

High Weald AONB Management Plan 2024-2029



High Weald
National
Landscape

Monitoring Addendum

WORKING DOCUMENT MARCH 2025

Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework

“The High Weald Partnership seeks to ensure that actions taken today leave the High Weald National Landscape as a beautiful and functioning biodiverse landscape for future generations, whether they work, live, or spend their leisure time here.

This will require transformational change at a cultural level, with a strengthened appreciation of National Landscape status amongst policymakers supported by increased investment and resources, and wider engagement and understanding.

The High Weald Partnership seeks to respond proactively, ambitiously and urgently to ‘drivers of change,’ including working towards the national goal of reaching net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, reversing the biodiversity crisis, and reducing development pressure.”

High Weald AONB Management Plan 2024-2029

The High Weald National Landscape Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework (PL TOF) Monitoring Addendum is a working document. It should be considered in conjunction with the Local Monitoring Indicators of Success in the published High Weald AONB Management Plan 2024-2029.

Pursuance of any of the targets within the PL TOF should not be at the expense of, or cause harm to the character and natural beauty of the High Weald NL as defined in the Statement of Significance in the High Weald AONB Management Plan or contradict any Management Plan objectives.

Introduction

Defra released its Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP)¹ in 2023, which set out the government's goals for the environment in England. There are ten goals in the EIP (Box 1), which cover a wide range of environmental factors. The Office for Environmental Protection, created in 2021 under the Environment Act, will hold the government and other public authorities to account on the EIP goals.

Three of the goals have non-statutory targets (highlighted goals in Box 1) which make up the 'Protected Landscape Targets and Outcomes Framework' (PLTOF). These set out how the government expects Protected Landscapes to deliver outcomes under three EIP goals. The PL TOF aligns with the High Weald AONB Management Plan's cross-cutting themes on nature recovery (including 30x30), the climate crisis and net zero, soil health, and access.

PL TOF is an indicator-based assessment mechanism mandated by government to monitor progress towards EIP goals within Protected Landscapes. **The PL TOF does not represent the full scope of the statutory purpose of National Landscapes, which is to conserve and enhance natural beauty**, for which objectives, actions and monitoring are set out in the High Weald AONB Management Plan 2024-2029.

BOX 1

EIP environmental goals for England

- | | |
|-----------------|--|
| Goal 1: | Thriving plants and wildlife |
| Goal 2: | Clean air |
| Goal 3: | Clean and plentiful water |
| Goal 4: | Managing exposure to chemicals and pesticides |
| Goal 5: | Maximise our resources, minimise our waste |
| Goal 6: | Using resources from nature sustainably |
| Goal 7: | Mitigating and adapting to climate change |
| Goal 8: | Reduced risk of harm from environmental hazards |
| Goal 9: | Enhancing biosecurity |
| Goal 10: | Enhanced beauty, heritage, and engagement with the natural environment |

1. [Environmental Improvement Plan 2023 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/environmental-improvement-plan-2023)

The targets

There are ten targets for Protected Landscapes under the PL TOF, which are nested within three of the EIP goals. Each of these targets and their application to the High Weald NL is explained in more detail in the following pages.

It is important to note **the targets:**

- **are for the landscape** (i.e. the geographic area), not Protected Landscape teams
- **are non-statutory²**, being ambitions only
- **will be delivered by a range of public bodies, and partnerships between these bodies and land managers**

BOX 2

National targets

Goal 1	Target 1:	Restore or create more than 250,000 hectares of a range of wildlife-rich habitats within Protected Landscapes, outside protected sites by 2042 (from a 2022 baseline).
	Target 2:	Bring 80% of SSSIs within Protected Landscapes into favourable condition by 2042.
	Target 3:	For 60% of SSSIs within Protected Landscapes assessed as having 'actions on track' to achieve favourable condition by 31 January 2028.
	Target 4:	Continuing favourable management of all existing priority habitat already in favourable condition outside of SSSIs (from a 2022 baseline) and increasing to include all newly restored or created habitat through agri-environment schemes by 2042.
	Target 5:	Ensuring at least 65% to 80% of land managers adopt nature friendly farming on at least 10% to 15% of their land by 2030.
	Target 6:	Reduce net greenhouse gas emissions in Protected Landscapes to net zero by 2050 relative to 1990 levels.
Goal 7	Target 7:	Restore approximately 130,000 hectares of peat in Protected Landscapes by 2050.
	Target 8:	Increase tree canopy and woodland cover (combined) by 3% of total land area in Protected Landscapes by 2050 (from 2022 baseline).
Goal 10	Target 9:	Improve and promote accessibility to and engagement with Protected Landscapes for all using existing metrics in our Access for All programme.
	Target 10:	Decrease the number of nationally designated heritage assets at risk in Protected Landscapes.

2. Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, (2024). Policy Paper: Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework [Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework - GOV.UK](#)

Relationship between the PL TOF and the High Weald AONB Management Plan

Character components of natural beauty and drivers of change



Local monitoring Indicators of Success

Local Monitoring for the duration of the current Management Plan are specific to the High Weald landscape and associated with the objectives set out in the Plan.

The Partnership will look to develop a programme to identify appropriate, effective and proportionate mechanisms to measure or judge progress towards indicators of success, and will seek to work with wider partners to secure a long-term programme of monitoring along with appropriate resources.

A full list of the 36 ambitions for local monitoring in the High Weald NL are set out on page 76 of the Management Plan.

National Monitoring Targets and Outcomes Framework



Thriving plants and wildlife

TARGETS 1-5



Mitigating and adapting to climate change

TARGETS 6-8



Enhanced beauty, heritage, and engagement with the natural environment

TARGETS 9-10

Apportionment

Targets 1, 7 and 8 (highlighted in box 2) are apportioned to individual Protected Landscapes. This means there is a spatial target for creation of wildlife rich habitats (1), peatland (7) and tree planting (8). For these specific targets, Protected Landscape teams set the level of ambition that could be achieved based on their local knowledge of the landscape capacity to deliver these targets, and local circumstance. Ambitions are set for the short and long-term. Short-term is defined as within the lifecycle of the current management plan (until 2029), and targets 1 and 8 can be referred directly back to the current High Weald Management Plan objectives, actions and investment priorities. The long-term ambition reflects the wording specific to each target, which ranges from 2028 to 2050.

Target monitoring

Target progress is evaluated by Natural England (NE), based mainly on proxy data deemed representative of the target. Monitoring and reporting are conducted annually by Natural England as part of the EIP annual reporting process. Defra is working (as of late 2024) to develop a reporting system that PLs can use to report progress towards any of the targets not captured through national programme monitoring (e.g. ELMS) carried out by arm's length bodies such as the Forestry Commission and Natural England.

Target delivery and the role of the High Weald National Landscape Partnership

Government departments and arm's length bodies such as Natural England, Forestry Commission and Environment Agency will lead delivery of the actions. These organisations have legal responsibilities, regulatory powers, and are in control of key investment mechanisms such as agri-environment schemes.

The High Weald National Landscape Partnership will facilitate local action through its small multidisciplinary team of 6FTEs (2025/26) and project staff.

The Partnership will:

Lead strategic environmental action

- Using the co-created High Weald AONB Management Plan to guide and shape the activities needed to achieve environmentally beneficial action and land-use change
- Disseminating and promoting the High Weald AONB Management Plan Objectives, Actions, and Priorities to a wide range of stakeholders
- Translating the strategic ambitions of multiple organisations into clear, actionable information for High Weald farmers and land managers while ensuring local needs are effectively communicated to policymakers to align priorities

Further understanding of the High Weald's habitats, species and historic environment and promote land management practices suited to the area's character

- Working directly with land managers to understand and promote practices suited to the High Weald's unique landscape character
- Providing practical guidance and support for their adoption and implementation, demonstrated by the Partnership's early advocacy and facilitation of regenerative farming practices

Drive environmental project development and create flexible investment mechanisms to support environmental action

- Leading strategic and landscape-scale initiatives such as the Weald Forest Ridge Landscape Partnership Scheme. Recognising that investment in project development is essential part of the process of achieving action and delivering high quality environmental outcomes at every scale
- Developing holistic support packages that balance convening, advisory support, and grant funding to address local environmental challenges, for example targeted initiatives such as the Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites Project and the Weald Meadows Initiative

Fill investment gaps to complement national agri-environment programmes

- Managing funding streams that address gaps left by national programmes, ensuring tailored support for High Weald farmers and land managers, for example the Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme and the High Weald Nature and Community Fund grant programmes have enable removal of long-standing barriers to SSSI management

Facilitate farmer and land manager collaboration

- Supporting both topic-focused and geographically-focused collaborations to enable collective action that delivers greater impact than individual efforts alone. For example, the Upper Rother and Dudwell Farm Cluster (a geographically focused cluster) and the High Weald Collaborative Deer Management Initiative (set up to address a landscape-scale challenge)

Strengthen advisory and support networks

- Facilitating a National Landscape-focused advisory network to improve landscape-led advice, encourage integrated, multi-objective land management, and reduce conflicting guidance
- Co-designing environmentally focused training, mentoring, and CPD programmes tailored to the specific needs of High Weald farmers and land managers

Ensure focused environmental investment to maximise impact

- Using local knowledge to guide environmental proposals and funding allocations, ensuring maximum deliverability and impact, supported by sounding boards with diverse representation such as the High Weald Local Advisory Panel, which provides local direction and scrutiny of investment via the Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme

The High Weald National Landscape Partnership currently does not have the powers or resources to:

- Own land, supervise or directly carry out any active land management including habitat restoration, tree planting, farming etc
- Regulate and enforce actions by any organisation or individual to conserve and enhance the High Weald National Landscape
- Force landowners or community group etc. to take up a funding opportunity even when it would benefit the PL TOF
- Campaign or join local campaigns even if they would benefit the PL TOF
- Survey habitats or species to industry standard for PL TOF monitoring purposes
- Hold individuals or organisations to account for failing to contribute to targets

Target delivery risks and uncertainties

Delivery of all these targets are subject to risks and uncertainties including:

Data risks/uncertainties:

- Targets selected in the PL TOF are proxy indicators for some aspects of environmental health. The measures used to support the targets rely on currently available national data sets which may have a symbolic relationship to the target rather than a causal one
- Lack of an independently verifiable mechanism to address qualitative judgements or identify a target range for what might count as ‘favourable condition,’ ‘nature friendly farming’ or ‘wildlife rich habitats’ may militate against these measures being reliable evidence to track progress
- Inadequate evidence for the current baseline state of nature may erode trust in the measures. For example, grasslands across the High Weald are currently poorly recorded, and this could manifest in projects destroying existing sites to (re)create similar habitats (this is already a known issue with BNG, where semi-improved grassland is undervalued, and creation garners greater units compared to enhancement)
- Inconsistent use of terms such as ‘restore’, which do not align with the meaning assigned in LNRS, 30x30 policy and the High Weald Management Plan, adds confusion for users

Delivery risks/uncertainties:

- Resources may be inadequate to provide the long-term support necessary to secure change on the ground, particularly in a landscape where maintaining the existing small-scale habitat mosaic is costly. Land use policy, advisory services, and incentives for land managers (such as agri-environment schemes) need to be coordinated, consistent, and tailored to the landscape’s and land manager’s needs
- The nature of High Weald land ownership – the predominance of small holdings/ family farms – generally necessitates a greater need for facilitation and support at a farming cluster level to secure large scale changes in practice
- Land in the High Weald has always provided multiple functions. The downplaying of food and material production systems which foster a healthy environment, healthy food, and economic benefits to the local area may undermine the necessary engagement of land managers

- Governance gaps for the long-term preservation and maintenance of habitats created through agri-environment schemes (which currently have a lifespan of 5-10yrs) may undermine confidence in the targets
- Creation of ‘new’ habitats (e.g. woodland) will only happen at the expense of losing other habitats (e.g. scrub, heathland or grassland) and productive agricultural land, as well as having potentially adverse impacts on existing landscape character

Policy risks/uncertainties:

- Section 85 CRoW Act duty not being rigorously applied and enforced, to protect National Landscapes from inappropriate development, could undermine the PL TOF
- Potential conflict of targets and associated agendas where arms-length bodies have their own targets to meet, separate to the PL TOF
- Fast-moving central government policy changes focusing on growth, including a move to more centralised Environmental Delivery Plans, brings risk and uncertainty for delivery of the PL TOF at the local scale, and risks resulting in the loss of existing habitats and protected species at a site-specific local level
- Habitat creation and enhancement targets risk being meaningless in terms of positive outcomes for nature if losses (e.g. to development or through damage, disease or pollution) are not counted and monitored alongside gains.
- The drive to deliver targets set at a national scale may have unintended consequences in reducing resources and focus on locally important issues. For example, the HW AONB Management Plan recognises as a priority the need to identify wildlife-rich core sites and protect them from harms including pollution, pesticides, disturbance, and habitat destruction. These outcomes are poorly represented in the PL TOF



The Protected Landscape Targets and Outcomes

The 10 targets are set out in the following tables. Information about each target includes proposed baseline data, relevant AONB Management Plan objectives, delivery responsibilities, and monitoring approaches. Where targets have been apportioned, proposed locally evidenced targets are explained together with what is required for more ambitious targets to be met.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN GOAL 1: Thriving plants and wildlife

TARGET 1

Restore or create more than 250,000 hectares of a range of wildlife-rich habitats within Protected Landscapes, outside protected sites by 2042 (from a 2022 baseline).

Actions should result in an increased extent of wildlife-rich habitat, which is of sufficient quality to support the species that are typically found in that habitat (improvements or maintaining the condition of existing wildlife-rich habitat are excluded from this target).

Defra proposed baseline data for the High Weald NL 2024:

- **There is currently no supplied data on the restoration and creation of habitats from Defra grant-based schemes**

Relevant High Weald AONB Management Plan objectives, priorities and principles

- G1: to restore the natural function of rivers, water courses and water bodies
 - G2: To protect landform and geological features including sandstone outcrops
 - G4: To restore soil health across the High Weald
 - R2: To protect and enhance the ecological function of routeways
 - W1: To maintain and restore the existing extent and pattern of woodland cover and particularly ancient woodland
 - W2: To protect and restore the ecological quality and functioning of woodland at a landscape scale
 - FH2: To maintain the pattern of small irregularly shaped fields bounded by hedgerows and woodlands
 - FH3: To protect and enhance the ecological function of field and heath as part of the complex mosaic of High Weald habitats
 - DS2: To protect wildlife and habitats from light pollution across the High Weald.
- Recovering Nature: Principles and Investment Priorities (MP p 61)
High Weald habitat and 30x30 (MP p60)

Information on habitat restoration and creation can be found here:

[Natural England - Habitat management and restoration](#)
[Priority Habitat Creation and Restoration - data.gov.uk](#)

Delivery responsibility:

- Primarily Defra

The EIP states that new farming schemes nationally (e.g. ELMS) are expected to:

- Contribute 80 to 100% of the target to restore or create more than 500,000 hectares of wildlife-rich habitat outside of protected areas by 2042, including the contribution from peat restoration and biodiverse woodland creation

Restoration and creation actions may include but are not limited to the following:³

- Agri-Environment Schemes or Environmental Land Management (including woodland) schemes
- Biodiversity Net Gain where an excess of wildlife-rich habitat has been created or restored beyond the direct replacement of existing habitat (the direct replacement habitat does not count)
- Local Planning Authority/Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects where habitat delivery is planned through permissions beyond replacement of existing habitat
- Nature-based solutions such as those that address coastal erosion and flooding
- Work under the “Plan for Water” for waterbodies to reach Good Ecological Status, although further actions may also be required
- Work under the Water Industry National Environment Programme
- Grant funded nature projects e.g., Peat Grant, Species Recovery Grant, Species Survival Fund, Heritage Lottery nature projects, Big Nature Impact Fund
- Nature markets based on high-integrity standards set by appropriate standards agencies
- Regulatory or licensing activities for example via statutory authorities such as Forestry Commission, Natural England and Environment Agency
- Management plan agreements – these cover action taken by individual farmers/landowners not covered under existing schemes

Progress is measured by the extent of wildlife rich habitat created or restored within Protected Landscapes, outside of protected sites.

³ [Environment Act Habitat Target – Definitions and Descriptions - TIN219 \(naturalengland.org.uk\)](#)

Apportionment of Target 1

High Weald locally evidenced target

Short-term ambition: **25ha**

Long-term ambition: **700ha**

Defra proposed apportioned target: **11,544ha**

Evidence to support this target:

- Target 1 is not the primary focus for ongoing nature recovery work in the High Weald where enhancement is more important. This includes reducing deer grazing pressure in ancient woodlands and enhancing semi-natural grassland
- Higher tier funding in the High Weald NL is overwhelmingly used for maintaining habitats, which is not currently included in this target
- The Farming in Protected Landscapes grant scheme (FiPL) supported 15ha of habitat creation but over 10,000ha of habitat enhancement over its three-year period 2021-24
- No further Defra supported evidence has been provided of other grant-supported habitat creation in the High Weald over the last five years
- The 'easy wins' in habitat creation have already been achieved
- The amount of off-site BNG anticipated in the High Weald is unclear
- There is concern that habitat creation projects may be at the expense of other valuable habitats and productive agricultural land
- Restoration of 8,730ha of Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) may contribute to this target but easy wins have been achieved already and without careful intervention, restoration using heavy machinery can cause extensive damage to woodland soils
- PAWS restoration can mean the loss of locally economic timber extraction

The landscape could accommodate a substantially higher target if...

- Enhancement of existing habitat counts towards target 1
- Management of existing habitat counts towards target 1, allowing stacking with 30x30 targets
- Soil-focused regenerative nature friendly farming counts towards target 1
- Agri-environment schemes are tailored to the needs and characteristics of the High Weald NL
- The SFI option GRH6 is amended so that good quality semi-improved grasslands are not lost because of inconsistencies in species frequencies compared to BEHTA and UK Habs guidance
- A core of independent land management advisors is consistently funded to facilitate trust and cooperation with land managers during transition to nature-friendly farming
- Restoring the natural function of rivers, water courses and other water bodies is prioritised and funded in the High Weald
- Habitat creation includes support for wood pasture and agroforestry
- Support for farming clusters is increased (to mitigate the dominance of small-holdings which make large scale restoration projects challenging)
- Restoration of Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) is supported by dedicated advisors able to assist with work planning and contract supervision
- Rapid development of the conservation land management sector and rural craft related skills are supported in economic development plans
- Production of Weald Native Origin Wildflower Seed, including and grass seeds is supported to scale-up
- Flooding the lower reaches of the rivers to increase wet woodland habitats, at the expense of lost productive farmland and some built environment, is acceptable

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN GOAL 1: Thriving plants and wildlife

TARGET 2

Bring 80% of SSSIs within Protected Landscapes into favourable condition by 2042.

SSSI are Sites of Special Scientific Importance for wildlife, geology and landform, designated by Natural England under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). This is the highest level of statutory designation in England.

SSSIs in 'favourable' condition, are sites conserved through appropriate management, and the SSSI assets are in a healthy condition. NE advise landowners with SSSIs on their land on appropriate management, condition assessing SSSIs, and should be consulted by landowners wishing to change management or other operations within a SSSI.

Natural England proposed baseline data for the High Weald NL, 2024:

- 141 SSSIs
- 40 (28%) are in favourable condition

Our role: Seek external funding to support SSSI management and utilise our strong relationship with land managers to support SSSI owners. Promote awareness of relevant Management Plan Objectives, Actions, and Principles and Investment Priorities with relevant stakeholders.

Relevant High Weald AONB Management Plan objectives, priorities and principles

G2: To protect landform and geological features including sandstone outcrops

W1: To maintain and restore the existing extent and pattern of woodland cover and particularly ancient woodland

W2: To protect and restore the ecological quality and functioning of woodland at a landscape scale

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

DS2: To protect wildlife and habitats from light pollution across the High Weald
Recovering Nature: Principles and Investment Priorities. (MP pg. 61)

Information on SSSI can be found here:

- [Sites of special scientific interest: managing your land - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/sites-of-special-scientific-interest-managing-your-land)

The location of SSSI can be found here:

- [Sites of Special Scientific Interest \(England\) | Natural England Open Data Geportal \(arcgis.com\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/sites-of-special-scientific-interest-england)

Delivery responsibility:

- Primarily Natural England
- Natural England will need to bring an additional 73 SSSI within the High Weald into favourable condition by 2042, or 6 per year over the next 18 years

Natural England's Action Plan KPI E: [Natural England Action Plan 2024 to 2025 - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/114444/natural-england-action-plan-2024-to-2025.pdf)

- all SSSIs will have an up-to-date condition assessment by 31 January 2028

Natural England Action Plan KPI A:

- Roll out Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) monitoring and develop and implement SSSI improvement plans that drive favourable condition as part of a phased programme towards the 2042 target for 75% of sites to be in favourable condition

The EIP states that new farming schemes nationally (e.g. ELMS) are expected to:

- Contribute at least 50% of the target of bringing protected sites into favourable condition by 204

Progress is measured by percentage of SSSIs within Protected Landscapes in favourable condition.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN GOAL 1: Thriving plants and wildlife

TARGET 3

For 60% of SSSIs within Protected Landscapes assessed as having 'actions on track' to achieve favourable condition by 31 January 2028.

SSSIs are Sites of Special Scientific Importance for wildlife, geology and landform, designated by Natural England under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). This is the highest national statutory designation.

SSSI 'actions on track' mean the site has an up-to-date assessment to take or maintain the site to favourable condition.

Natural England proposed baseline data for the High Weald NL, 2024:

- 141 SSSI
- 20 (14%) have actions on track

Our role: Seek external funding to support SSSI management and utilise our strong relationship with land managers to support SSSI owners. Promote awareness of relevant Management Plan Objectives, Actions, and Principles and Investment Priorities with relevant stakeholders.

Relevant High Weald AONB Management Plan objectives, priorities and principles

G2: To protect landform and geological features including sandstone outcrops

W1: To maintain and restore the existing extent and pattern of woodland cover and particularly ancient woodland

W2: To protect and restore the ecological quality and functioning of woodland at a landscape scale

FH3: To protect and enhance the ecological function of field and heath as part of the complex mosaic of High Weald habitat.

DS2: To protect wildlife and habitats from light pollution across the High Weald

Recovering Nature: Principles and Investment Priorities. (MP pg. 61)

Information on SSSI can be found here:

- [Sites of special scientific interest: managing your land - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

The location of SSSI can be found here:

- [Sites of Special Scientific Interest \(England\) | Natural England Open Data Geoportal \(arcgis.com\)](https://www.naturalengland.org.uk/SSSI/)

Delivery responsibility:

- Natural England
- Natural England will need to have an additional 64 SSSI within the High Weald with actions on track by 2042, or 3-4 per year over the next 18 years

Natural England TIN216 Environment Act Interim Target for protected sites:

- [TIN216 Edition 2 Environment Act Interim Target for protected sites - TIN216](https://www.naturalengland.org.uk/TIN216/)
- 50% of SSSIs to have actions on track to achieve favourable condition by 31 January 2028

Progress is measured by percentage of SSSIs within Protected Landscapes assessed as having 'actions on track' to achieve favourable condition.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN GOAL 1: Thriving plants and wildlife

TARGET 4

Continuing favourable management of all existing priority habitat already in favourable condition outside of SSSIs (from a 2022 baseline) and increasing to include all newly restored or created habitat through agri-environment schemes by 2042.

There are 56 priority habitats in England. The list of these priority habitats helps:

- **Public bodies** – to help them meet their 'biodiversity duty' to be aware of biodiversity conservation in their policy or decision making
- **Landowners** – to inform their nature recovery planning, action and funding applications
- **Funding bodies** – to support suitable nature recovery

Defra proposed baseline data for the High Weald NL, 2024:

- **13 priority habitats including good quality semi-improved grassland**
- **Priority habitats cover 37,511ha (25.7%)**

Our role: Seek to secure the tailoring of agri-environment schemes to the needs of the High Weald landscape and its land managers (in particular the enhancement of good quality semi-improved grassland) and raise awareness of what favourable condition looks like. Promote awareness of relevant Management Plan Objectives, Actions, and Principles and Investment Priorities with relevant stakeholders.

Relevant High Weald AONB Management Plan objectives, priorities and principles

G2: To protect landform and geological features including sandstone outcrops

W1: To maintain and restore the existing extent and pattern of woodland cover and particularly ancient woodland

W2: To protect and restore the ecological quality and functioning of woodland at a landscape scale

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

DS2: to protect wildlife and habitats from light pollution across the High Weald

Recovering Nature: Principles and Investment Priorities. (MP pg. 61)

High Weald habitat and 30x30 (MP pg. 60)

More information on priority habitats can be found here:

- [Habitats and species of principal importance in England - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)
- [Priority Habitats Inventory \(England\) - data.gov.uk](https://data.gov.uk)

Delivery responsibility:

- Primarily Defra via ELMS and other agri-environmental grant schemes

The EIP states that new farming schemes nationally are expected to:

- Support continued favourable management of all existing priority habitat already in favourable condition outside of SSSIs (from a 2022 baseline) and increasing to include all newly restored or created habitat through our new farming schemes by 2042

Progress is measured by extent of priority habitat within Protected Landscapes, outside of protected sites, in favourable management through agri-environment schemes.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN GOAL 1: Thriving plants and wildlife**TARGET 5**

Ensuring at least 65% to 80% of land managers adopt nature friendly farming on at least 10% to 15% of their land by 2030.

Nature friendly farming is delivered through countryside stewardship, and environmental stewardship and the sustainable farming incentive, excluding pilot, test and trial, and grant schemes.

Defra proposed baseline data* for the High Weald, 2024:

- **29,300ha of farmland in nature friendly farming schemes (not including linear features such as hedge restoration)**

Our role: Working with land managers already leading in nature friendly farming, seek to provide advice, guidance and demonstrations of what nature friendly farming looks like in the High Weald, how success can be judged and how it can be part of an economically productive and socially valuable farmed landscape. Seek to secure resources to support a transition to nature friendly farming. Promote awareness of relevant Management Plan Objectives, Actions, and Principles and Investment Priorities with relevant stakeholders.

Relevant High Weald AONB Management Plan objectives, priorities and principles

G4: To restore soil health across the High Weald

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

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

Soil Health: Principles and Investment Priorities. (MP pg. 57)

High Weald habitat and 30x30 (MP pg. 60)

More information on agri-environment schemes can be found here:

- [Environmental Land Management \(ELM\) update: how government will pay for land-based environment and climate goods and services - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
- [Future of farming in England - GOV.UK](#)

Delivery responsibility:

- Defra via ELMS and other agri-environmental grant schemes
- The EIP states that to reach EIP goal 1 the government will 'support a transformation in the management of 70% of our countryside by incentivising farmers to adopt nature friendly farming practices' And, that the governments new farming schemes are expected to: Support 65 to 80% of landowners and farmers to adopt nature friendly farming on at least 10-15% of their land by 2030

Progress is measured by percentage of land managers adopting nature-friendly farming on a percentage of their land.

*There is currently no data on the number of farms adopting nature friendly farming

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN GOAL 1: Thriving plants and wildlife

TARGET 6

Reduce net greenhouse gas emissions in Protected Landscapes to net zero by 2050 relative to 1990 levels.

Climate change is one of the two big crisis's which everyone must contend with (along with biodiversity loss). Both climate mitigation and adaption are required to prevent temperatures exceeding a 2oC rise and having a critical impact on all lives.

Defra proposed baseline data for the High Weald NL, 2024:

- Up to 50.4 million tons of carbon is stored in High Weald soils and plants
- High Weald habitats sequester on average 757,000 tons of carbon a year

Our role: Produce a climate change adaption plan for the High Weald by 2028. Promote polices and actions which reduce carbon emissions; foster land management approaches which protect soil and sequester carbon or lock up carbon for the longer term e.g. in building materials and rooftop solar panels on farm buildings. Promote awareness of relevant Management Plan Objectives, Actions, and Principles and Investment Priorities with relevant stakeholders.

Relevant High Weald AONB Management Plan objectives, priorities and principles

G3: To pursue net zero across the High Weald without compromising its characteristic landscape beauty

Climate Crisis: Principles and Investment Priorities. (MP pg. 64)

Planning Principle 5

More information on emissions within Protected Landscapes can be found here:

- [UK local authority and regional greenhouse gas emissions statistics, 2005 to 2022 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

Delivery responsibility:

- Primarily Defra

The EIP proposes that government will:

- Explore how a range of actions through farming schemes can be paid for to support nature-based solutions and decarbonisation in the land-based sector
- Use the Farming Innovation Programme, and Farming Investment Fund to explore innovation, science and technology to support climate adaption and net zero
- Support agroforestry through SFI and CS Plus with new grant offers

Calculate carbon through farm-level Monitoring, Reporting and Verification (MRV).

Progress is measured by the level of greenhouse gas emissions within Protected Landscapes – current data sources unknown, current lead unknown.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN GOAL 7: Mitigating and adapting to climate change

TARGET 7

Restore approximately 130,000 hectares of peat in Protected Landscapes by 2050.

Peat soil is defined as soil with 30% or more of organic matter. Deep peat has a depth greater than 40cm, peat soils between 10-40cm are referred to as shallow peat. The peat target refers only to deep peat.

Defra proposed baseline data for the High Weald, 2024:

- Deep peaty soils 34.45ha (0.02%)
- England peat map is due to be published in March 2025, with updated evidence of extent, depth and condition expected in April 2025 and will be not comparable to the current statistics

Relevant High Weald AONB Management Plan objectives, priorities and principles

G2: To protect landform and geological features including sandstone outcrops

G3: To pursue net zero across the High Weald without compromising its characteristic landscape beauty

G4: To restore soil health across the High Weald

Soil Health: Principles and Investment Priorities. (MP pg. 57)

More information on peat soils can be found here:

- [With a lot of help from our friends: assembling an England Peat Map – Natural England \(blog.gov.uk\)](#)
- [Nature for Climate Peatland Grant Scheme - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Delivery responsibility:

- Natural England/Defra

Natural England's Action Plan KPI A3:

- 2.15 mega tonnes carbon secured through 25,000ha peat restoration under Nature for Climate Peatland grant scheme

Beyond 2025, the main delivery vehicles for peat will be incentives through the government's new farming schemes:

- From 2024, Countryside Stewardship will provide a key funding stream for wetter modes of farming
- Develop new farming scheme options to support the restoration of lowland peat and wetter farming methods
- Landscape Recovery will provide long-term funding to support large-scale peatland restoration projects
- The Farming Innovation Programme supports applications for research and development in paludiculture
- Launch a £6.6 million lowland peat research and development programme
- Continue to deliver the £5.6 million Paludiculture Exploration Fund
- Developing further a Peatland Code for private investment
- Publish the new England peat map

Progress is measured by extent of peat under restoration in Protected Landscapes on the Peatland Restoration Register (under development by Defra).

Apportionment of Target 7

High Weald locally evidenced target

Short term ambition: **understand the accuracy of peatland mapping**

Long term ambition: **0ha**

Defra proposed apportioned target: **14.43ha**

Evidence to support this target:

- The current peatland grants schemes do not cover the High Weald
- Uncertainty around current peat mapping and no evidence of where deep peat has been lost from the High Weald
- There is a lack of expertise to lead on peat restoration locally
- Peatland restoration is not a local priority
- The peatland restoration register is still in development by Defra

The landscape could accommodate the Defra target if...

- Peatland grant schemes included the High Weald landscape
- Funding for development of appropriate expertise was available in this landscape
- Funding was available to improve peatland mapping locally and understand peat restoration regionally

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN GOAL 7: Mitigating and adapting to climate change

TARGET 8

Increase tree canopy and woodland cover (combined) by 3% of total land area in Protected Landscapes by 2050 (from 2022 baseline).

This target includes tree canopy cover both within woodlands, and outside woodlands including traditional orchards, wood pasture and parkland, infield trees and tree cover in urban areas, which provide many benefits for wildlife and people. This target is key to achieving the government's Net Zero Strategy.

Defra proposed baseline data for the High Weald NL, 2024:

- **Tree canopy and woodland cover 51,624.07ha (35.3%)**
- **This includes all types of woodlands, trees outside woodlands (e.g. trees in parks, urban areas, in field trees), orchards, ancient woodland, conifer plantations, coppiced woodland and shrubs**

Relevant High Weald AONB Management Plan objectives, priorities and principles

- G3: To pursue net zero across the High Weald without compromising its characteristic landscape beauty
- W1: To maintain and restore the existing extent and pattern of woodland cover and particularly ancient woodland
- W2: To protect and restore the ecological quality and functioning of woodland at a landscape scale
- W3: To protect the archaeology and historic assets of AONB woodlands
- W4: To increase the output of sustainably produced high-quality timber and underwood for local markets
- FH1: To secure agriculturally productive use for the fields of the High Weald, especially for local markets, as part of sustainable land management
- FH2: To maintain the pattern of small irregularly shaped fields bounded by hedgerows and woodlands
- LBE1: To improve returns from, and thereby increase entry and retention in, farming, forestry, horticulture and other land management activities that conserve and enhance natural beauty

High Weald Management Plan sets out guidance on tree planting and woodland creation (MP pg. 64)

High Weald habitat and 30x30 (MP pg. 60)

For more information on woodlands:

- [The benefits of woodland creation: Woods and Carbon - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)
- [Tree planting and woodland creation: overview - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

Delivery responsibility:

- Defra /Forestry Commission

The EIP sets out the government's national targets as:

- Increase tree canopy and woodland cover to 16.5% of total land area in England by 2050
- Interim target to increase this by 0.26% (equivalent to 34,000 hectares) by 31 January 2028, in line with the trajectory required to achieve the long-term target

The tree canopy and woodland cover target will also play a key role in meeting government species abundance targets, delivering around 20% of the total hectares of new habitat creation and restoration (target 1).

Progress is measured by extent of tree canopy and woodland cover in Protected Landscapes.

Apportionment of Target 8

High Weald locally evidenced target

Short term ambition: **20ha**

Long term ambition: **to be discussed**

Defra proposed apportioned target: **4,385ha**

Evidence to support this target:

- Not aligning with High Weald Management Plan objectives on woodland maintenance and enhancement before tree planting – the Management Plan sets out the importance of the High Weald’s small-scale medieval fieldscape which means large woodland creation schemes are usually unsuitable
- Increases in tree cover can be best accommodated in the High Weald through increased scrub habitat (managed), thickened hedgerows, infield trees, agroforestry, and wood pasture (ideally by natural regeneration) and street trees
- It is unclear how much canopy will be lost to tree diseases such as Ash Die Back (ADB) and the Ips spruce bark beetle, and how these losses will be accommodated in the target
- England Woodland Creation Offer has not delivered increased canopy cover in the High Weald so far beyond a handful of small (1ha-) creation schemes
- The ‘easy wins’ have already been achieved in woodland creation
- The risk of loss to unregistered quality grasslands is considerable (2024 survey of 316 unregistered fields revealed the majority to be good quality semi-improved or lowland meadow)
- High deer pressure across the whole landscape are hampering tree establishment
- Forestry Commission woodland sensitivity mapping is currently unsuitable for the High Weald as it does not take adequate account of historic field systems, archaeology and many good quality species rich grasslands
- The current tree cover figure may be an underestimate - there is an additional 1,942ha of unrecorded trees outside of woodland not accounted for in the NFI (Friends of the Earth [Mapping English tree cover: results, ranking and methodology | Policy and insight](#))

Although this landscape cannot accommodate the apportioned Defra target without damage to open habitats, landscape character or agricultural production, it could accommodate a higher tree cover target if...

- Enhancement of existing woodland habitat counts towards target 8 and is prioritised in policy and adequately resourced
- Natural regeneration is prioritised in policy (including the BNG metric) and the High Weald is recognised as an area-wide natural regeneration zone
- Grant support for trees and woodlands is tailored to the needs of the High Weald and its land managers including support for in-field trees, wood pasture, agroforestry, wet woodland, and maintenance of trees in hedgerows
- Deer are effectively tackled through a coordinated, adequately funded whole landscape approach
- Trials of agroforestry schemes tailored to the High Weald are promoted and supported
- Local tree nurseries are supported to grow local and climate resilient varieties of trees and shrub, at scale to supplement natural regeneration where needed
- The provision of specialist advice on trees outside of woodlands is adequately resourced
- Ambitious standards for street trees and urban forestry are required in new developments
- Tree planting in the High Weald focuses on growing timber for construction (including appropriate conifers)
- The long-established culture of timber and wood utilisation in the High Weald is supported through economic regeneration policy and funding
- Support for orchards and nut-producing trees is improved
- If PAWS restoration were included in this target

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN GOAL 10: Enhancing beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment**TARGET 9**

Improve and promote accessibility to and engagement with Protected Landscapes for all using existing metrics in our Access for All programme.

The benefits of access to green space on health and wellbeing has become universally understood in recent years, however equity of access remains a challenge. The Access for All programme started in 2006, and specifically addressed the issues faced by disabled passengers, and those with mobility issues when using railway stations across the nation. Further guidance from Defra on what is meant by the 'AfA metrics' and how these will be applied to furthering access in protected landscapes, is yet to come.

Within the High Weald NL boundary there are:

- **2,126km of footpaths**
- **384km of bridleway**
- **61km of byway**
- **30 manor houses, castle and gardens with public access**
- **2km of climbable sandrock**

Our role: Promote emotional engagement with nature and the health and wellbeing benefits this brings to people. Promote awareness of relevant Management Plan Objectives, Actions, and Principles and Investment Priorities with relevant stakeholders.

Relevant High Weald AONB Management Plan objectives, priorities and principles

R1: To maintain the historic pattern, morphology and features of routeways

PQ3: To foster and promote equitable access and informal enjoyment of the High Weald landscape and the integrated management of its resources for the enjoyment of natural beauty by all

People & Access Principles and Investment Priorities. (MP pg. 67)

For more information on access to green spaces:

- [Access to green space in England - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
- [Improving access to greenspace: 2020 review \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

Delivery responsibility:

- Primarily government investment

The EIP sets out how the government will deliver promotion of accessibility nationally:

- Increase the accessibility of green and blue spaces through the £14.5 million 'Access for All' programme
- Create or significantly refurbish over 100 green spaces through the Levelling Up Parks Fund
- Complete delivery of the England Coast Path and the new Coast to Coast National Trail
- Green the Green Belt as set out in the Levelling Up White Paper by identifying key areas for nature restoration through the roll out of Local Nature Recovery Strategies
- Invest in a new national landscapes partnership for National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and National Trails
- Extend the delivery of our successful Farming in Protected Landscapes programme, using lessons learned to inform future farming schemes
- Publish government ambitions for improving the quantity, quality and permanency of woodland access
- Invest in active travel, with a vision for half of all journeys in towns and cities to be cycled or walked by 2030. £35 million funding has already been committed this fiscal year
- Continue to progress assessments to designate two new Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and two AONB extensions
- Scale up green social prescribing across the healthcare system
- Develop the Climate Action Award pilot and roll out in 2024. This will recognise the achievements of children and young people in taking action to increase biodiversity and develop their skills and knowledge of climate change
- Deliver a new Natural History GCSE by 2025
- Continue contributions to targeted grant schemes which support our work on heritage

Progress is measured by improve and promote accessibility to and engagement with Protected Landscapes for all using existing metrics in the government's Access for All programme.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN GOAL 10: Enhancing beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment

TARGET 10

Decrease the number of nationally designated heritage assets at risk in Protected Landscapes.

The Heritage at Risk (HAR) programme is a Historic England initiative which identifies those historic sites that are most at risk of being lost because of neglect, decay or inappropriate development. Historic England maintains and updates annually the Heritage at Risk Register.

Historic England baseline data for the High Weald NL, 2024:

- **5,301 listed buildings of which five (0.09%) are at risk**
- **92 scheduled monuments of which eight (8.7%) are at risk**
- **44 registered parks and gardens of which three (6.8%) are at risk**
- **There is one registered battlefield, and it is not at risk**

Our role: Promote awareness of Heritage Assets as an important part of the natural beauty of the High Weald NL. Promote awareness of relevant Management Plan Objectives, Actions, and Principles and Investment Priorities with relevant stakeholders.

Relevant High Weald AONB Management Plan objectives, priorities and principles

S3: To conserve the distinct built heritage of the High Weald

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

FH4: To protect individual archaeological features as well as historic assets and pattern of field and heath

Planning Principle 4

For more information on heritage at risk:

- [Heritage at Risk in the South East 2023 | Historic England](#)

Delivery responsibility:

- Historic England

Progress is measured by number and percentage of nationally designated heritage assets in Protected Landscapes to be deemed at risk



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