



# 1. Introduction

The High Weald AONB Management Plan is subject to a 5 year review cycle and work to review the 2014-2019 Plan began in March 2017. A crucial part of the review process is engagement, and the decision was taken to engage at an early stage to ensure the revised draft incorporated as many different peoples' views from the outset as possible. The engagement process may be divided into two parts:

1. Expert engagement
2. Public engagement

This report provides an overview of the entire consultation and engagement process, as well as the method used to complete each stage.

The process involved running a series of character component-themed workshops in which experts their respective fields were invited to submit their views on various aspects of a specific character component. Those unable to attend the workshops were given the option of submitting their views via a feedback form. Full transcripts of the workshop are reproduced in Appendix A and completed feedback forms (where available) in Appendix B, both of which are at the end of this report.

The following sections outline the method used to run the workshop, a summary of the results and some conclusions on what they mean for the new plan. This particular report details the woodland-themed workshop, which was the first workshop in the series.

**NB:** As this review seeks to be light touch – in line with the scoping report – the aim of the workshops was not to revise the objectives, but to instead focus on the issues, targets and indicators of success.

## 2. Method

In order to gather expert input at an early stage, practitioners and representatives from a range of partner organisations were invited to a series of character component-themed workshops. Invitees were selected from the AONB Unit's database of contacts – a process which also afforded the opportunity to update and add to our existing contacts where gaps were apparent – and invitations were sent out via Eventbrite several weeks in advance of the events



Public Understanding & Enjoyment workshop  
Image ©Matt Pitts

The workshops themselves all took place in mid-May, with each workshop consisted of either a morning (10am-1pm) or afternoon (2pm-5pm) session. They involved a series of introductory presentations (outlining the importance of the AONB and Management Plan, as well as introducing the character and significance of the component in question) and the use of facilitators to note down responses to a range of pre-defined questions on a flip chart. Some of the questions also involved a ranking component and the session was broken up by a guest speaker with specialist knowledge of an aspect of a particular component.

The field & heath workshop was held in the morning of Tuesday May 16<sup>th</sup>. A detailed outline of the workshop may be found in the table on p.3.

Question	Purpose	Activity	Timings
<b>INTRODUCTORY PRESENTATION FROM THE DIRECTOR &amp; COMPONENT-SPECIFIC PRESENTATION ON CHARACTER AND SIGNIFICANCE</b>			30 mins
Q1) <i>“What has been done to achieve the conservation and enhancement of High Weald XXXX in the last 5 years?”</i>	The purpose of this questions is: i) to get people in a positive frame of mind by asking them to think about successes/achievements and ii) to contribute to the performance & condition monitoring portion of the plan by giving us a sense of the work that has been done conserve & enhance the landscape and realise the MP’s targets.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Write the question at the top of a flipchart sheet in advance of the workshop</li> <li>▪ Split the participants into manageable groups (up to 10 per group) with each group working on separately on the same question</li> <li>▪ Record peoples’ comments on the flipchart, ensuring each group uses a different colour pen</li> <li>▪ Throughout the process try to keep discussion and debate to a minimum and ensure everyone has a say, and try to keep to time</li> <li>▪ Make sure to write as neatly as possible so the information can be transcribed later!</li> </ul>	10 mins
Q2) <i>“What are the main issues affecting the conservation and enhancement of XXXX in the High Weald?”</i>	The purpose of this question is to generate a list of the most important issues affecting each component and in doing so, potentially identify new issues that were not included in the previous plan.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Write the question at the top of a flipchart sheet in advance of the workshop, as well as the initials of the facilitator, the topic and question</li> <li>▪ For smaller groups (10 and under) this exercise may be done as a single group. For larger groups, split the participants into two groups with each group working on separately on the same question</li> <li>▪ Record peoples’ comments on the flipchart, ensuring each group uses a different colour pen</li> <li>▪ Once everyone’s had a chance to submit their views, number each point randomly</li> <li>▪ Once all the points are numbered, ask the participants to rank them by noting down on sticky dots the numbers of the four issues they consider most important.</li> <li>▪ Once everyone’s numbered their four dots collect them up and – with the help of another facilitator – stick the dots next to their respective point</li> <li>▪ Once all the dots have been stuck up summarise the results for the group pointing out the highest ranking points and asking the groups’ opinion on the result</li> <li>▪ Throughout the process try to keep discussion and debate to a minimum and keep to time</li> <li>▪ Make sure to write as neatly as possible so the information can be transcribed later!</li> </ul>	20 mins
<b>REFRESHMENTS &amp; GUEST SPEAKER</b>			40 mins
<p>Q3i) <i>“What would the successful conservation and enhancement of High Weald XXXX look like?”</i></p> <p>Q3ii) <i>“What do you think needs to be added or taken away from the draft field and heathland character statement?”</i></p> <p>Q3iii) <i>“What needs to be done in the next 5 years to achieve the conservation and enhancement of XXXX in the High Weald?”</i></p>	The purpose of these questions is to get people thinking about: i) what the landscape would be like if it was to be successfully conserved and enhanced, ii) how this particular landscape component should be characterised in the expanded character statement, and ii) the most achievable actions that need to be taken/changes that need to occur for the conservation and enhancement vision to be realised.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Write the question at the top of a flipchart sheet in advance of the workshop</li> <li>▪ Split participants into manageable groups (up to 10 per group)</li> <li>▪ Give each group a different colour pen and send them to separate stations to answer one of the three questions</li> <li>▪ Allow 20 mins for each group to initially respond to their assigned question and then swap the groups around so each group can have their say on the other groups’ question (<b>NB:</b> make sure you keep the same colour pen so that you can distinguish which responses belong to which group).</li> <li>▪ Once the groups have switched stations, their facilitator should explain the new question ask the group if there’s anything they would like to add to what’s already been said by the previous group. Each group then has ten minutes to add their thoughts and comments to what has already been written down by the preceding group.</li> <li>▪ Once everyone’s had a chance to submit their views on each question, gather everyone into one large group around the Q3iii) <i>“What needs to be done to achieve it?”</i> question and number each point on the board randomly</li> <li>▪ Once all the points are numbered, ask the participants to rank them by noting down on sticky dots the numbers of the four issues they consider most important.</li> <li>▪ Once everyone’s numbered their four dots collect them up and – with the help of another facilitator – stick the dots next to their respective point</li> <li>▪ Once all the dots have been stuck up summarise the results for the group pointing out the highest ranking points and asking the groups’ opinion on the result</li> <li>▪ Throughout the process try to keep discussion and debate to a minimum and keep to time</li> <li>▪ Make sure to write as neatly as possible so the information can be transcribed later!</li> </ul>	c.1 hour
<b>NB:</b> In addition to the activities outlined above, workshop participants will also be given the opportunity to make additions to the draft character statements. The draft statements will be posted on the wall during the workshops and the opportunity to add to them will be flagged up following each character component presentation.			

## 3. Results

Responses from the workshop have been organised by question and are displayed below. A list of the original points for each group is provided first, followed by some basic analysis of these responses. In the case of Q1, this entailed generating a word cloud from participant responses and that shows the most frequently occurring words in larger font.

For the following questions (Q2 – Q3), workshop answers were tabulated and grouped according to themes identified in the existing Management Plan (2014-2019). Where responses did not fit into pre-existing categories they were grouped in their own standalone category. Using this approach enables support for existing issues, targets and indicators of success to be clearly identified, as well as clearly highlighting those that have been newly identified through the workshop process.

Ranking information from the workshop exercises has also been included where available.

### **Q1) What has been done to achieve the conservation & enhancement of the fields & heathland of the High Weald in the last 5 years?**

Both groups' transcribed responses to the first question of the field & heath workshop may be seen below:

#### **Group 1 CT responses**

- Field systems project enhanced knowledge of origins of character of fields in HW
- Small funding e.g. Sussex Lund helped with restoration Brede & Battle
- Support for Tottingworth through leader funding
- Continued farming in marginal areas
- Work CLA, NFU and AONB Unit has done with planners raising awareness of active land use
- Continued management of Ashdown
- 100 hectares of heathland restored at Broadwater
- Partnership working e.g. NT, BC, RSPB
- Continued support through Countryside Stewardship
- KHWP secured funding for managing Southborough Common
- Restocking HW Project

#### **Group 2 GS responses**

- Grant aid under stewardship schemes to increase biodiversity
- Non-funded (by grants) work by landowners (primarily driven by fields coming out of agriculture)
- Natural England character assessments helped people tailor work for the High Weald
- AFC – step change in focus and attention on heathland (almost entirely enabled by CS)
- Trusts maintaining their reserves in management
- Success with other funding schemes e.g. coronation meadows and magnificent meadows
- Review of (LWS) SNCIs (WDC, RDC)
- SSSI condition – lots of work using CSS
- Increase (knowledge national and local) of field archaeology giving advice across wider landscape not just reserves)

- Local provenance seed supply commercial operation
- Increase in small scale grazing on reserves (Sussex Ponies etc.)
- Significant extension of heath at Broadwater Forest

### Group 3 MP responses

- Use of Wealden see to recreate meadows
- Magnificent meadows project
- Advising landowners
- HLS agreement
- Field systems project
- Work with children will pay dividends in the future - High Weald Heroes
- Restocking HW Project – new entrants
- Heathland restoration by RSPB Broadwater
- Scotney meadow restoration by NT
- Good for public engagement
- Ongoing maintenance of charities
- Increased number of breeding nightjars at Broadwater
- Benefits of benefactors such as Elizabeth Rausing
- Balancing needs of individual for recognition and what they are doing
- Sussex Lund Fund
- Other small scale funds
- Facilitation fund groups – HLS Matt's Group

**(NB: the colour scheme – black, green & blue – used to signify the different groups is used throughout the rest of the report.)**



## Q2) What are the main issues affecting the conservation & enhancement of fields & heathland in the High Weald?

		Issues raised in the workshop categorised by issues in the 2014-19 AONB Management Plan (with workshop scores in brackets)
Existing top five issues MP 2014-2019	<i>The need to secure agricultural expertise and infrastructure through a period when small mixed farming systems are uncompetitive in the current market irrespective of their efficiency, resilience or wider benefits (such as resource protection and biodiversity) and with economic pressures currently favouring more industrial scale uses of fields, threatening ancient small scale field patterns</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Viability of farming (6)</li> <li>- Land falling out of agriculture production (5)</li> <li>- Lack of understanding about countryside (4)</li> <li>- Viability of land ownership (3)</li> <li>- Lack of advisors – spread thin can't take a landscape approach and driven by funding source (3)</li> <li>- Lack of knowledge what needs to be maintained (2)</li> <li>- Contractors large machinery can't use in small fields (1)</li> <li>- Actual character of the landscape main barrier to getting it managed given economics (1)</li> <li>- Boundaries – hedges being taken out – 7 going due to lack of maintenance</li> <li>- Hay a cost not a product (1)</li> <li>- Too much hay not worth anything (2)</li> <li>- Lack of availability of hay cutting service (1)</li> <li>- Hay fluctuating prices different types of bales do not necessarily meet needs</li> <li>- Access issues to fields can't get machines in</li> <li>- Landowners keen but don't know who to ask</li> <li>- Landowners got poor advice</li> <li>- Access to information and communication (3)</li> <li>- Expertise of landowners (2)</li> <li>- Lack of appreciation of expert advice (1)</li> <li>- Possible amalgamation of fields to increase profitability</li> <li>- Size of farm equipment hedges can be grubbed out quickly</li> <li>- Accessibility of advice – HW Unit</li> </ul>
	<i>Reduction of capacity for land management within farmsteads as historic farm buildings and yards are converted to residential use and modern farm buildings are removed leading to pressure for new farm premises or processing space in the wider countryside</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Buildings being concerted – not available for machinery – particular problem in isolated areas cannot store hay (2)</li> <li>- Development pressure (2)</li> </ul>
	<i>Excessive tidiness and lack of grazing animals providing traditional management of grassland and heathland resulting in fewer ecological niches and a less varied vegetation structure with the associated decline in biodiversity including insect pollinators such as bees,</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Need for fencing of fields and woodlands (1)</li> <li>- Lack of traditional management of heathland (1)</li> <li>- Wooding over of small greens and heaths and fields</li> <li>- Lack of grazing stock/people (5)</li> <li>- Fencing Ashdown – needed to get heath grazed but a common (commoners work to exercise</li> </ul>

	<i>moths and butterflies</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>rights) (1)</li> <li>- Scrub same issue and wood pasture</li> <li>- Graziers want to graze more intensively – can pick and choose graze easy sites</li> <li>- Single payment – negative for heaths &amp; scrub (not managed want to take funds away)</li> </ul>
	<i>Climate change: the impact of unpredictable and extreme weather events, and outbreaks of new pests and diseases</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Tree diseases affect landscape of HW (1)</li> <li>- Weather less rain less grass harder to a make a living (1)</li> <li>- Climate change (1)</li> </ul>
	<i>Risk of significant loss of and damage to rare unimproved grasslands and recently enhanced flower rich meadows (and other older features which tend to have high biodiversity and carbon sequestration benefits) if CAP reform and proposed 'greening measures' do not properly address the needs of permanent grassland livestock farms or mixed farms with small arable areas</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- CSS more targeted (1)</li> <li>- Lack of initiatives</li> <li>- Land parcels too small to quality for grants</li> <li>- Other local grants disappearing – were flexible</li> <li>- Legislation can give the wrong message</li> </ul>

## New Issues

- Agric needing to be intensive (3)
- Pressure on heathland from recreation (3)
- Population pressure and residential values leading to fragmentation (2)
- Development pressure around settlements (2)
- Less funding in agri-environment (2)
- Less predictor control
- Nitrogen deposition – insidious can't do anything about it – favours Gorse not heather changing vegetation (2)
- Farm business economics changing and had to make money (2)
- Wooded heath EFC designation – doesn't fit boxes HLS/WGS (1)
- Too many initiatives – messages get diluted come and go i.e. Turtle Dove Meadows WFU Initiatives (1)
- Heathland in the weald not typical – borderline moorland – doesn't behave like coastal heath
- People buy parcelled land with no access
- Brexit – may remove all agricultural incentives and manage profits land as it has been (5)
- Sustainability of the landscape can it be made independent of funding (4)
- Funding (3)
- Uncertainty around countryside stewardship future – landscape and biodiversity (2)
- General uncertainty (2)
- Appreciation of landscape not universal (3)
- TB Testing making cattle farming more difficult and less profitable (2)
- Health problems with deer possible TB
- Atmospheric pollution in heathland (1)
- Deer pressure on F&H insufficient control measures (1)
- Recreational disturbance to heathland
- Modern machinery can also help management
- New landowners on occasion undertake damaging operations to rare habitats as they are not aware of the site's value/vulnerability

**\*NB: a point coloured purple signifies that it has been submitted remotely via a consultation form rather than during the workshop.**

**Q3 i) What would the successful conservation & enhancement of fields & heathland in the High Weald look like?**

**IoS raised in the workshop categorised by IoS in the 2014-19 AONB Management Plan**

<b>Existing IoS MP 2014-2019</b>	<p><b>FH1 Objective: To secure agriculturally productive use for the fields of the High Weald, especially for local markets, as part of sustainable land management.</b></p> <p><b>Associated IoS:</b>  <i>i) increase in grazing animals (cattle &amp; sheep) contributing to land management</i>   <i>ii) increase in business activity and numbers of people employed in agriculture, horticulture and related businesses</i>   <i>iii) capacity for land management maintained within existing farmsteads and small settlements</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- More hop gardens – organic/right outlets</li> <li>- More economically viable livestock farming with more entrants</li> <li>- Landowners able to diversify and use different management and uses</li> <li>- More graziers and more livestock</li> <li>- More people buying local products e.g. venison</li> <li>- Economically viable landscape</li> <li>- Higher density housing</li> <li>- Age distribution more young people diversity of ages in farming greater</li> <li>- Fewer need for new building on productive agricultural land</li> <li>- Embrace fields and heaths rather than seen as a barrier</li> <li>- Living and working countryside</li> <li>- Marketing HW Sussex brand beef and lamb</li> <li>- Fields fenced and water laid on</li> <li>- More sheep and cattle</li> </ul>
	<p><b>FH2 Objective: To maintain the pattern of small irregularly shaped fields bounded by hedgerows and woodlands.</b></p> <p><b>Associated IoS:</b>  <i>i) existing extent of surviving historic field boundaries maintained</i>   <i>ii) no loss of historic small fields</i>   <i>iii) increase in hedges in appropriate management</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- No worse than it is now</li> <li>- Nothing changed same as last 700 years</li> <li>- Re-established lost hedgerows</li> <li>- Managed hedgerows alongside roads and verges</li> <li>- Continuous line of hedgerows</li> <li>-</li> </ul>

	<p><b>FH3 Objective: To enhance the ecological function of field and heath as part of the complex mosaic of High Weald habitats.</b></p> <p><b>Associated IoS:</b></p> <p><i>i) no further loss or degradation of known unimproved grassland sites</i></p> <p><i>ii) increase in area of enhanced flower rich grassland</i></p> <p><i>iii) increase in proportion of national and locally designated sites important for grassland and heathland in favourable condition</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increased biodiversity</li> <li>- More flower richness</li> <li>- Greener countryside not bare earth</li> <li>- Connectivity between heathland</li> <li>- Landscape biodiversity corridor</li> <li>- Recognised nationally for caring for wildflowers meadows</li> <li>- More planning protection for SNCIS/LWS and other characteristic of the area</li> <li>- Increased in natural habitats e.g. heathland</li> <li>- Pasture more varied in texture and colour</li> <li>- I agree these are good indicators</li> </ul>
	<p><b>FH4 Objective: To protect the archaeology and historic assets of field and heath.</b></p> <p><b>Associated IoS:</b></p> <p><i>i) increase in archaeological surveys and Historic Environment Records (HER) for non-wooded sites</i></p> <p><i>ii) increase in assessments of significance or management plans for individual heritage assets</i></p>	

**New IoS**

- Would holistic all year grazing work on Wealden clay?
- Increased awareness of value of field and heath
- Less deer
- More public engagement with the landscape – teach/support more respect
- Less deer
- More carbon storage
- Improved water quality and reduced flooding and soil biodiversity e.g. Ouse Medway – more wet heath
- More awareness of characteristic features /LWS what's there
- County register – kept updated promote more to owners
- More educated planners
- More sharing of information
- Better predator control management of deer and badgers and rabbits
- Improved wildlife balance and game management
- Allowing some rewilding e.g. flood plain and some fields
- More community involvement
- Continuity of any future grant scheme and support advice and knowledge

**Q3 ii) What needs to be done in the next 5 years to achieve the conservation & enhancement of fields & heathland in the High Weald?**

		Targets raised in the workshop categorised by Targets in the 2014-19 AONB Management Plan
<b>Existing targets MP 2014-2019</b>	<p><b>FH1 Objective: To secure agriculturally productive use for the fields of the High Weald, especially for local markets, as part of sustainable land management.</b></p> <p><b>Associated Targets:</b></p> <p>a. Rural development funds better focused on support for livestock farmers and businesses associated with livestock farming including new technologies, dedicated support for new entrants and an increase in support for the maintenance and reinstatement of livestock infrastructure such as fences and gates, with a requirement to utilise local timber;</p> <p>b. Support provided for industry initiatives to match graziers with rented grazing at sufficient scale and tenancy length to offer sustainable businesses that are attractive to young farmers and new entrants;</p> <p>c. Facilitation and encouragement provided for expansion in collaborative farming projects such as meat producer organisations; area networks for communal Stewardship applications and producer/processor collaborations;</p> <p>d. A new High Weald initiative established integrating planning and land management support to foster small scale horticulture, community agriculture and innovative small scale processing activity;</p> <p>e. Local authority and public body purchasing protocols reviewed to favour purchasing of local land management products where possible;</p> <p>f. Advice and assistance provided to small scale farmers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Collaboration between land managers (7)</li> <li>- Education – college students given opportunities to hear specialists and see greater range of examples (4)</li> <li>- More facilitation fund type projects (3)</li> <li>- Targeting graziers with advice and grants rather than landowners (2)</li> <li>- How to educate graziers now as well as to support future graziers (old graziers don't move on) (2)</li> <li>- More graziers more affordable housing need a package (Restocking the Weald) (2)</li> <li>- Fencing Ashdown (sofs permission) (2)</li> <li>- Funded training for farmers (2)</li> <li>- Better targeted legislation – too many groups (1)</li> <li>- Landowners targeted for advice too</li> <li>- Support local clusters suppliers</li> <li>- Not just local provenance but national certification of food production methods</li> </ul>

	<p>and growers to help them utilise new media platforms to tell the landscape story of their products, and maximise niche marketing opportunities;</p> <p>g. Communication networks improved between farming and nonfarming landowners, government agencies and specialist advisors to facilitate rapid adaptive responses to external events such as new pest outbreaks, and help maximise efficient production within environmental constraints;</p> <p>h. Wider benefits of permanent grassland and heathland recognised including soil conservation, carbon sequestration and water regulation and methods of valuing these services developed;</p> <p>i. The importance of diversified income streams to economic viability of small farm holdings in the High Weald recognised in policy and support mechanisms;</p> <p>j. Analysis of the built infrastructure needed to support profitable mixed farming in the High Weald informing planning decisions and pro-active assistance provided to existing markets, abattoirs and cutting rooms;</p> <p>k. A network of open heathland and wooded heath sites of varying sizes established with Ashdown Forest at the core to champion sustainable heathland management in the face of declining subsidy;</p> <p>l. Support for organic farming which has proven environmental benefits.</p>	
	<p><b>FH2 Objective: To maintain the pattern of small irregularly shaped fields bounded by hedgerows and woodlands.</b></p> <p><b>Associated Targets:</b></p> <p>a. Historic boundaries and areas of surviving medieval field systems recognised as significant heritage assets with protection embedded in planning and rural development policy;</p> <p>b. Agri-environmental schemes and other support</p>	<p>- Publishing field systems assessment method and characters statement*</p>

<p>mechanisms revised to provide a higher level of support for surviving medieval field systems and historic boundaries;</p> <p>c. Information about historic boundaries including data and maps made available to all landowners and land managers;</p> <p>d. A Weald-wide initiative established to record hedgerows; support hedgelaying and hedge management, and explore opportunities for the economic utilisation of hedge and boundary products including log wood, faggots and late summer fodder.</p>	
<p><b>FH3 Objective: To enhance the ecological function of field and heath as part of the complex mosaic of High Weald habitats.</b></p> <p><b>Associated Targets:</b></p> <p>a. Specialist advice provided to enhance the management of grassland for multiple benefits including expert advice on soil and nutrient management; agronomy; ponds and water courses; farmland birds and invertebrates; horse pasture management;</p> <p>b. Renewed support for a Weald Meadows initiative to foster the economic management of flower-rich grasslands; secure the supply of Weald Native Origin Seed and promote the uptake of cost effective grassland enhancement schemes;</p> <p>c. SSSIs and locally designated sites important for grassland and heathland assessed and support tailored to securing favourable condition in line with Biodiversity 2020 targets;</p> <p>d. Support provided for contractor training on conservation management techniques and use of specialist machinery;</p> <p>e. A campaign initiated to encourage non-farming owners to be less 'tidy' and manage fields for structural complexity and species diversity;</p> <p>f. Preparation of a High and Low Weald connectivity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Targets for heathland wildflower meadow restoration (7)</li> <li>- Better public understanding of land management – social media etc. (7)</li> <li>- Lobby for simplified red tape and recognition RPA (6)</li> <li>- Localised grants (administered locally) tailored to areas needs HW different (5)</li> <li>- Need to support farming community in Brexit negotiations/outcomes (5)</li> <li>- Better communication about methods of production – Tesco etc. and customers (3)</li> <li>- Added value /premium to management measures like grass fed cattle (3)</li> <li>- Green infrastructure planning and developer contributions to support wildlife corridors and heathland restoration (3)</li> <li>- More agronomists/pasture advisors (2)</li> <li>- Joining up local areas together so can be managed holistically (1)</li> <li>- Grassland inventory – to know what management is going on and to enable targeted support (1)</li> <li>- Work more with horse fraternity (general trend) – education (2)</li> <li>- Education for contractors (less of them)</li> <li>- Emotive story to be told around meadows e.g. health benefits local produce etc.</li> </ul>

map to inform green infrastructure strategies and CAP targeting and greening measures, identifying location and management state of landscape elements that contribute significantly to soil, air and water quality and reversing biodiversity loss, such as permanent pasture; semi-natural habitats; land maintained out of production or managed for conservation purposes for continuous periods over successive years and longer established features that tend to have high biodiversity and carbon sequestration benefits;

g. Agri-environment schemes refocused to:

- i) better meet the needs of small scale mixed farms and focus on more extensive management of target features over larger patches of land, or groups of farms, to maximise biodiversity gain; resource protection, pollination and pest control benefits;
- ii) focus on buffering and connecting the core unimproved grassland sites, encompassing support for management of grass margins/ patches to benefit invertebrates including reducing fertilizer inputs, improving structural complexity and enhancing the variety and seasonal range of nectar and pollen bearing plants;
- iii) target support for heathland at large sites such as Ashdown Forest;

h. Targeted business and rural development support provided for specialist conservation grazing enterprises including small capital grants or loans, and support for product development and niche marketing;

i. Baseline mapping of all unimproved grassland and valuable species rich grassland completed with species recording carried out utilising experts and community initiatives where possible.

	<p><b>FH4 Objective: To protect the archaeology and historic assets of field and heath.</b></p> <p><b>Associated Targets:</b></p> <p>a. Recording and assessment of non-designated heritage assets carried out consistently across the High Weald, working with experts and community initiatives where possible, and contributing to a wider understanding of features such as historic parks and gardens; veteran trees; abandoned settlements; commons; military features; wharves and harbours;</p> <p>b. Understanding of the historic role of small quarries and pits in the socio-economic development of the High Weald recognised and informing decisions on future small scale extraction required to repair heritage assets.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Publishing field systems assessment method and characters statement *</li> </ul>
<p><b>New targets</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- High profile demonstration farm e.g. Rob’s approach with no subsidy (6)</li> <li>- Educating visitors to heath and field e.g. dog owners cyclists and everybody (3)</li> <li>- Clone Rob to 2024 (2)</li> <li>- Enable transition to system not reliant on grants (taking agronomists with us) – focus on chemicals and fertilisers</li> <li>- Research history of amazing management in HW e.g. transhumance droving etc.</li> <li>- Mental health issues for farmers</li> </ul> <p>*NB: an asterisk signifies that a point appears twice in two separate categories.</p>	

### **Q3 iii) What do you think needs to be added – or taken away – from the draft field & heath character statement?**

#### **CT Group 1 responses**

- Concentrate on medieval field systems
- How the character components are linked together
- Many species rich meadows lost and fragmented
- Sense of enclosure – perception
- Reinstatement of medieval boundaries may not be economic
- Heathland sense of openness and long views
- Hop fields for specialist breweries

#### **GS Group 2 responses**

- Heaths colder and wetter that is typical of lowland heather more boggy wet borderline moorland
- Extra wide strips (no man's land) corridors – part verge part woodland fenced beyond
- Bell pits and clay pits – ponds in fields
- Narrow gateways
- Chestnut fences - other local timber for boundaries
- Fields wet springs and flushes
- Variability e.g. gypsum
- Gill streams
- Bryophytes assemblages
- Spiked rampion cord not bittercress
- Heaths military interest rabbit warrens iron geology deer poles
- Tranquil
- Mixed farm landscape

#### **MP Group 3 responses**

- Undulating landscapes and glimpsed views
- Reference to dispersed settlement
- Areas of small scale regular field patterns
- No mention of key species e.g. red data book species
- Routeways current and last added to first bullet
- 6th bullet needs rethinking separate point put with settlement
- Think more about how cropping is covered
- No mention of heathlands manmade nature and its need for traditional management
- So much heath has been lost (90%)



## 4. Conclusions

The field & heath workshop provided an invaluable opportunity to engage with a range of experts at an early stage of the Management Plan review. The input that has been provided on the issues, indicators of success and targets for field & heath will help shape the next Plan and highlight sections that require updating and/or additional information.

By comparing responses collated during the workshop and organising them alongside the content of the existing plan (see the tables on the preceding pages), it is clear that many of the points raised – including some of the most highly ranking (where ranking data is available) – are supportive and fit squarely within the issues, indicators of success and targets of the existing Plan. Where differences do occur – such as those relating to the uncertainty around future countryside management support stemming from Brexit – this will be taken on board in the review process and appropriate updates made. Similarly, parts of the plan that received little or no support from consultees will be considered for removal or alteration.

As well as informing the redrafting of the revised Plan, the information gathered at this expert engagement workshop will also be fed into the Performance and Condition Monitoring reports – documents that are required by the review process and that help measure the effectiveness of the last plan and thereby highlight areas that require improvement in the next Plan.

In conclusion, the information summarised in this report represent a critical first step in the 2019-2024 Management Plan review.

# Appendix A

## Workshop question response transcripts

**Q1)** What has been done to improve public understanding & enjoyment of the High Weald character in the last 5 years?

### Group 1 CT responses

- National Trust magazine
- Social media
- Weald Forest Ridge Partnership Scheme
- Restoration of bus service – Hastings, Bodiam, Hawkhurst and Cranbrook Sunday Service
- Woodland Trust (community led Brede High Woods)
- Website - ESCC and KCC walks information
- Walking festivals
- Small grants
- High Weald Heroes
- Profile of the High Weald Unit has increased
- Sheffield Park engagement
- Public better education about HW- commenting on planning applications
- Google maps identify AONB
- National Park promoted protected landscapes
- Constraints of geology and landscape - Downs
- Bluebell railway extension
- New types of short breaks/accommodation
- Awareness of mindfulness and escapes
- Increasing cyclists and walkers on trails
- Tour de France
- Glamping/eco camping
- conversion of buildings to tourist
- Quality of High Weald

### Group 2 CW responses

- Ashdown Forest Education programme
- Local festivals e.g. Crowborough
- Healthy walks – BCTV
- High Weald Heroes
- Good web resources
- Better links to useful websites
- Social media generally – useful resources
- Dog walking initiatives e.g. Broadwater
- Specialised guided walks – e.g. Ashdown Forest and Wildlife Trusts
- Butterfly and bird counts
- Technical studies e.g. Lidar - good for informing and educating
- Publicity – good and bad raising awareness

- increased volunteering opportunity
- Increased awareness and designation of special places
- Public availability of the HW Management Plan
- Walking festivals – Wealden and Eastbourne
- Newly accessible greenspace
- Dark Skies initiative raises public awareness (CPRE) and Unit
- National Trust campaign – 50 things to do outdoors
- Increased availability of funding for health and wellbeing
- More evidence and understanding that being outdoors brings health and wellbeing benefits.

## Q2) What are the main issues affecting the conservation & enhancement of fields & heathland in the High Weald?

<b>CT Group 1 responses</b>	<b>Rank</b>
▪ Viability of farming	6
▪ Land falling out of agriculture production	5
▪ Lack of understanding about countryside	4
▪ Agric needing to be intensive	3
▪ Pressure on heathland from recreation	3
▪ Viability of land ownership	3
▪ Population pressure and residential values leading to fragmentation	2
▪ Development pressure around settlements	2
▪ Less funding in agri-environment	2
▪ Need for fencing of fields and woodlands	1
▪ CSS more targeted	1
▪ Tree diseases affect landscape of HW	1
▪ Lack of traditional management of heathland	1
▪ Less predictor control	
▪ Wooding over of small greens and heaths and fields	
<b>GS Group 2 responses</b>	<b>Rank</b>
▪ Lack of grazing stock/people	5
▪ Lack of advisors – spread thin can't take a landscape approach and driven by funding source	3
▪ Nitrogen deposition – insidious can't do anything about it – favours Gorse not heather changing vegetation	2
▪ Farm business economics changing and had to make money	2
▪ Too much hay not worth anything	2
▪ Lack of knowledge what needs to be maintained	2
▪ Buildings being concerted – not available for machinery – particular problem in isolated areas cannot store hay	2
▪ Wooded heath EFC designation – doesn't fit boxes HLS/WGS	1
▪ Fencing Ashdown – needed to get heath grazed but a common (commoners work to exercise rights)	1
▪ Weather less rain less grass harder to a make a living	1
▪ Contractors large machinery can't use in small fields	1
▪ Lack of availability of hay cutting service	1
▪ Hay a cost not a product	1
▪ Actual character of the landscape main barrier to getting it managed given economics	1
▪ Too many initiatives – messages get diluted come and go i.e. Turtle Dove Meadows WFU Initiatives	1
▪ Scrub same issue and wood pasture	
▪ Heathland in the weald not typical – borderline moorland – doesn't behave like coastal heath	
▪ Boundaries – hedges being taken out – 7 going due to lack of maintenance	

- Lack of initiatives
- Graziers want to graze more intensively – can pick and choose graze easy sites
- Hay fluctuating prices different types of bales do not necessarily meet needs
- Land parcels too small to quality for grants
- Access issues to fields can't get machine in
- People buy parcelled land with no access
- Landowners keen but don't know who to ask
- Landowners got poor advice
- Single payment – negative for heaths & scrub (not managed want to take funds away)
- Other local grants disappearing – were flexible

**MP Group 3 response**

**Rank**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| ▪ Brexit – may remove all agricultural incentives and manage profits land as it has been | 5 |
| ▪ Sustainability of the landscape can it be made independent of funding                  | 4 |
| ▪ Funding  | 3 |
| ▪ Access to information and communication  | 3 |
| ▪ Appreciation of landscape not universal  | 3 |
| ▪ Development pressure   | 2 |
| ▪ Uncertainty around countryside stewardship future – landscape and biodiversity         | 2 |
| ▪ General uncertainty  | 2 |
| ▪ TB Testing making cattle farming more difficult and less profitable                    | 2 |
| ▪ Expertise of landowners  | 2 |
| ▪ Atmospheric pollution in heathland   | 1 |
| ▪ Climate change   | 1 |
| ▪ Lack of appreciation of expert advice  | 1 |
| ▪ Deer pressure on F&H insufficient control measures                                     | 1 |
| ▪ Recreational disturbance to heathland  |   |
| ▪ Legislation can give the wrong message   |   |
| ▪ Health problems with deer possible TB  |   |
| ▪ Possible amalgamation of fields to increase profitability                              |   |
| ▪ Size of farm equipment hedges can be grubbed out quickly                               |   |
| ▪ Modern machinery can also help management  |   |
| ▪ Accessibility of advice – HW Unit  |   |

### Q3 i) What would the successful conservation & enhancement of fields & heathland in the High Weald look like?

#### CT Group 1 responses

- No worse than it is now
- Increased biodiversity
- Nothing changed same as last 700 years
- More flower richness
- More hop gardens – organic/right outlets
- More economically viable livestock farming with more entrants
- Would holistic all year grazing work on Wealden clay?
- Greener countryside not bare earth
- Connectivity by between heathland
- Re-established lost hedgerows
- Managed hedgerows alongside roads and verges
- Landscape biodiversity corridor
- Continuous line of hedgerows
- Landowners able to diversify and use different management and uses
- Increased awareness of value of field and heath
- Less deer

#### GS Group 2 responses

- More graziers and more livestock
- More public engagement with the landscape – teach/support more respect
- More people buying local products e.g. venison
- Less deer
- More carbon storage
- Economically viable landscape
- Higher density housing
- Age distribution more young people diversity of ages in farming greater
- Recognised nationally for caring for wildflowers meadows
- Fewer need for new building on productive agricultural land
- Improved water quality and reduced flooding and soil biodiversity e.g. Ouse Medway – more wet heath
- More planning protection for SNCIS/LWS and other characteristic of the area
- More awareness of characteristic features /LWS what's there
- County register – kept updated promote more to owners
- More educated planners
- More sharing of information
- Embrace fields and heaths rather than seen as a barrier

#### MP Group 3 responses

- Living and working countryside
- Increased in natural habitats e.g. heathland

- Pasture more varied in texture and colour
- Better predator control management of deer and badgers and rabbits
- Improved wildlife balance and game management
- Marketing HW Sussex brand beef and lamb
- Fields fenced and water laid on
- Allowing some rewilding e.g. flood plain and some fields
- More community involvement
- Continuity of any future grant scheme and support advice and knowledge
- More sheep and cattle

**Q3 ii) What needs to be done in the next 5 years to achieve the conservation & enhancement of fields & heathland in the High Weald?**

<b>Group 1, Group 2 &amp; Group 3 combined responses</b>	<b>Rank</b>
▪ Targets for heathland wildflower meadow restoration ✓	7
▪ Better public understanding of land management – social media etc. ✓	7
▪ Collaboration between land managers ✓	7
▪ High profile demonstration farm e.g. Rob’s approach with no subsidy ✓	6
▪ Lobby for simplified red tape and recognition RPA ✓	6
▪ Localised grants (administered locally) tailored to areas needs HW different ✓	5
▪ Need to support farming community in Brexit negotiations/outcomes ✓	5
▪ Education – college students given opportunities to hear specialists and see greater range of examples ✓	4
▪ Educating visitors to heath and field e.g. dog owners cyclists and everybody ✓	3
▪ Added value /premium to management measures like grass fed cattle ✓	3
▪ Better communication about methods of production – Tesco etc. and customers ✓	3
▪ Green infrastructure planning and developer contributions to support wildlife corridors and heathland restoration ✓	3
▪ More facilitation fund type projects ✓	3
▪ Clone Rob to 2024 ✓	2
▪ More agronomists/pasture advisors ✓	2
▪ Targeting graziers with advice and grants rather than landowners ✓	2
▪ How to educate graziers now as well as to support future graziers (old graziers don’t move on) ✓	2
▪ More graziers more affordable housing need a package (Restocking the Weald) ✓	2
▪ Work more with horse fraternity (general trend) – education ✓	2
▪ Fencing Ashdown (sofs permission) ✓	2
▪ Funded training for farmers ✓	2
▪ Joining up local areas together so can be managed holistically ✓	1
▪ Grassland inventory – to know what management is going on and to enable targeted support ✓	1
▪ Education for contractors (less of them) ✓	1
▪ Publishing field systems assessment method and characters statement ✓	1
▪ Better targeted legislation – too many groups ✓	1
▪ Enable transition to system not reliant on grants (taking agronomists with us) – focus on chemicals and fertilisers ✓	1

- Emotive story to be told around meadows e.g. health benefits local produce etc. ✓
- Landowners targeted for advice too ✓
- Research history of amazing management in HW e.g. transhumance droving etc. ✓
- Support local clusters suppliers ✓
- Not just local provenance but national certification of food production methods ✓
- Mental health issues for farmers

**Q3 iii) What do you think needs to be added – or taken away – from the draft field & heathland character statement?**

**CT Group 1 responses**

- Concentrate on medieval field systems
- How the character components are linked together
- Many species rich meadows lost and fragmented
- Sense of enclose – perception
- Reinstatement of medieval boundaries may not be economic
- Heathland sense of openness and long views
- Hop fields for specialist breweries

**GS Group 2 responses**

- Heaths colder and wetter that is typical of lowland heather more boggy wet borderline moorland
- Extra wide strips (no man's land) corridors – part verge part woodland fenced beyond
- Bell pits and clay pits – ponds in fields
- Narrow gateways
- Chestnut fences - other local timber for boundaries
- Fields wet springs and flushes
- Variability e.g. gypsum
- Gill streams
- Bryophytes assemblages
- Spiked rampion cord not bittercress
- Heaths military interest rabbit warrens iron geology deer poles
- Tranquil
- Mixed farm landscape

**MP Group 3 responses**

- Undulating landscapes and glimpsed views
- Reference to dispersed settlement
- Areas of small scale regular field patterns
- No mention of key species e.g. red data book species
- Routeways current and last added to first bullet
- 6th bullet needs rethinking separate point put with settlement
- Think more about how cropping is covered
- No mention of heathlands manmade nature and its need for traditional management
- So much heath has been lost (90%)

# Appendix B

## Consultation form response transcripts

### High Weald AONB Management Plan Review

*Technical consultation on the conservation and enhancement of the field & heath component of natural beauty*

#### Context

AONB Management Plans guide the management of the nation's protected landscapes and are a statutory requirement of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CROW) 2000. The High Weald AONB Management Plan is an evidence-based document that sets out the priorities for future conservation and enhancement efforts in the area, as well as providing a means for you and others to assess the impact of development on the landscape's special character.



#### Purpose of the consultation

We are reviewing the High Weald AONB Management Plan (on behalf of our 15 local authority partners) and need your specialist input on the field & heath component of natural beauty. Specifically, we would like your views on:

- landscape character as it relates to field & heath
- the top issues facing field & heath
- the most important long-term objectives for the management for field & heath
- the most significant 2024 management targets for field & heath
- the means by which progress towards these objectives should be assessed

## How you can make your views heard

Please fill in your contact details below and then complete the consultation form on the following pages. Text from the current Plan is highlighted in the grey. Targets from the current Management Plan have been omitted for brevity, but can be found in full [here](#), along with the information specifically relating to geology, climate and water (pp.22-23). Your views on which targets should be rolled forward to 2019 and why would be welcome, as well as any proposals for new targets. A map showing the extent of the AONB may be found at the end of this document.

The information you provide will help shape the new Management Plan and, ultimately, the future management of this special area.

*Thank you in advance for you time!*

<b>Name:</b>	XXXX
<b>Email:</b>	<u>XXXX</u>
<b>Organisation:</b>	XXXX

### 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.

Comments

-

### Top 5 issues:

- The need to secure agricultural expertise and infrastructure through a period when small mixed farming systems are uncompetitive in the current market irrespective of their efficiency, resilience or wider benefits (such as resource protection and biodiversity) and with economic pressures currently favouring more industrial scale uses of fields, threatening ancient small scale field patterns;
- Reduction of capacity for land management within farmsteads as historic farm buildings and yards are

converted to residential use and modern farm buildings are removed leading to pressure for new farm premises or processing space in the wider countryside;

- Excessive tidiness and lack of grazing animals providing traditional management of grassland and heathland resulting in fewer ecological niches and a less varied vegetation structure with the associated decline in biodiversity including insect pollinators such as bees, moths and butterflies;
- Climate change: the impact of unpredictable and extreme weather events, and outbreaks of new pests and diseases;
- Risk of significant loss of and damage to rare unimproved grasslands and recently enhanced flower rich meadows (and other older features which tend to have high biodiversity and carbon sequestration benefits) if CAP reform and proposed 'greening measures' do not properly address the needs of permanent grassland livestock farms or mixed farms with small arable areas.

Comments / Additional issues

New landowners on occasion undertake damaging operations to rare habitats as they are not aware of the site's value/vulnerability.

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

**Indicators of success**

- i. Increase in grazing animals (cattle & sheep) contributing to land management;
- ii. Increase in business activity and numbers of people employed in agriculture, horticulture and related businesses;
- iii. Capacity for land management maintained within existing farmsteads and small settlements.

Comments:

-

2019 targets to be rolled forward (please mark with a 'x')

a) b) c) d) e) f) g) h) i) j) k) l)

Proposed new targets for 2024:

-

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

**Indicators of success**

- i. Existing extent of surviving historic field boundaries maintained;
- ii. No loss of historic small fields;
- iii. Increase in hedges in appropriate management.

Comments:

-

2019 targets to be rolled forward (please mark with a 'x')

a)    b)    c)    d)

Proposed new targets for 2024:

-

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

**Indicators of success**

- i. No further loss or degradation of known unimproved grassland sites;
- ii. Increase in area of enhanced flower rich grassland;
- iii. Increase in proportion of national and locally designated sites important for grassland and heathland in favourable condition.

Comments :

I agree this is a good indicator.

2019 targets to be rolled forward (please mark with a 'x')

a) b) c) d) e) f) g) h) i)

Proposed new targets for 2024:

-

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

**Indicators of success**

- i. Increase in archaeological surveys and Historic Environment Records (HER) for non-wooded sites;
- ii. Increase in assessments of significance or management plans for individual heritage assets.

Comments:

-

2019 targets to be rolled forward (please mark with a 'x')

a) b)

-

Proposed new targets for 2024:

-

**Additional comments:**

No. Thank you for the opportunity to comment and apologies I could not attend on the day.