



# 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 public understanding & enjoyment workshop was held in the afternoon of Wednesday May 10<sup>th</sup>. A detailed outline of the work shop 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>	15 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>	30 mins
<b>REFRESHMENTS &amp; GUEST SPEAKER</b>			40 mins
<p>Q3i) <i>“What would the successful conservation and enhancement of High Weld XXXX look like?”</i></p> <p>Q3ii) <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 and ii) the most achievable actions that need to be taken/changes that need to occur for this 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</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, gather everyone into one large group around the Q3ii) <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.40 mins
<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 improve public understanding & enjoyment of the High Weald character in the last 5 years?**

Both groups' transcribed responses to the first question of the public understanding & enjoyment workshop may be seen below:

#### **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 public understanding & enjoyment of 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>Lack of knowledge about AONB designation and the benefits small changes in behaviours can bring</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Education about the legislation e.g. NPPF (3)</li> <li>- Lack of awareness of High Weald – more attracted to Downs (2)</li> <li>- Importance and significance of High Weald not appreciated (2)</li> <li>- Dogs – impact on ground nesting birds and stock of commercial dog walkers which entails policing costs (1)</li> <li>- Litter</li> <li>- Conflict between landowners and public access</li> <li>- Need for more cohesive communication</li> <li>- Conflicts between different user groups (3)</li> <li>- People unsure where to find information as it's all so desperate and spread across multiple places (1)</li> <li>- Lower public awareness and sense of place of the High Weald and its distinctive features (1)</li> <li>- Anti-social behaviour – e.g. motor bikes etc.</li> </ul>
	<i>A focus on valuing views and visual enjoyment over maintaining the ecological and economic functioning of the landscape</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Disrespect for landscape (3)</li> <li>- Loss and degradation of habitats (1)</li> <li>- Plant health – ash dieback and climate change (1)</li> <li>- Air quality</li> <li>- Lack of understanding of management (3)</li> <li>- Reality of farming – mess etc. can be off putting (1)</li> </ul>
	<i>The need to understand and recognise the role of knowledge and cultural tradition in how people value the aesthetic qualities of the landscape</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- National curriculum at secondary level restricts communication about landscape values</li> <li>- Changing perceptions over time about how the countryside should be – urban park expectations (1)</li> <li>- Us/them divide between town and country</li> <li>- Decline in rural industries and associated experts who can share their knowledge</li> </ul>
	<i>Quality – the area's visitor services infrastructure requiring investment to meet demands for higher standards</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lack of accessibility for children in Hastings – difficulty of engagement with urban areas (2)</li> <li>- Accessibility by public transport (2)</li> <li>- Brexit EU money has helped in the past fund information about sites – what fills the gap? (1)</li> <li>- Rural bus network and constant threats to continuation</li> <li>- Maintaining PROW more difficult as resources reduced</li> <li>- Lack of interpretation and associated list of this (1)</li> <li>- Poor conditions of the PROW puts people off (1)</li> <li>- Disability and aging elderly population makes access tricky</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- High volumes of traffic and lack of public transport*</li> <li>- Car parking capacity /facilities – e.g. National Trust at Sheffield Park</li> <li>- Expenses maintaining car parks</li> <li>- Fly tipping, miss-use, &amp; dog mess puts people off</li> <li>- Visitor expectations can be quite high</li> </ul>
	<p><i>Detrimental impacts of traffic and noise intrusion (including aircraft).</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Traffic in the lanes creating difficulties for walkers (2)</li> <li>- Too tolerant of cars more dialogue needed (1)</li> <li>- High Volumes of traffic and lack of public transport*</li> </ul> <p>*Appears twice as it straddles two different issues categories.</p>

## New Issues

- Pressure for development – more people could degrade quality (5)
- Lack of awareness of where people are allowed to walk and appropriate behaviour (2)
- Funding for projects and events declining (1)
- Engagement of LEPs in AONBs needs to be greater (1)
- Complacency about the High Weald (1)
- When development trumps environment it creates an imbalance (1)
- Constant change to planning system and a general pro-development position
- Differences of interpretation of legislation for AONBs
- Lack of awareness that Woodland Trust or National Trust as charities
- Lack of affordable housing
- Lack of workplaces
- Low level of public awareness of bus services – residents and visitors
- Population expansion
- Difficulty of retaining young people
- Extra visitors additional pressure can have too many – victim of own success
- General disconnect with nature and outdoors (3)
- People unsure about what they can and cannot do in the countryside (2)
- Muddy and dangerous – a lot of people's perception of going out about in the country (2)
- Funding pressures for local authorities (2)
- Decline and lack of rural communities (2)
- People are too busy/no time (1)
- Kids are increasingly living in a virtual world and are difficult to read and engage (1)
- Public Understanding & Enjoyment low on political agenda (1)
- Conflict/tension between conservation and tourism (1)
- People don't necessarily understand they can walk in and access the countryside on PROW
- School funding and syllabus
- Difficulties/ barriers to schools getting their pupils outdoors
- Countryside can't compete with television or Pokémon Go
- Geocaching and other activities gets people outdoors
- Horsification
- Letterboxing?

### Q3 i) What would better public understanding & enjoyment of the High Weald look like?

		IoS raised in the workshop categorised by IoS in the 2014-19 AONB Management Plan
Existing IoS MP 2014-2019	<p><b>UE1 Objective: To increase opportunities for learning about and celebrating the character of the High Weald.</b></p> <p><b>Associated IoS:</b>  <i>i) increased participation of residents in community events that develop an understanding of the rural environment</i>  <i>ii) increase in scope and coverage of character-based education and interpretation programmes and resources</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Higher % population know about the High Weald 80%</li> <li>- Increased understanding of value of our woods and countryside</li> <li>- Every school child in the High Weald access to Welly Walk and or outdoor education</li> <li>- Strong planning and policies improved public understanding</li> <li>- Easily available resources one stop shop and portal</li> <li>- More productive and vibrant rural economy – more people local</li> <li>- More recognisable regional identity – “I live in the High Weald” – and people being proud of this</li> </ul>
	<p><b>UE2 Objective: To increase the contribution of individuals to the conservation and enhancement of the AONB.</b></p> <p><b>Associated IoS:</b>  <i>i) increase in volunteering for countryside management activities</i>  <i>ii) increase in membership of local ecological or heritage recording groups</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Less dog poo and more responsible dog owners</li> <li>- More respect, less litter, fly tipping etc.</li> <li>- More people enjoying and working in the countryside</li> <li>- More volunteers not just visitors</li> <li>- Sensitive habitats protected</li> </ul>

	<p><b>UE3 Objective: To increase community involvement in conservation and enhancement of the AONB.</b></p> <p><b>Associated IoS:</b>  <i>i) increase in community led initiatives related to AONB conservation such as local character studies or conservation projects</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- More ownership and engagement with residents and visitors</li> <li>- More public involvement to improve quality of schemes</li> <li>- More celebrations</li> <li>- More proactive projects that achieve management required to maintain landscape</li> <li>- Public empowered and enable to protect the HW AONB</li> </ul>
	<p><b>UE4 Objective: To develop and manage services that support informal open-air recreation to facilitate ‘green’ use by all residents and visitors.</b></p> <p><b>Associated IoS:</b>  <i>i) County Countryside Access Improvement Plans prioritising AONB works in recognition of their national role in enabling access and leisure use</i>   <i>ii) increase in the range and extent of access opportunities to better meet the needs of the diversity of leisure users</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Accessibility to countryside the same or better – signage and more inclusive</li> <li>- More groups from urban areas to learn about the area</li> <li>- More community buses and transport</li> <li>- Good balance between attractions, destinations and management of visitor numbers</li> <li>- More minorities enjoying nature – greater diversity</li> </ul>
	<p><b>UE5 Objective: To promote the perceptual and aesthetic qualities that people value.</b></p> <p><b>Associated IoS:</b>  <i>i) baseline information in place on the special qualities residents and users of the AONB value</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Better visitor data</li> </ul>

**New IoS**

- More funding to achieve aims
- More joined up thinking between organisations including health
- Improvements in health less depression
- More partnership working more effective good use of resources
- More even distribution between visitor destinations
- More natural areas – less suburban
- Other tourist destinations talking about High Weald context
- In good heart – vibrant/healthy
- Not necessarily about getting more visitors but ensuring those that do come have a better quality experience and are themselves more responsible
- More funding available – or at least no cuts to funding - requires greater public awareness of importance of HW AONB
- HW labelling scheme for produce

**Q3 ii) What needs to be done in the next 5 years to improve public understanding & enjoyment of the High Weald?**

		<b>Targets raised in the workshop categorised by Targets in the 2014-19 AONB Management Plan</b>
<b>Existing targets MP 2014-2019</b>	<p><b>UE1 Objective: To increase opportunities for learning about and celebrating the character of the High Weald.</b></p> <p><b>Associated Targets:</b></p> <p>a. Joint working between tourism, countryside, education and arts sectors to develop innovative, celebratory countryside events and competitions for a wider audience;</p> <p>b. Increase in landowner-led events that further understanding of land management;</p> <p>d. Parish websites and magazines highlighting AONB character components within their area;</p> <p>e. Increased promotion of the AONB story and special qualities in tourism sector marketing activities and promoted through countryside sites, attractions and visitor information centres;</p> <p>f. Promotion of authentic experiences by the tourism sector based on local identity;</p> <p>h. High Weald introductory sessions/materials provided for training and education providers together with production of new videos and apps that promote AONB issues and development and promotion of character-focused heritage survey toolkits;</p> <p>i. AONB boundary project to raise awareness of the High Weald's location and character;</p> <p>j. Continuation of the AONB-focused primary school education programme, High Weald Heroes;</p> <p>k. Increase in Learning Outside the Classroom activities, for example Forest Schools initiatives that utilise local woodlands to teach personal, social and technical skills;</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Information sharing between organisations – funding time to do this and funding/money (6)</li> <li>- Education and awareness raising for all age groups (6)</li> <li>- Schools programme (5)</li> <li>- Partnership working coordinating organisation (3)</li> <li>- Deer awareness raising in terms of impact on woodland management (2)</li> <li>- Maintaining and establishing walking festivals and other events (1)</li> <li>- Strengthen High Weald AONB Partnership (1)</li> <li>- Mixed messages – work together to avoid this</li> <li>- Lewes festival themed around walks for children</li> </ul>

	<p>I. Continued coordination of support for green tourism and tourism businesses through joint protected landscape initiatives such as 'Our Land'.</p>	
	<p><b>UE2 Objective: To increase the contribution of individuals to the conservation and enhancement of the AONB.</b></p> <p><b>Associated Targets:</b></p> <p>a. Awareness campaign focused on the Caring for the High Weald Charter issues and actions and support for projects that promote and enable residents and businesses to undertake such activities as: using less water; reducing, reusing, recycling;</p> <p>b. AONB introductory information provided for new residents;</p> <p>c. production of AONB guidelines on maintaining the rural character of properties;</p> <p>d. Support for training events that offer opportunities for individuals to develop skills in countryside crafts; land management and heritage/ecological surveys and monitoring;</p> <p>e. Support for charitable trusts that support AONB work, for example the High Weald Landscape Trust.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increased volunteering – networking between organisations – portal (3)</li> <li>- Volunteering (1)</li> <li>- Engaging with targeting key individuals in local communities – e.g. councillors by educating them (1)</li> <li>- Explore ways in which the HW Unit might engage more on the local level</li> <li>- You can get greater buy in</li> </ul>
	<p><b>UE3 Objective: To increase community involvement in conservation and enhancement of the AONB.</b></p> <p><b>Associated Targets:</b></p> <p>a. Continuing support for community environmental projects and maintenance of AONB character-influenced grant schemes;</p> <p>b. Support for community initiatives to record the AONB and manage threats such as Ash dieback;</p> <p>c. Support and facilitation provided for community projects that support AONB management objectives such as changing the behaviour of drivers; encouraging</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Effort to build local/community pride and engage with wider landscape as well as local patch (6)</li> <li>- Need to mobilise people to support our work to conserve the High Weald (2)</li> </ul>

<p>responsible dog behaviour; encouraging use of public transport;  d. Support for parish and other community group led initiatives to identify and conserve locally distinctive features and characteristic sites.</p>	
<p><b>UE4 Objective: To develop and manage services that support informal open-air recreation to facilitate ‘green’ use by all residents and visitors.</b></p> <p><b>Associated Targets:</b></p> <p>a. Quality of the Rights of Way (RoW) network prioritised in areas close to towns, villages, visitor attractions and within AONB rural tourism hubs (areas with a high concentration of visitor services and products);</p> <p>b. Public-sector promoted routes rationalised and updated against best practice criteria and maintained to high standards by Rights of Way teams;</p> <p>c. Strategic gaps in the High Weald ROW network for walkers, cyclists and horse riders identified with joint working to develop projects that address strategic gaps;</p> <p>d. Consultation exercises undertaken to understand the needs of existing and potential leisure users leading to improved welcome and orientation information at countryside sites to meet the user needs;</p> <p>e. A coordinated approach to improving the number of access projects that meet the needs of users with impaired mobility;</p> <p>f. Identification and promotion of viewpoints that enable appreciation of the High Weald landscape by people of all abilities;</p> <p>g. A requirement for new, and encouragement for existing, accommodation providers and attractions to produce and implement ‘green’ travel plans;</p> <p>h. Identification and promotion of themed High Weald character short breaks that can be taken using public</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Using health and wellbeing as a way to get wider demographics involved in outdoors (7)</li> <li>- Improvement in PROW and making the HW more accessible in general - partnership working will help achieve this (1)</li> <li>- Need overarching strategies for accessible greenspace position - not just piecemeal approach</li> <li>- Buggy walks to improve accessibility</li> <li>- Visitor destinations promoting High Weald</li> <li>- Linked ticketing between destinations especially to help transport (like 7 Wonders of the Weald)</li> <li>- Loyalty card for High Weald including transport</li> </ul>

	<p>transport;</p> <p>i. Increase in service providers achieving Green Tourism Business Accreditation or similar;</p> <p>j. Joint working to produce visitor management plans for sensitive sites and areas, for example Ashdown Forest;</p> <p>k. Networking events that enable sharing of best practice in the development of responsible tourism, behaviour of drivers; encouraging responsible dog behaviour; encouraging use of public transport;</p> <p>l. Support for parish led initiatives to identify and conserve locally distinctive features;</p> <p>m. Increase the variety of walking opportunities (self-guided and themed) to raise awareness of the positive health and wellbeing benefits of the AONB on your doorstep.</p>	
	<p><b>UE5 Objective: To promote the perceptual and aesthetic qualities that people value.</b></p> <p><b>Associated Targets:</b></p> <p>a. An understanding of cultural traditions that have shaped people’s aesthetic appreciation of the landscape;</p> <p>b. Information on valued locally distinctive features generated by communities;</p> <p>c. Guidance on the conservation and management of special qualities and locally valued features produced such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• tranquillity and dark skies</li> <li>• protection of views and assessment of visual impact</li> <li>• historic features – abbeys, hop gardens etc.</li> </ul> <p>d. Consultation exercises with residents, visitors and businesses to understand how people value the landscape;</p> <p>e. Support for projects that enable people to develop joint visions for their local landscape.</p>	<p>- Gathering and sharing of visitor data (2)</p>

## New targets

- Awareness of connectivity between landscapes (3)
- Raising money (3)
- Pick up on efforts and projects begun in last MP and dedicate resources to them

## 4. Conclusions

The public understanding & enjoyment 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 public understanding & enjoyment 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 largely supportive and fit squarely within the issues, indicators of success and targets of the existing Plan. Where differences do occur – such as the value of the AONB landscape for peoples’ mental health, a link which is not explicitly mentioned in the public understanding & enjoyment section of the current Plan – 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
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- Constraints of geology and landscape - Downs
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- 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 public & enjoyment of the High Weald?

Group 1 CT responses	Rank
▪ Pressure for development – more people could degrade quality	5
▪ Education about the legislation e.g. NPPF	3
▪ Disrespect for landscape	3
▪ Lack of awareness of High Weald – more attracted to Downs	2
▪ Lack of accessibility for children in Hastings – difficulty of engagement with urban areas	2
▪ Traffic in the lanes creating difficulties for walkers	2
▪ Accessibility by public transport	2
▪ Lack of awareness of where people are allowed to walk and appropriate behaviour	2
▪ Importance and significance of High Weald not appreciated	2
▪ Funding for projects and events declining	1
▪ Engagement of LEPs in AONBs needs to be greater	1
▪ Complacency about the High Weald	1
▪ Loss and degradation of habitats	1
▪ Too tolerant of cars more dialogue needed	1
▪ Plant health – ash dieback and climate change	1
▪ Brexit EU money has helped in the past fund information about sites – what fills the gap?	1
▪ Dogs – impact on ground nesting birds and stock of commercial dog walkers which entails policing costs	1
▪ When development trumps environment it creates an imbalance	1
▪ Constant change to planning system and a general pro-development position	
▪ Differences of interpretation of legislation for AONBs	
▪ Lack of awareness that Woodland Trust or National Trust as charities	
▪ Litter	
▪ Lack of affordable housing	
▪ Lack of workplaces	
▪ Rural bus network and constant threats to continuation	
▪ Low level of public awareness of bus services – residents and visitors	
▪ Air quality	
▪ Maintaining PROW more difficult as resources reduced	
▪ Conflict between landowners and public access	
▪ Population expansion	
▪ Difficulty of retaining young people	
▪ Need for more cohesive communication	
▪ Extra visitors additional pressure can have too many – victim of own success	
▪ National curriculum at secondary level restricts communication about landscape values	
<b>Group 2 CW responses</b>	<b>Rank</b>
▪ General disconnect with nature and outdoors	3
▪ Conflicts between different user groups	3
▪ Lack of understanding of management	3
▪ People unsure about what they can and cannot do in the countryside	2

- Muddy and dangerous – a lot of people's perception of going out about in the country 2
- Funding pressures for local authorities 2
- Decline and lack of rural communities 2
- People are too busy/no time 1
- People unsure where to find information as it's all so desperate and spread across multiple places 1
- Kids are increasingly living in a virtual world and are difficult to read and engage 1
- Lack of interpretation and associated list of this 1
- Public Understanding & Enjoyment low on political agenda 1
- Conflict/tension between conservation and tourism 1
- Lower public awareness and sense of place of the High Weald and its distinctive features 1
- Poor conditions of the PROW puts people off 1
- Changing perceptions over time about how the countryside should be – urban park expectations 1
- Reality of farming – mess etc. can be off putting 1
- Disability and aging elderly population makes access tricky
- People don't necessarily understand they can walk in and access the countryside on PROW
- School funding and syllabus
- Difficulties/ barriers to schools getting their pupils outdoors
- High Volumes of traffic and lack of public transport
- Car parking capacity /facilities – e.g. National Trust at Sheffield Park
- Expenses maintaining car parks
- Fly tipping, miss-use, & dog mess puts people off
- Anti-social behaviour – e.g. motor bikes etc.
- Us/them divide between town and country
- Visitor expectations can be quite high
- Countryside can't compete with television or Pokémon Go
- Geocaching and other activities gets people outdoors
- Decline in rural industries and associated experts who can share their knowledge
- Horseyfication
- Letterboxing?

### Q3 i) What would public understanding & enjoyment of the High Weald look like?

#### Group 1 CT responses

- Higher % population know about the High Weald 80%
- Less dog poo and more responsible dog owners
- More respect, less litter, fly tipping etc.
- Accessibility to countryside the same or better – signage and more inclusive
- Increased understanding of value of our woods and countryside
- Every school child in the High Weald access to Welly Walk and or outdoor education
- More funding to achieve aims
- More joined up thinking between organisations including health
- More ownership and engagement with residents and visitors
- Strong planning and policies improved public understanding
- More public involvement to improve quality of schemes
- Improvements in health less depression
- Easily available resources one stop shop and portal
- More groups from urban areas to learn about the area
- More people enjoying and working in the countryside
- More community buses and transport
- More partnership working more effective good use of resources
- More even distribution between visitor destinations
- More volunteers not just visitors
- More natural areas – less suburban
- More celebrations
- Other tourist destinations talking about High Weald context
- In good heart – vibrant/healthy
- Good balance between attractions, destinations and management of visitor numbers
- Sensitive habitats protected
- Better visitor data

#### Group 2 CW responses

- Not necessarily about getting more visitors but ensuring those that do come have a better quality experience and are themselves more responsible
- More proactive projects that achieve management required to maintain landscape
- More minorities enjoying nature – greater diversity
- More funding available – or at least no cuts to funding - requires greater public awareness of importance of HW AONB
- Public empowered and enable to protect the HW AONB
- More productive and vibrant rural economy – more people local
- More recognisable regional identity – “I live in the High Weald” – and people being proud of this
- HW labelling scheme for produce

**Q3 ii) what needs to be done in the next 5 years to improve public understanding & enjoyment of the High Weald?**

<b>Group 1 &amp; Group 2 combined responses</b>	<b>Rank</b>
▪ Using health and wellbeing as a way to get wider demographics involved in outdoors	7
▪ Information sharing between organisations – funding time to do this and funding/money	6
▪ Education and awareness raising for all age groups	6
▪ Effort to build local/community pride and engage with wider landscape as well as local patch	6
▪ Schools programme	5
▪ Awareness of connectivity between landscapes	3
▪ Raising money	3
▪ Partnership working coordinating organisation	3
▪ Increased volunteering – networking between organisations – portal	3
▪ Deer awareness raising in terms of impact on woodland management	2
▪ Need to mobilise people to support our work to conserve the High Weald	2
▪ Gathering and sharing of visitor data	2
▪ Volunteering	1
▪ Maintaining and establishing walking festivals and other events	1
▪ Engaging with targeting key individuals in local communities – e.g. councillors by educating them	1
▪ Improvement in PROW and making the HW more accessible in general - partnership working will help achieve this	1
▪ Strengthen High Weald AONB Partnership	1
▪ Mixed messages – work together to avoid this	
▪ Explore ways in which the HW Unit might engage more on the local level	
▪ You can get greater buy in	
▪ Need overarching strategies for accessible greenspace position – not just piecemeal approach	
▪ Pick up on efforts and projects begun in last MP and dedicate resources to them	
▪ Buggy walks to improve accessibility	
▪ Lewes festival themed around walks for children	
▪ Visitor destinations promoting High Weald	
▪ Linked ticketing between destinations especially to help transport (like 7 Wonders of the Weald)	
▪ Loyalty card for High Weald including transport	