

High Weald AONB Sign Guidance



Produced by: High Weald AONB Unit
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An Outstanding Medieval Landscape

Our Guidance Programme

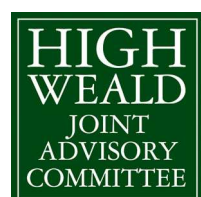
The High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is one of the best surviving medieval landscapes in northern Europe. The components of the High Weald's natural beauty that make it recognisably distinct are:

- ✦ **Geology, landform, water systems and climate:** deeply incised, ridged and faulted landform of clays and sandstone from which spring numerous gill streams.
- ✦ **Settlement:** dispersed historic settlements of farmsteads and hamlets and late medieval villages.
- ✦ **Routeways:** ancient routeways often narrow, deeply sunken, and edged with trees, hedges, wildflower-rich verges and boundary banks.
- ✦ **Woodland:** a great extent of ancient woods, gills, and shaws in small holdings
- ✦ **Field and heath :** small, irregularly shaped and productive fields often bounded by, and forming a mosaic with, hedgerows and small woodlands

The High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) is a partnership established in 1991 of 15 local authorities, Defra, Natural England and organisations representing farming, woodland, access and community interests. The JAC is responsible for publishing and monitoring the **statutory AONB Management Plan**.

The JAC is supported by a small, dedicated staff team, the **High Weald AONB Unit**, which develops understanding of the High Weald's key components - their history, development, distribution, special qualities, deterioration, damage and loss - to provide an evidence base for the AONB Management Plan and related policy and guidance.

This guidance is based on that understanding and aims to help everybody conserve and enhance **one of England's finest landscapes**.



The High Weald AONB Unit
Woodland Enterprise
Centre
Hastings Road
Flimwell
East Sussex TN5 7PR

T: 01580 879500
E: info@highweald.org
Web: www.highweald.org

The views expressed in this report are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the High Weald Partnership.

1. Introduction

1.1 The rationale for installing AONB signs

A number of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, including the Kent Downs, the Surrey Hills, the Chilterns, and the Quantocks, have installed signposts highlighting the existence of the designation. Typically these have taken the form of fairly standard roadside signs marking either the boundary of the AONB, or the fact that a village is located within the AONB itself. In addition, some AONBs have taken a slightly different approach, flagging up “gateway” towns and villages on the edge of the AONB, or using non-standard signs or markers/sculptures to signal entry into the protected landscape.

However, regardless of the type and style of sign the objective is the same: to raise awareness of the area and its designation to visitors and locals alike.

In the High Weald the rationale for installing signs is no different. The primary purpose of installing High Weald AONB signs is to raise public awareness of the areas’ designation and location. However, according to experience in other AONBs, signs can also deliver a number of additional benefits beyond profile-raising, including:

- Promoting pride in the local area
- Creating a sense of regional identity
- Helping improve people’s understanding of the landscape and its character
- Stimulating a desire to care for and conserve the landscape and its special features
- Raising awareness of the quality of the landscape as being on a par with National Parks.

Although there is no data to formally prove or quantify these benefits, staff members at other AONBs (including the Kent Downs and Surrey Hills) attest anecdotally to the effectiveness of AONB signs as a means to improving awareness and understanding.

1.2 The purpose of this guidance

The High Weald AONB sign guidance has two broad purposes:

1. To lay out the principles for choosing the location of AONB signs – including boundary signs, village signs and gateways signs;
2. To provide guidance on the design of the signs themselves.

The guidance should help to prioritise the best area(s) to locate a new sign. It should also help avoid a piecemeal approach and ensure that appropriate and consistent AONB sign designs are installed across the length and breadth of the High Weald.

2. Three types of AONB sign

2.1 High Weald AONB boundary signs

The first – and perhaps most obvious – type of AONB-related sign is the AONB boundary sign. These signs are placed near the boundary of the AONB and are designed to highlight the fact you are entering a protected landscape.

2.2 High Weald AONB village signs

The second type of AONB sign is the village sign. These signs are placed at entrance to a village (or town) and are designed to highlight the fact you are entering a settlement located within the High Weald AONB.

2.3 High Weald gateway signs

The final type of sign is the gateway sign. Like village signs, these signs are placed at the entrances to villages (or towns) on the immediate edge of the AONB boundary. Their purpose is to highlight the fact that you are about to enter the AONB even though you are not already within its bounds. These signs should be used sparingly and only in appropriate locations.

3. Location strategy

3.1 High Weald AONB boundary signs

Given that raising awareness of the designation is one of the main reasons for installing AONB signs, roads which tend to have higher volumes of traffic should be a higher priority than lesser used smaller roads.

Nevertheless, certain roadside locations may be chosen over others for particular reasons – e.g. the availability of funding, degree of local support, or the suitability of that location due its particular context (for example, it may be best to avoid placing signs in areas where the natural beauty of that location is not immediately apparent, such as in less rural locations, as this could appear misleading/confusing to members of the public).

Generally, the following principles should guide the placement of “High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty” boundary signs:

- All things being equal busier roads should be favoured over quieter roads
- Locations where there is a stark juxtaposition between the natural beauty/characteristic features of the AONB and the surrounding area is clear should be favoured over locations where the difference between the designated and non-designated area is less obvious
- If possible an even spread of locations around the AONB boundary – including internal boundaries, such as the Tunbridge Wells and Crowborough cut-outs – should be sought
- Boundary signs should be sited in locations relatively free of other signs to ensure the designation is not lost in a sea of clutter
- Conversely, boundary signs should avoid contributing to sign clutter in sensitive areas that are relatively clutter-free
- Signs should be placed in locations where they are clearly legible from a car – something that is particularly important on faster road

3.2 High Weald AONB village signs

The following principles should guide the placement of High Weald AONB village signs:

- All things being equal busier/main roads into and out of the village should be favoured over quieter roads
- Where replacement is not possible AONB signs should be combined with/append to existing village signs to avoid contributing to sign clutter
- Where Neighbourhood Plans are in the process of being produced/implemented, the installation of High Weald village signs may be encouraged to boost recognition of – and local pride in – the AONB
- High Weald AONB signs should ideally be sited in places where the transition from countryside to village is clear.

3.3 High Weald gateway signs

The following principles should guide the placement of High Weald AONB gateway signs:

- AONB gateway signs should be used sparingly and only where the village is situated immediately adjacent to the AONB. All things being equal boundary signs and village signs should be prioritised over gateway signs
- Where replacement is not possible AONB signs should be appended to existing village signs to avoid contributing to sign clutter
- Where Neighbourhood Plans are in the process of being produced/implemented, the installation of High Weald gateway signs may be encouraged to boost recognition of – and local pride in – the AONB
- High Weald AONB signs should ideally be sited in places where the transition from countryside to village is clear, and – specifically in the case of gateway signs – as close to the AONB boundary as possible.

4. Design guidance

4.1 The wider AONB context

As previously mentioned, a number of other AONBs across the country have decided to promote the installation of signs in order to raise awareness of the designation and their landscapes. These signs have taken a diverse range of forms, from fairly standard metal and plastic road signs, to stone marker posts, to wooden sculptures constructed from locally sourced timber. To get a flavour of this diversity, some of the different AONB sign designs are displayed in the images below.

Figure 1. Example of an “In the...” AONB village sign in the Kent Downs.



Figure 2. Example of a two part AONB village sign on oak posts in the Quantock Hills.



Figure 3. Example of a gateway AONB village sign on oak posts in the Surrey Hills.



Figure 4. Example of an AONB boundary sign on a stone marker post in the Cotswolds.



Figure 5. Example of a metal AONB boundary sign on a metal post in the Forest of Bowland.



Figure 6. Example of a wooden (oak) AONB boundary sculpture in the Surrey Hills.



4.2 The High Weald AONB approach

Given that the overarching purpose of installing AONB signs is to raise awareness of both the designation and the area, ensuring all signs follow a consistent design is crucial to boosting recognition across the region through the promotion of a unified identity/brand.

Furthermore, in view of the High Weald's large size (it is the largest AONB in the South East and the fourth largest nationally), as well as its administrative complexity (it covers 15 different local authorities and 99 parishes), the overall approach to sign design will seek to remain in keeping with relatively standard highway signs. This approach has several advantages.

- It reduces cost. Producing standard highway-style signs is cheaper than making more elaborate sculptures, or bespoke metal or stone designs.
- It makes the process of attaining highway authority permission easier, as non-standard designs must be rigorously assessed to ensure they meet the relevant safety standards. Moreover, even if non-standard signs are approved there remain issues around ongoing maintenance costs, as well as sometimes needing to be insured against damage and theft.
- Despite not being as visually interesting as non-standard design (e.g. the wooden sculptures used in the Surrey Hills AONB), taking a more standard highway-style approach still provides leeway for personalisation — for by adding a 'heritage' style font for elements of the AONB wording, for example.
- The use of a more standard approach to sign design means that AONB-related signage can be more easily incorporated into existing village signs, either when they are replaced or through the addition of a strip beneath the existing highways-approved sign. This ease of incorporation into the existing sign environment has the added advantage of reducing sign clutter through the proliferation of non-standard signs in addition to the pre-existing highways signage
- This approach has been successfully deployed on a large scale in other AONBs, such as the Kent Downs, and will be easier to rollout over the long-term than some of the non-standard approaches taken in other AONBs where future replication may be problematic
- Using a highways-style approach helps to ensure the original aim of consistency is achieved, as broadly following existing highways designs makes it easier for AONB signs of all types – boundary markers, village and gateway signs – to adhere to a similar template. In the absence of such a template, there may be a temptation to introduce different style signs marking the boundary to those highlighting villages in the AONB. By avoiding this and maintaining a more uniform and 'official' approach, it will be easier to achieve the ultimate goal of raising the public's recognition of the High Weald AONB as a single designated area.

However, despite opting for a relatively uniform and standardised approach, not all AONB signs will appear exactly the same. This is due to the fact that there will be several different types of sign, but each incorporating common design principles. The three broad types of sign – and the principles governing their design – are identified in the following sections.

4.3 High Weald AONB boundary signs

The following principles should guide the design of "High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty" boundary signs:

- All signs should use the same typeface (Times New Roman) in order to ensure consistency across the area and thus improve public recognition, as well as to convey a "heritage" feel
- The first line of text (in this case "High Weald") should be capitalised whilst Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and AONB – "Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty" – should be spelled out in full

- “High Weald” should appear on its own line in capital letters, with “Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty” in lowercase letters, on a single line below
- Where possible new signs should be mounted on locally sourced oak posts 8ft (c.2.4m) in length, depending on the requirements of each particular site. Using oak posts will help contribute to Objective W4 (p.39) of the High Weald AONB Management Plan — *“To increase the output of sustainably produced high-quality timber and underwood for local markets”* — as well as to add to local character. Brown, black or grey recycled plastic posts (with no significant difference in cost) may, however, be acceptable where signs occur near/adjacent to other signs also mounted on black posts
- A simplified version of the High Weald AONB area logo should be used (i.e. one that only displays a black silhouette of the anvil) rather than the standard logo, which is too small to read on a road sign
- Detailed information on the size, materials, colours, font etc. may be found in in Appendix A.

Figure 7. High Weald AONB boundary sign option 1.



4.4 High Weald AONB village signs

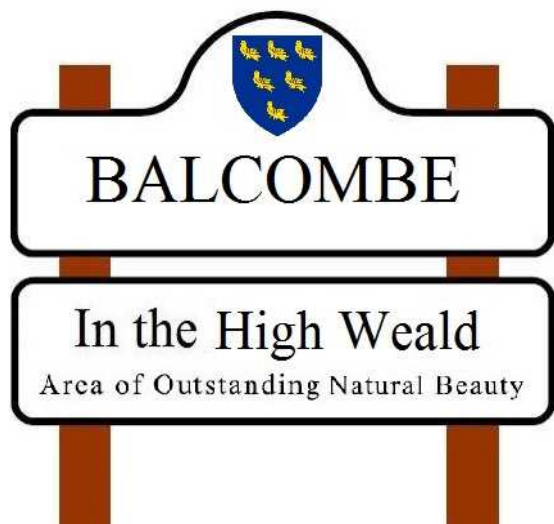
The following principles should guide the design of “High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty” boundary signs:

- All signs should use the same standard highways typeface in order to ensure consistency across the area and thus improve public recognition
- The first line of text (in this case “High Weald”) should be capitalised whilst Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and AONB – “Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty” – should be spelled out in full
- “In the High Weald” should appear on its own line in capital letters, with “Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty” in lowercase letters, on a single line below
- Where possible new signs should be mounted on locally sourced oak posts 8ft (c.2.4m) in length, depending on the requirements of each particular site. Using oak posts will help contribute to Objective W4 (p.39) of the High Weald AONB Management Plan — *“To increase the output of sustainably produced high-quality timber and underwood for local markets”* — as well as to add to local character. Brown, black or grey recycled plastic posts (with no significant difference in cost) may, however, be acceptable where signs occur near/adjacent to other signs also mounted on black posts
- A simplified version of the High Weald AONB area logo should be used (i.e. one that only displays a black silhouette of the anvil) rather than the standard logo, which is too small to read on a road sign
- “In the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty” can appear on either the same sign as the village name or on a new strip below, depending on whether it is a sign replacement or an addition to an existing sign
- Detailed information on size, materials, colours, font etc. may be found in Appendix B.

Figure 10. High Weald AONB village sign option 1 (for use when installing a new village sign).



Figure 11. High Weald AONB village sign option 2 (for use when adding to existing village signs).



4.5 High Weald AONB “Gateway” signs

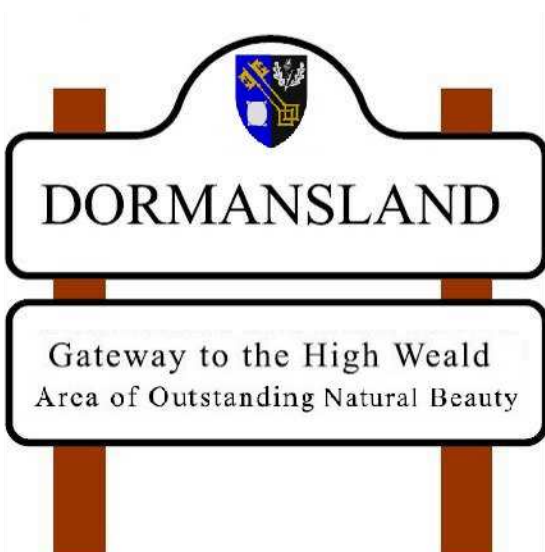
The following principles should guide the design of “High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty” boundary signs:

- All signs should use the same typeface (Times New Roman) in order to ensure consistency across the area and thus improve public recognition, as well as to convey a “heritage” feel
- The first line of text (in this case “High Weald”) should be capitalised whilst Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and AONB – “Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty” – should be spelled out in full
- “Gateway to the High Weald” should appear on its own line in capital letters, with “Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty” in lowercase letters, on a single line below
- Where possible new signs should be mounted on locally sourced oak posts 8ft (c.2.4m) in length, depending on the requirements of each particular site. Using oak posts will help contribute to Objective W4 (p.39) of the High Weald AONB Management Plan — *“To increase the output of sustainably produced high-quality timber and underwood for local markets”* — as well as to add to local character. Brown, black or grey recycled plastic posts (with no significant difference in cost) may, however, be acceptable where signs occur near/adjacent to other signs also mounted on black posts
- A simplified version of the High Weald AONB area logo should be used (i.e. one that only displays a black silhouette of the anvil) rather than the standard logo, which is too small to read on a road sign
- “Gateway to the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty” can appear on the same sign as the village name, or on a new strip below, depending on whether it is a sign replacement or an addition to an existing sign
- Detailed information on the size, materials, colours, font etc. may be found in Appendix C.

Figure 12. High Weald AONB gateway sign option 1
(for use when replacing old village signs).



Figure 13. High Weald AONB gateway sign option 2
(for use when adding to an existing village sign).



Appendix A:

High Weald AONB sign design specifications – boundary signs

The High Weald AONB boundary signs consist of three components which are constructed in either one or two parts.

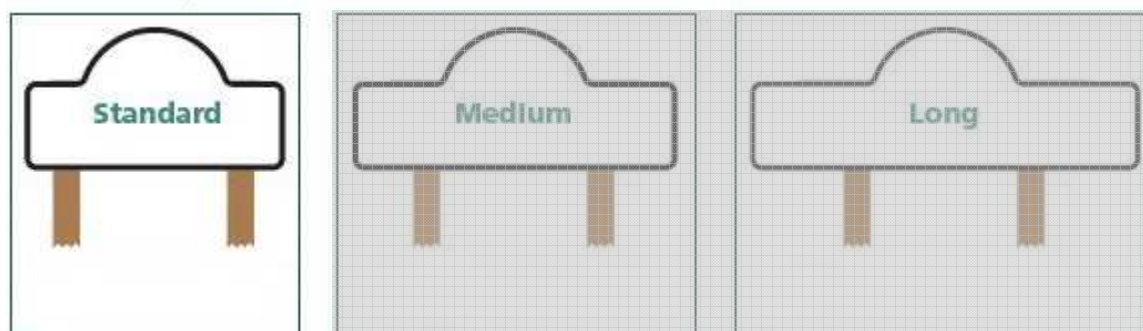
A 1. Village or County Logo

A 2. “High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty”



Overall Size

Part A come in three lengths, standard, medium and long to accommodate the number of characters in village names. However, in the case of AONB boundary signs, only the standard is used.



Materials

Part A is constructed using Dibond, an aluminium faced composite sheet with a polythene cover; and digital or vinyl cut lettering. The logo is applied using a digital process or vinyl cutting depending on the complexity and colour.

The wooden posts used for mounting the sign are 4inch x 4inch wooden oak posts. These are generally 8ft long. This is to allow them to be seated securely into the ground.

Other considerations

Approval is required by the relevant County Council manager including a site survey prior to construction.

The site should be scanned to ensure no pipework is underneath.

The optimum height of the sign is 5ft (c.1.5m).

Appendix B:

High Weald AONB sign design specifications – village signs

The High Weald AONB village signs consist of three components which are constructed in either one or two parts.

One part version:

A 1. Village or County Logo

A 2. Village Name & “In the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty”

Two part version:

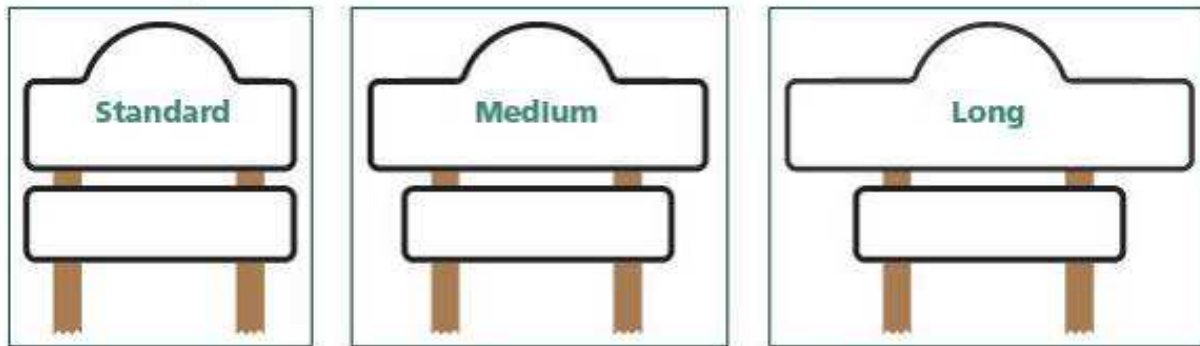
B 1. Village or County Logo

B 2. Village Name

B 3. “In the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty”

Overall Size

Over and above this part A come in three lengths, standard, medium and long to accommodate the number of characters in village names. Wherever possible it is recommended standard is used.



Materials

Part A and B Village signs are constructed using Dibond, an aluminium faced composite sheet with a polythene cover; and digital or vinyl cut lettering. The logo is applied using a digital process or vinyl cutting depending on the complexity and colour.

The wooden posts used for mounting the sign are 4inch x 4inch wooden oak posts. These are generally 8ft long. This is to allow them to be seated securely into the ground.

Other considerations

Approval is required by the relevant County Council manager including a site survey prior to construction.

The site should be scanned to ensure no pipework is underneath.

The optimum height of the sign is 5ft (c.1.5m).



Appendix C:

High Weald AONB sign design specifications – gateway signs

The High Weald AONB village signs consist of three components which are constructed in either one or two parts.

One part version:

A 1. Village or County Logo

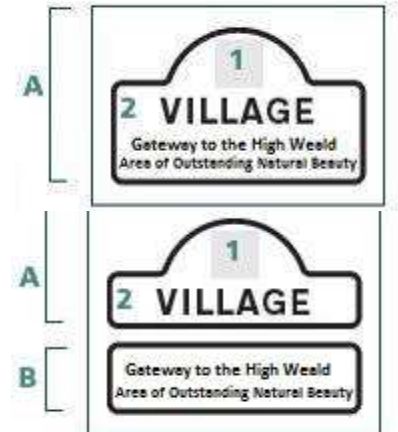
A 2. Village Name & “Gateway to the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty”

Two part version:

B 1. Village or County Logo

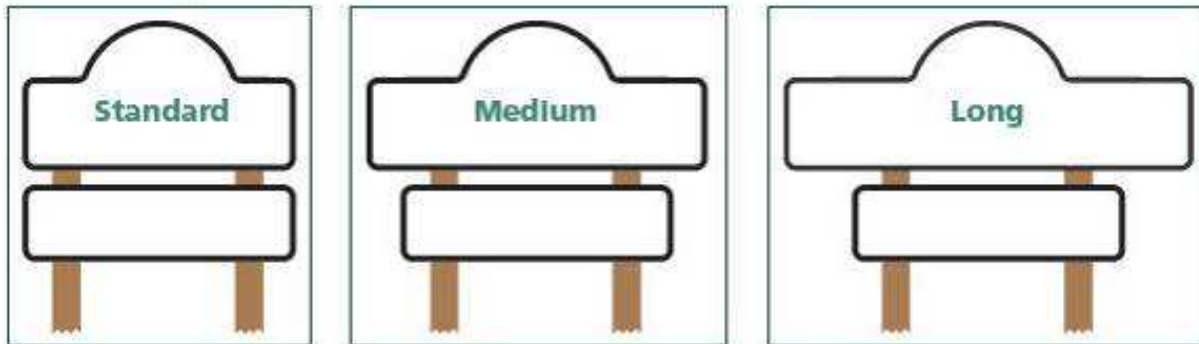
B 2. Village Name

B 3. “Gateway to the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty”



Overall Size

Over and above this part A come in three lengths, standard, medium and long to accommodate the number of characters in village names. Wherever possible it is recommended standard is used.



Materials

Part A and B Gateway signs are constructed using Dibond, an aluminium faced composite sheet with a polythene cover; and digital or vinyl cut lettering. The logo is applied using a digital process or vinyl cutting depending on the complexity and colour.

The wooden posts used for mounting the sign are 4inch x 4inch wooden oak posts. These are generally 8ft long. This is to allow them to be seated securely into the ground.

Other considerations

Approval is required by the relevant County Council manager including a site survey prior to construction.

The site should be scanned to ensure no pipework is underneath.

The optimum height of the sign is 5ft above ground level (c.1.5m).