achieving sustainable tourism objectives
- p) service providers achieving tourism industry quality standards, in particular Green Tourism Business Accreditation

UE5 Objective: To acknowledge and increase people's understanding of our shared cultural values and aspirations for the High Weald

Rationale: To ensure that people's perceptions and social and cultural aspirations for the landscape are recognised and taken account of in AONB management.

Indicators of success

- i) improved understanding of peoples experience of, and aspiration for, the landscape

Targets for 2014

- a) an understanding of cultural and social landscape values
- b) guidance produced regarding locally important features such as
 - tranquillity, dark skies
 - visual impact
 - historic features – abbeys, hop gardens etc
- c) an understanding of historic landscape character and threat to historic features promoted

11 Implementation

11.1 It is vital that the objectives of the management plan are embraced and acted upon by all those organisations and individuals that have a role to play in the management of the High Weald landscape and the well-being of its communities. Future plans, strategies and actions of key partners should reflect the vision and objectives of this statutory AONB management plan. For local authorities, it 'formulates their policy for the management of the area of outstanding natural beauty and their functions in relation to it'.⁸ For government, public bodies, agencies and other 'relevant authorities', the AONB management plan is the key to their legal requirement to 'have regard' to the 'purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty' of the AONB: it is the only articulation of vision and objectives focusing on the High Weald as a whole.

2014 targets

11.2 Targets have been set under each objective and indicate the key outcomes or outputs to be achieved by 2014. These targets can only be met through organisations accommodating the AONB management objectives within their own business plans and translating this thinking into action, and by individuals, whether they own land or not, taking positive action to care for the area. The targets are not intended to be comprehensive. As yet unforeseen pressures and opportunities will require creative solutions and new partnerships in the future. Many of the non-AONB specific activities undertaken by partner bodies will make a positive contribution to AONB objectives, but gaps will remain. In order to meet some objectives there is an urgent need for new action and the forging of new partnerships.

The High Weald AONB partnership

11.3 The JAC will have a key responsibility for promoting and encouraging co-ordinated action in support of the plan; for increasing awareness of and commitment to the management objectives; for seeking new funds and resources to assist implementation of key action programmes; and for monitoring both the condition of the AONB itself and the achievement of the plan objectives. A three-year business plan (reviewed annually) will be prepared by the JAC setting out the key programmes where the partnership and its dedicated staff unit can make a significant impact.

Government departments and regional bodies

11.4 Support for AONB management plans as statement of public policy relating to the management of these nationally protected areas has been agreed by the signatories to the 'Protected Landscapes in the South East: Joint Statement of Intent' (2002), namely the Countryside Agency (Natural England), Defra, GOSE, SEEDA and SEERA. The statement includes commitment to shared action in support of AONB management plans. A Joint Accord has been agreed between the Forestry Commission and NAAONB at a national and with the High Weald JAC at a local level. Natural England are the key governmental partner supporting the work of the plan nationally and regionally.

Local authorities

11.5 In addition to the delivery of planning policy supporting AONB designation, local authorities can assist through continuing to support and fund the AONB partnership; developing community services such as countryside management projects across the AONB; the delivery of educational materials rooted in AONB character themes; a proactive approach to the procurement of local products; and support for pilot initiatives such as wood fuel.

Land owners and managers

11.6 Land owners and managers have a crucial role to play in the long-term conservation and management of the AONB and will be vital partners in action targeted particularly at key features or important habitat mosaics. Their response to CAP reform and changes in rural development policy will have a major impact on the AONB.

Parish Councils, amenity organisations and community groups

11.7 These will be important partners driving projects on the ground, particularly those related to increasing public understanding and enjoyment, but also community initiatives to identify and protect locally distinctive features.

Individuals, visitors and businesses

11.8 Through individual actions residents, visitors and businesses can contribute significantly to the care of the High Weald AONB and the achievement of management objectives.

12 Monitoring and evaluation of the AONB

12.1 The High Weald AONB partnership has a duty to monitor the condition of the AONB. The Plan is a 20 year strategy setting clear objectives for the core components of natural beauty along with 'indicators of success' and 'targets' which indicate the preferred direction of travel towards achieving those objectives. In the High Weald AONB condition monitoring has been designed to inform this forward looking process.

12.2 For this review condition monitoring has adopted an approach that concentrates on the processes that affect landscape – the drivers of change, and in particular how they impact upon the components over time. For each component, and its constituent features, our best current knowledge of the state (or condition) of the feature is assessed. This is informed by any statistical or objective evidence available. Then an assessment of the of drivers acting upon the resource or feature is made, together with an understanding of the trajectory of these drivers or impacts. This is described in terms of whether the activity is

increasing/decreasing/is it new/continuing/rising/falling etc. These assessments are then subject to critical peer review. The direction and rate of change, its likely impact on the feature together with our ability to influence that change gives us a broad assessment of threat. Overall condition is then summarised in terms of the state – good, poor etc and the possible future change. A full report detailing this approach and results is available on the AONB website.

12.3 The High Weald AONB Management Plan is more than just a statement of character, and it is essential that the objectives and actions are evaluated. Performance monitoring of the plan has been designed to inform this forward looking review process. A simple scoring system has been set for the targets to show progress to meeting the targets. The indicators have been assessed to show where they are being met or making progress towards being met. A full report of plan performance prepared as part of the review of the plan 2004 is available on the website. Annual surveys of stakeholders have also been used to measure user satisfaction and usage of the plan during its implementation and these results are reported to the Joint Advisory Committee on a regular basis, and also informed the current review of the plan.

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A CHARTER FOR RESIDENTS & VISITORS

The following are actions that all residents, visitors and businesses can take to help care for this nationally important landscape.

■ **Buy local products and services from farmers and woodland managers who actively manage their land to benefit the environment**

The landscape and wildlife value of the area's woodlands, hedges, meadows, heathlands and field margins are dependent on traditional management. Money invested in products and services that help support this management is money invested in conserving the AONB and its local economy.

■ **Manage your land for wildlife and maintain the rural nature of your property**

Fields, woodland, paddocks and gardens support valuable and threatened wildlife. Inappropriate materials and features, often associated with urban areas, are leading to the gradual loss of the AONB's valued rural feel.

■ **Help prevent the spread of invasive and harmful plant and animal species**

Introduced plant, animal and fish species spread rapidly in the High Weald countryside, competing with our native wildlife and leading to its loss.

■ **Use less water**

Demands for water lead to high levels of water extraction, damaging the wildlife of the AONB's streams, rivers and wet grasslands. Increased demand in future will create pressure for new reservoirs within the AONB.

■ **Reduce, reuse and recycle, and dispose of all litter responsibly**

Litter spoils enjoyment of the countryside for the majority of residents. Less rubbish means less pressure for landfill sites and incinerators in the AONB.

■ **Respect other users – follow the Countryside Code**

Through responsible behaviour we can all use and enjoy the countryside without damaging the enjoyment or livelihoods of others.

■ **Slow down for people, horses and wildlife**

Traffic spoils enjoyment of the High Weald for 80% of its residents. Speeding cars kill people, horses, badgers, deer and foxes, and ancient routeways and their rare plants are damaged by inconsiderate driving and parking.

■ **Avoid using the car where possible and consider using renewable energy in your home**

Emissions from petrol and other non-renewable fossil fuels contribute to climate change and lead to degradation of valuable habitats such as sandrock and gradual loss of wildlife such as bluebells.

■ **Take pride in the High Weald – promote its special features and places to family, friends and visitors**

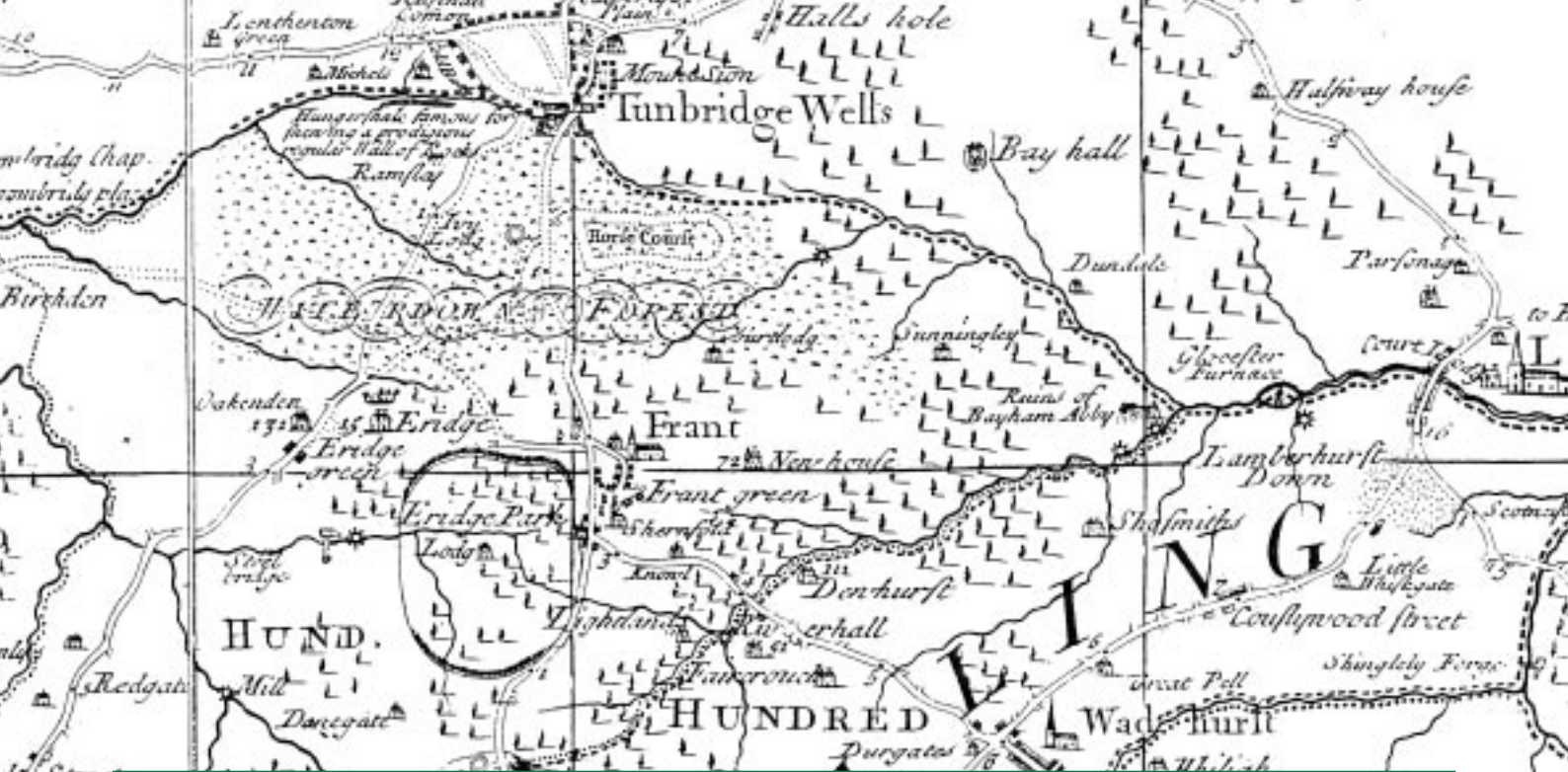
Promoting what you find special about the High Weald is the best way of encouraging commitment and action by others to the area.

■ **Have a say**

Your views can influence care of the area – use consultation processes operating at parish, district, county and AONB level to steer policy and action that affects the area.

■ **Get involved – support local conservation organisations**

With your financial and practical support, local conservation organisations can take action to care for the area such as monitoring threatened wildlife, undertaking practical conservation tasks and lobbying government.



**HIGH
WEALD**
JOINT
ADVISORY
COMMITTEE

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