



## HIGH WEALD JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

**A meeting of the Joint Advisory Committee will be held at East Grinstead Town Council, East Court, College Lane, East Grinstead, West Sussex, RH19 3LT followed by a light lunch.**

1. Apologies
2. Members' Interests  
Members and officers are invited to make any declarations of any interest that they may have in relation to items on the agenda and are reminded to make any declaration at any stage during the meeting if it then becomes apparent that this may be required when a particular item or issue is considered.
3. Urgent matters  
Members are asked to raise any urgent matters at this stage and not at the end of the meeting. The Chairman will decide whether the JAC should discuss any items so raised but asks members to give her prior notification of such matters unless urgency prevents it.
4. Minutes of the JAC meeting  
To confirm the minutes of the last meeting of the JAC held on 6 November 2015 (page 3)
5. Minutes of the Management Board Meeting  
To confirm the notes arising from the Management Board meeting held on 2 March 2016 (page 9)
6. Minutes of the Officer Steering Group  
To confirm the notes arising from the Officer Steering Group meeting held on 10 February 2016 (page 14) and to note the Planning Briefing Paper appended
7. Revenue Budget 2016/2017  
To consider a report by the Deputy Treasurer (page 20)
8. Land Management Initiative  
To consider a report by the AONB Business Manager and presentation by the AONB Land Manager Advisors (page 25)
9. Neighbourhood Planning  
To consider a report (page 34) and presentation by the AONB Landscape Advisor
10. Risk Management  
To consider a report by the AONB Director (page 36), Risk Log appended
11. Any other business  
Joint Advisory Committee Meeting – November 2016.

To: ALL MEMBERS OF THE HIGH WEALD AONB JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Samantha Nicholas  
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Agenda Item: 4

## HIGH WEALD AONB JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE



6 November 2015 Meeting of the Joint Advisory Committee held at Great Dixter House and Gardens, Northiam, Rye, East Sussex, TN31 6PH.

Present:

Cllr B Kentfield	Rother District Council, Chairman
Mrs J Davison	Sevenoaks District Council, Deputy Chairman
Cllr Mrs S Tidy	East Sussex County Council
Cllr Mrs L Dunbar	Tandridge District Council
Cllr Mrs L Kitchen	Horsham District Council
Cllr Mrs J Soyke	Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
Cllr Mrs R Moore	Wealden District Council
Cllr R Street	Hastings Borough Council
Cllr H Rogers	Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council

Officers:

Mr T Alty	Finance Manager, East Sussex County Council
Ms R Childs	Kent County Council
Mr D Greenwood	Surrey County Council
Mr J Lavender	AONB Director (job share)
Ms S Marsh	AONB Director (job share)
Mr T Dyer	West Sussex County Council
Mr M Davidson	Hastings Borough Council
Mrs R Bennington	AONB Education Officer

### A. PRESENTATIONS

- A.1 Victoria Williams, Project Director of Great Dixter House and Gardens introduced the Members to a brief history of Great Dixter. The Members thanked Fergus Garrett, Head Gardener, for allowing the Committee to hold the Meeting at the House and Victoria Williams for organising the facilities for its use.
- A.2 Andrew Shaw, the London and South East Planning Advisor, for the National Trust (NT) presented to the Committee - The role of the National Trust in planning and heritage. The presentation is appended - NT and Heritage.
- A.3 The Members thanked Andrew for his informative presentation. The Members were also given a hardcopy of the paper 'Development and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty'. The Trust commissioned research from planning consultants Green Balance, and this report looks at case studies where significant development has been approved in AONBs. The research finds some shortcomings in the way existing planning policy is being applied on the ground– <http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/documents/national-trust-areas-of-outstanding-natural-beauty-and-development.pdf> - report appended .

- A.5 This was followed by a presentation from Rachel Bennington, Education Officer High Weald AONB, on the current status of the High Weald Heroes programme- presentation appended.
- A.6 Cllr R Street requested that he received a list of Primary Schools within Hastings area that the Unit are working with.
- A.7 RESOLVED to note the presentation.

1. **APOLOGIES**

- 1.1 Apologies were received from the following Members and officers:

Councillor M Balfour, Councillor B Acraman, , Councillor G Thomas, Councillor C Hersey, Councillor M Sydney, Mrs Alison Field, Mrs V Pullen, Mr R Edwards, Mrs H French, Mr J Seymour , Mrs J Hollingum, Mr D Scully.

2. **MEMBERS INTERESTS**

- 2.1 It was noted that there were no declarations of interest raised by the Members.

3. **URGENT MATTERS**

- 3.1 It was noted that no urgent matters were raised by the Members.

4. **ELECTION OF MANAGEMENT BOARD MEMBERS**

- 4.1 The Chairman Cllr Brian Kentfield took the JAC through the nominations for Chairman, Vice-Chairman, and six additional Management Board Members after which voting by the JAC Members took place.

- 4.2 RESOLVED to note that the following Members have been elected for Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Management Board:

**Elected Chairman: Mrs J Davison**

Proposed by Management Board; seconded by Cllr Mrs L Dunbar

**Elected Vice-Chairman Cllr Mr B Kentfield**

Proposed by Management Board; seconded by Cllr Julia Soyke

**Elected Management Board Member: Cllr Mrs S Tidy**

Proposed by Cllr Mrs R Moore; seconded by Cllr B Kentfield

**Elected Management Board Member: Cllr M Balfour**

Proposed by Mrs J Davison; seconded by Cllr Mrs R Moore

**Elected Management Board Member: Cllr M Sydney**

Proposed by Cllr M Balfour; seconded by Cllr L Dunbar

**Elected Management Board Member: Cllr Mrs R Moore**

Proposed by Cllr Mrs S Tidy; seconded by Cllr H Rogers

**Elected Management Board Member: Cllr C Hersey**

Proposed by Cllr B Kentfield; seconded by Mrs J Davison

**Elected Management Board Member: Cllr B Acraman**

Proposed by Cllr M Balfour; seconded by Cllr Julia Soyke

4.3 Mrs J Davison as the newly elected Madam Chairman took control of the meeting. Mrs J Davison warmly thanked Cllr B Kentfield for all his work and support as Chairman and for his continued support in his role as Vice-Chairman.

**5. MINUTES OF THE JAC MEETING – 27 March 2015**

5.1 The Unit responded to Cllr Thomas' enquiry, 8.2 of the Minutes, with regard to utilising the 'Living Wage'. Sally Marsh confirmed that the Unit has used the 'Living Wage' pay structure for students and interns that have been supporting the Fields in the Weald Project.

5.2 RESOLVED to agree the Minutes of the meeting of 26 March 2015 as a correct record.

**6. MINUTES OF THE MANAGEMENT BOARD – 14 October 2015**

6.1 RESOLVED to note the Minutes of the Management Board held on 15 October 2015 as a correct record.

**7. MINUTES OF THE OFFICER STEERING GROUP – 30 September 2015**

7.1 The Committee considered a verbal report on the Office Steering Groups (OSG) workplan by the OSG Chairman, David Marlow.

7.2 David Marlow informed the Members that he had been re-elected as Chairman for the Officer Steering Group (OSG) and that there was a newly elected Vice-Chairman, Virginia Pullen, Landscape Architect, from East Sussex County Council. David Scully who was the Vice-Chairman is embarking on a Masters Course and, therefore, due to additional commitments was unable to take over the role as Chairman, but will remain as a representative for Tunbridge Wells Borough Council.

7.3 David Marlow informed the Members that the OSG meetings have been well attended due to the positive workplan that has been achieved.

7.4 The Group has been focusing on three main areas; prioritising LPAs agreed by the OSG Members to guide AONB Unit work planning, Housing and Renewable Energy emerged as the two highest ranked LPA's; researching best practise with planning policies across the AONB Local Authorities, a draft paper is to be circulated to officers; and investigating the process of setting up an AONB design panel which will support housing development from source and reflect the character of the High Weald.

7.5 David Marlow also confirmed that the Unit has received signed copies of the Service Level Agreement from all of the Local Authorities.

7.6 Cllr Mrs S Tidy asked whether there was a noticeable trend towards Planning Inspectors changing their views on building within the AONB. David Marlow responded that in the majority of the cases the Inspectors support the AONBs. It was suggested that the National Association of AONBs may wish to approach the Planning Inspectorate to offer training to build on their understanding and awareness of these issues.

7.7 RESOLVED to note the Minutes of the Officer Steering Group held on 30 September 2015 as a correct record.

## 8. **PLANNING AND THE AONB**

8.1 The Committee considered a verbal report on planning and the AONB by the Unit's Co-Director, Jason Lavender.

8.2 Jason Lavender informed the Members that he has been covering the Planning Advisory role since the Policy Officer, Andrew Shaw, had left the Unit eighteen months ago. Since the relaxation of the planning regulations the number of applications received by the Unit for comment has increased in quantity and complexity and often the submissions were of poor quality. The developers often gave little regard to the AONB and only two applications to date have taken consideration of the AONB characteristics in a positive manner. Members of the Public are also becoming better informed and utilising the Management Plan information more effectively.

8.3 Jason Lavender also highlighted other areas which may put pressure on the Unit's workload including the possibility of Gatwick being again put forward as a site for additional runways; the continued pressure of fracking applications; and the extension of High Speed 1. There has also been an increase in Solar Farm applications across the High Weald.

8.4 The Unit has recently contacted the Parishes within the AONB to offer them support for their Neighbourhood Planning. There has been a positive response from the Parishes and the Unit's Research Officer is currently developing a pack to offer to the Parishes to provide environmental data and other AONB information.

8.5 Cllr Mrs L Dunbar commented that the Solar Farms may be less of an issue with the reduction of solar power subsidies. Cllr Mrs J Soyke asked whether the Unit had considered charging for their planning services. Jason Lavender responded that where appropriate this had been taken into consideration and there may be potential to do this at the pre-application stages. Tim Dyer also commented that the reduction in the number of Landscape Architects has restricted Local Authority's ability to effectively respond to the submissions.

8.6 Taking these areas into consideration the Unit is looking to work more closely with the Local Authorities on land allocation and SHLAAs as well as developing guidance notes/advice to increase awareness of the AONB characteristics such as eco-camping and solar farms.

8.7 RESOLVED to note the verbal report and the Unit's change in Planning Strategy with full support from the Committee.

## 9. **HIGH WEALD AONB STAFFING – 3 YEAR DIRECTION AND RESOURCING**

9.1 The Committee considered a report on High Weald AONB Staffing – 3 year direction and resourcing by the Unit's Co-Director, Sally Marsh.

- 9.2 Sally Marsh took the members through the background to the changes in the Unit's staffing structure during 2015. The Unit were faced with a number of challenges to deliver the work programme due to the resignation of the Communications Officer after 6 months in the post; the Policy and Research Officer resigned in April 2015, after a lengthy sickness absence; and in May the Administer, Kerry Baldwin, moved into a new post outside of the Unit. In view of the savings and pressure on existing staff to meet work schedules the formal restructuring process was put on hold pending a review of the budget and work priorities.
- 9.3 The revision in the core team is driven by a renewed focus on supporting Local Authority partners in delivering the Section 85 requirements and therefore a part-time Principle Planning Advisor and full time Landscape Advisor post are being recruited.
- 9.4 Competition for external funding is intense and in order to secure future project funding from funders such as National Grid, water catchment partnerships and Natural England, two new posts have been created. The Land Management Advisor role was advertised and Tamara Taylor joined the team in October. Tamara has an excellent working knowledge of agriculture and countryside stewardship. Matthew Pitts who managed the Living Woods Project has taken on the Outreach Advisor post.
- 9.5 The Committee were informed that the Community Landscape Fund Panel (formerly Sustainable Development Fund) will evolve into a project scrutiny panel which will support externally funded landscape enhancement activities. The Unit has discussed with Mrs J Davison taking on the role of leading this panel which should be in place by January 2016.
- 9.6 The report is reflected in the draft revenue budget for 2016/17 and the staffing changes should be in place by 31 March 2016.
- 9.7 RESOLVED to note the report and agree to the changes to the staff structure which are reflected in the draft revenue budget 2016/17.

## 10. **REVENUE BUDGET 2016/2017**

- 10.1 The Committee considered a report on the draft Revenue Budget for 2016/17 by the Deputy Treasurer.

Points to note:

- The draft revenue budget would be presented as a balanced budget assuming Local Authorities maintain their core contribution at the 2016/17 level and the use of project reserves.
- The budget confirmed that Defra contribution will be at £204,000 for 2016/17, and it assumes the local authority contributions would remain at £84,700.
- The draft budget allows for a smaller core team, reducing 5.5 FTE staff to 4.4 FTE. Staff costs are subject to inflation of 1% and incremental progression as result of revised grades following the Single Status review.
- Self-Funding Projects budget is attached at Appendix B. The Partnership's project budget has been rationalised into 3 programmes; Management Plan Research and Evidence; the Landscape Enhancement Initiative; High Weald Heroes and Project Development.
- The Defra grant contribution allocated to Partnership Projects is £38,800.

- 10.2 The draft revenue budget may be impacted by the autumn statement. However, up to a 10% reduction in core budget can be accommodated if required.
- 10.3 The Unit are looking at alternative accommodation which would give a one-off saving of potentially up to £10,000. However, locating a suitable rural location which has the necessary fibre optic connections is proving difficult.
- 10.4 RESOLVED to note the report and:
- I. Approve the draft Revenue Budget for 2016/17
  - II. To commence the budget consultation with the local authorities and Defra.

## 11. **FIELDS IN THE WEALD**

- 11.1 The Committee were asked to participate in a landscape perception exercise.
- 11.2 This exercise has been rolled out to officers and landowners across the AONB as part of the research basis for the Fields in the High Weald Project. The Members were asked to look at photographs, with limited information, on several different types of land use positioned around a settlement. They then had to discuss in groups which of these areas may be the most appropriate for housing development. – Landscape Perception Images appended
- 11.3 This is part of a wider report on Landscape Perceptions in the High Weald which will be an output as part of the Fields in the High Weald Project and highlights the challenges of making decisions without having the correct information to hand when assessing a site for housing allocation.

## 12. **RISK MANAGEMENT**

- 12.1 The Committee considered a report by the Unit's Co-Director Jason Lavender on Risk Management.
- 12.3 Jason Lavender re-enforced that the key risk might be the impact of the Autumn Budget Statement to the core budget. However, the appointment of Rory Stewart as Parliamentary Undersecretary of State at the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) in May 2015 may be positive as he is a supporter of AONBs and National Parks.
- 12.1 RESOLVED to note the report and the Management Board continue to meet to review significant risks as required and develop options for their management.

## 13. **AOB**

- 13.1 The Committee were informed that Ruth Childs, Kent County Council Officer, is leaving her position in December and the Committee thanked Ruth for her work supporting the Officer Steering Group and the Unit.
- 13.2 The next Meeting for JAC will be set by doodle poll – potential date of 23 March 2015 before the Easter Break was recommended.



**HIGH WEALD JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE – Management Board  
Minutes – 2 March 2016, Acorn Tourism, Woodland Enterprise Centre,  
Hastings Road, East Sussex, TN5 7PR.**

Samantha Nicholas  
Clerk to the High Weald AONB  
Joint Advisory Committee

Present:           Members:  
Mrs J Davison           Sevenoaks District Council (Chairman)  
Cllr B Kentfield       Rother District Council (Vice-chairman)  
Cllr B Acraman       West Sussex County Council  
Cllr Mrs S Tidy       East Sussex County Council  
Cllr M Balfour       Kent County Council  
Cllr M Sydney       Surrey County Council  
Cllr R Moore       Wealden District Council

Also Present:  
Sally Marsh           AONB Director (job share)  
David Marlow       Rother District Council (OSG Chairman)  
Gerry Sherwin       AONB Business Manager  
Charles Winchester   AONB Landscape Advisor

Apologies

1. The following persons gave their apologies for absence:  
Cllr C Hersey.

Members' Interests

2. There were no declarations of interest from the Members of the Management Board.

Minutes of the Management Board meeting held on 14 October 2015

3. The minutes of the last meeting, held on 14 October 2015 were agreed as a correct record.

Budget Overview

4. Gerry Sherwin informed the Members of the status of the budget consultation with the local authorities (LAs) and Defra since the draft Revenue Budget for 2016/17 had been approved at the JAC Meeting held on 6 November 2015. Kent County Council had advised the Unit that they would not be able to confirm the budget contribution until April 2016 and confirmation is also awaited from Surrey County Council and Ashford Borough Council.
5. The AONBs have been advised that Defra will be maintaining their contribution towards core budgets for the next four years, including inflation. This will increase the budget by £13,000 over this period of time.

6. The Members were informed that although the Unit had made significant inroads into decreasing costs in areas such as office facilities there were other areas such as the popular AONB website which require additional costs to maintain.
7. A discussion took place around securing budgets for the AONB in view of the extreme pressure the councils are facing with budget reductions. The Members articulated that it was important that the LAs knew that Defra had committed to supporting AONB future budgets.
8. It was agreed that the Unit would seek advice from NAAONB on the timing of this announcement and would speak with key individuals within the Local Authorities to raise awareness of the positive news.

#### Officer Steering Group update

9. David Marlow informed the Members that the Officer Steering Group (OSG) has been working on an advisory Planning Briefing Paper. The Paper was based on a report comparing the Local Authority planning policies across the AONB produced by Natalie Bumpus, Wealden DC, on behalf of the OSG. The Briefing Paper has been produced to assist Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) in fulfilling their duties to have regard to the conservation and enhancement of the AONB.
10. A robust discussion took place on the appropriate use of auxiliary verbs used in the Briefing Paper but it was agreed that in this context the overall statements should stand. The amendments to the Local Authority Planning Policies Guidance passed on by the Members are to be updated before publication.
11. It was agreed that this Planning Briefing Paper should be noted at the AONB Joint Advisory Committee Meeting to be held on 23 March 2016 and then be sent to the AONB Local Authority Heads of Planning with a covering letter.
12. Cllr Mrs R Moore suggested that it would be useful for Members to receive a summary of the Planning Briefing Paper. A discussion took place on the usefulness of receiving this information especially for those joining Local Planning Committees as part of their initial training.
13. Cllr M Balfour suggested further examples which impact on 'the setting' within the AONB such as the Maidstone site could be included. David Marlow explained that there were many Appeal Judgements which had been included within the AONB Policy Paper.
14. The Members agreed that a Planning Briefing Paper aimed at Members should be considered by the OSG for further development.
15. David Marlow explained that the Unit has recently contacted the 99 Parish Councils within the AONB to offer them support for their Neighbourhood Planning. Charles Winchester presented to the Members the Neighbourhood Planning Guidance and examples of the dataset maps that the Parish Council will received.
16. The Members agreed that this was excellent information and all Parishes should have access to the datasets. The datasets will be uploaded onto the AONB website over a period of time depending on priorities from the Parish Councils responses and this will be publicised through the Unit's enews communication.
17. The Eco-camping Advice Note has been presented to the OSG but requires further information before publishing.

18. David Marlow reported on the OSG discussion over the Field System's methodology which was held as a separate session following the OSG meeting. Further consideration as required but Officers indicated that this was a vital piece of research
19. The Members thanked David Marlow and the officers of the Steering Group for their excellent work to-date.
20. Sally Marsh informed the Members that Unit was to present terms of reference for a design working group at the next OSG Meeting. The working group may take two different directions, either to develop an AONB design manual or to focus on specific planning applications at the pre-application stage.
21. A discussion continued on the use of current design guidance material such as the Kent AONB Design Guidance and whether having another design panel would be viable. Sally Marsh indicated that the design panel would be a forum for filling the gaps in the design guidance criteria such as layouts of small settlement access routes. David Marlow confirmed that the officers were concerned about the process of setting out the AONBs components in terms of materials, layouts, boundaries and how these contribute to the AONB. He explained the design panel would also raise the AONB profile within the decision making process.

#### AONB Planning update

22. Sally Marsh informed the Members that the Unit was involved with a National Planning Committee which will look at appeal judgements across the AONBs. This Committee intends to provide information to the Inspectorate to assist clarification of landscape issues at appeals.
23. The Members were informed that the Tunbridge Wells Farmstead Assessment Guidance SPD had been published.
24. East Sussex CC is also looking to develop Farmstead Guidance based on the Kent Farmstead Guidance. Tunbridge Wells BC have also approached the Unit to discuss updating the Rural Lane SPD.
25. There is a significant application for 600 houses planning development at Pease Pottage. The AONB is working in partnership with Natural England with regard to the impact on the AONB.
26. The University of Sheffield has produced a report on the Role of the AONB Designation in the Planning Process which has not been published which indicates the escalating pressure of housing development within AONBs. National AONB are considering putting in a freedom of information requested to have the research findings released.

#### Staffing update

27. Sally Marsh explained to the Members that position for Planning Advisor has been re-advertised for a second time for (0.8 FTE) at the end of February 2016. The Unit were pleased to announce that there was a successful applicant but they were waiting for full confirmation of references before announcing this to a wider audience. This position would be on a permanent contract.
28. Due to the Defra funding being more secure the Unit will also look to fill the vacant position for, a part-time, Communication Officers on a temporary contract.

## Current and potential projects

29. Gerry Sherwin took the Members through the current and potential projects. The Land Management Project was initiated to be able to access the various grant schemes available. Tamara Taylor (2 days per week) and Matt Pitts (4 days per week) are supporting this by visiting Landowners to engage with them to support Water Catchment, National Grid and stewardship programmes. Currently there is no support for mid-tier applicants for the Countryside Stewardship Scheme and the Unit are able to fulfil this role by supporting landowners with individual applications.
30. Sussex LUND is in the process of being set up by a local philanthropist within the AONB. Potentially the fund will have £250,000 to spend on community projects per annum and the Land Management Advisors are again seeking applications which may fit the criteria.
31. National Grid has launched a smaller localised visual improvement projects which can be accessed by all AONBs. The Unit is identifying potential sites which run along the area of the powerlines. There is also funding available for undergrounding powerlines. Gerry Sherwin has identified several projects that may be suitable including Sheffield Park to the Bluebell Railway and Salehurst and Newenden area.
32. It was re-confirmed that although the AONB had been short listed for the National Grid undergrounding scheme to reduce the visual impact of electricity infrastructure in protected landscapes it was not selected to receive the funding. However, if one of the schemes is unsuccessful they may revisit the others that were short-listed. Cllr M Balfour congratulated the Unit on the Unit making it through to be short-list.
33. A 'Restocking in the Weald' proposal has been sent to the Prince's Countryside Fund for a small scale feasibility study. Unfortunately due to the large number of applications the Unit was not successful with this particular application and is considering where to seek further funding. Cllr M Balfour suggested contacting the South East LEP and indicated he would be happy to put the scheme forward to the committee.
34. The High Weald Heroes education project is continuing to be very successful with 5 new schools participating on the programme and 4 new welly walks, All Saints' and St Richard's, West Hoathly, Punnetts Town and Southborough. Rachel Bennington has been working with Casper Johnson to produce an archaeological toolkit – with replicated artefacts from Stone Age to Iron Age. In addition to this the Unit has secured additional funding, through Heritage Lottery, to produce a series of creative landscape workshops for primary school. At the end of June, the Unit are promoting 'National Meadows Day' by encouraging High Weald Hero schools, with local Meadows on their Welly Walks, to survey them.
35. The AONB supported a Rapid Grassland Assessment Project and the results indicated that there was 40% more wildlife grassland than recorded currently. The changes to the countryside stewardship schemes means there is a concern that Meadows are in increasing danger. The AONB is collaborating with the Natural England (local team and national grassland specialist), UK Grassland Forum, Buglife, Plantlife, Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre, Sussex Wildlife Trust and The Wildlife Trusts national. The report and findings will be circulated at the next OSG Meeting.
36. Cllr Mrs S Tidy remarked on the difficulty of finding guidance on Meadows restoration. Sally Marsh informed the Members that there are still opportunities to support landowners

through the Weald Meadows Initiative, and the AONB is working with Natural England to re-emphasise the importance of fragmented unimproved grassland.

37. The Members were reminded that they were two years into the Management Plan Process which needs to be reviewed for 2019. A scoping document for reviewing the Management Plan will be presented at the next November or March Joint Advisory Meeting.
38. The on-line area guide 'Slow Bodiam' is ready to be published. The area was originally selected as it had a high concentration of Our Land Businesses. The guide shows how to get around the area by train, boat, bus network and walking, essentially without having to use a car. It highlights places to stay and visit as well as an I-spy section. This guide format could be adapted to be used in other areas of the AONB such as the Kingscote Valley.

#### JAC Agenda Items

39. Items for Agenda:
  - Neighbourhood Planning Guidance and Planning Guidance Policy
  - Land Management Initiative
  - Defra budget information.

#### Risk Management

40. The risk management areas were covered in budget and staffing update. Gerry Sherwin also emphasised that although Defra has given assurance of a four year budget there is still a risk that this will be removed and that the LAs may reduce their contributions.

#### AOB

41. The Members were informed that the Unit is holding an information evening on Brexit and its potential agricultural implications in the Weald. This will be presented by Chris Horseman and Alan Bullion, from Agra Europe. The organisation produces reports which provide actionable intelligence required for business-critical decisions, whether to mitigate risk or identify new opportunities supplying reports to clients in the agricultural industry.
42. The Members had a robust discussion on the importance of this event delivering a balanced approach to the subject matter. It was agreed that questions would need to be received prior to the event and managed in a neutral fashion and suggested there should be an independent Chairman to host the event. All publicity is to be sent to the Chairman and Vice-chairman for approval.
43. A doodle poll will be circulated to the Members for the next Management Board Meeting to be held at the end of June or beginning of July.

## High Weald Officer Steering Group

Notes of a meeting of the High Weald Officer Steering Group held on Wednesday 10 February 2016, Acorn Tourism, Woodland Enterprise, Hastings Road, Flimwell, TN5 7PR



Clerk to JAC: Samantha Nicholas

### PRESENT:

David Marlow, Rother District Council (Chairman)  
Virginia Pullan, East Sussex County Council (Vice-chairman)  
David Scully, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council  
Marina Briggins, Wealden District Council  
Natalie Bumpus, Wealden District Council  
Sarah Thompson, Tandridge District Council  
Tim Dyer, West Sussex County Council  
Murray Davidson, Hastings Borough Council  
Jenny Knowles, Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council  
Jennifer Hollingum, Mid Sussex District Council  
Sally Marsh, Co-Director High Weald AONB Unit  
Jason Lavender, Co-Director High Weald AONB Unit  
Gerry Sherwin, High Weald AONB Unit  
Charles Winchester, High Weald AONB Unit

### Action

#### 1. MINUTES

1.1 The Minutes of the meeting held on the 30 September 2015 were agreed as a correct record.

1.2 **5.1 David Marlow confirmed that the Rother DC Equestrian Policy, jointly managed with Lewes DC, was available to be circulated to the officers as a draft report.** David Marlow

1.3 6.2 Dark Sky SPDs - the officers were informed that Matthew Nouch who managed the Ashford BC Dark Skies SPD was no longer working at the council and the Council was not in a position to send another officer at this present time.

A discussion took place around the development of an AONB Dark Skies Advice Note.

Tunbridge Wells BC has had approval to collect the necessary information to instigate a policy.

Wealden District Council is currently tendering for evidence

gathering and development of the Dark Skies methodology. Marina Brigginsshaw suggested they could build in an AONB wide research as the Wealden DC research will be geographically driven covering areas such as the Pevensey Levels.

1.4 The Unit asked to be put on the Wealden District Council tender list to research the development of the methodology.

1.5 **It was agreed that the Unit schedule into their workload the development of a Dark Skies advice note.** **Unit**

## **2. APOLOGIES**

2.1 Apologies for absence were received from; Tom Nutt, Crawley Borough Council, Ian Grundy, Ashford Borough Council, David Greenwood, Surrey County Council, Liz Milne, Kent County Council, Helen French, Sevenoaks Borough Council.

2.2 The officers were informed that Ruth Childs has left Kent County Council. The Council are in the process of recruiting an officer to cover this role.

2.3 Ashford Borough Council has still to appoint an officer to the Steering Group. Ian Grundy is currently the main point of contact.

## **3 Eco-camping Advice Note**

3.1 Gerry Sherwin presented the draft Eco-camping Advice Note to the officers. This advice is mainly directed at advising potential Landowners who wish to set up camping in woodland or unimproved grassland within the AONB.

This advice note is based on the research paper 'Eco-camping in the High Weald AONB' – a review of the potential environmental impacts and recommendations for future development, produced by Charles Winchester in October 2012.

The conclusion of this report was that there was significant long lasting impact on woodland from camping and therefore new camping areas are better placed on improved grassland areas.

3.2 It was suggested that the research paper should be linked to the advice note. The officers were asked if they would find it useful for the Unit to collect camping statistics to add to the note. It was recommended that an evaluation of different sites may be more

suitable to show best practice.

**3.3 Gerry Sherwin will circulate the report and request for comments by the end of February.**

**Gerry Sherwin  
and officers**

**4. Local Authority updates**

4.1 The officers were asked to up-date the group on any specific new projects within their local authorities.

- Hastings BC has tendered for the Hastings Country Park Visitor Centre. The cost has doubled and the Council is seeking additional grant aid support.
- Wealden DC has had initial feedback from the Steel Cross planning appeal which is favourable towards the AONB.
- Tunbridge Wells BC confirmed that although the Inspector acknowledge substantial impact on the AONB the Hawkhurst (Highgate) planning site has been approved due to exceptional circumstances based on the need for additional housing . The officers were informed that the Tunbridge Wells BC Farmstead Assessment Guidance is now available on-line.

**Action: David Scully will circulate Farmstead document website link to officers**

**David Scully**

- Rother DC highlighted that there was an increase in the number of planning applications which seems to be reflected across the AONB. David Marlow urged the Local Authorities to respond to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) Consultation as there was still time.

4.2 The officers were informed that the National Association of AONBs is responding on behalf of the AONBs to the consultation on proposed changes to NPPF.

**Action: This will be circulated to the officers.**

**Sally Marsh**

**5 Neighbourhood Planning Guidance**

5.1 Charles Winchester presented the Neighbourhood Planning Guidance. Initial comments from David Marlow, Virginia Pullan and Jennifer Hollingum had been incorporated. Following discussion on LPA access to the data, it was agreed that the guidance and datasets for each Parish in the AONB will be uploaded onto the AONB

website for public access over a period of time due to the numbers.

- 5.2 A discussion took place on whether it was the Local Authority or the Parishes obligation to carrying out screening for habitat regulation assessments. Marina Brigginshaw advised that it had Counsel's Opinion confirming that it was the role of the LPA, with which others agreed. It was agreed that, to add clarity, the guidance should have a note to contact the Local Authority for advice on this area. It was agreed to put the Record Centres contact details for ecological information and HER. David Scully asked for reference towards landscape character assessments to be included.

**5.3 Action:**

**Officers**

- 1. Officers to send Samantha Nicholas contact details for Neighbourhood Plans for each local authority to put on website.**
- 2. Any new changes need to be feedback Charles Winchester by 19 February 2016.**

**6 AONB Planning Officer**

- 6.1 Sally Marsh explained to the officers that although a planning advisor had been appointed after the last round of interviews they had declined the position. The position has been re-advertised, for a 4 day per week, Planning Advisor position, and interviews will be held on 23 February 2016. The role of the officer will be to further develop the planning design guidance and advice notes as well as managing the formation of a future High Weald design panel.

**7. Local Authority Planning Policies guidance**

- 7.1 High Weald AONB Planning Briefing paper and the review of policy approaches to development within and affecting the High Weald AONB was put forward for consideration at the Steering Group. These papers have been produced to assist Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) in fulfilling their duties to have regard to the conservation and enhancement of the AONB. The group agreed that these were very useful internal reports and thanked Natalie Bumpus and David Marlow for producing them on

behalf of the Steering Group.

The group discussed the briefing paper including the setting issues covered in paragraph 63. - Of note, a Court has held that NPPF paragraph 115 includes views from the AONB into the surrounding landscape, effectively taking the view that the beauty of the AONB would be harmed if looking out of it one saw ugliness. However, conversely, it held that paragraph 115 was not intended to cover views of the AONB from outside, which carried less weight.

7.2 The group also agreed that the National Landscape Character Assessment and Statement of Significance should be included with in the briefing document, as well as reference to s84 of the Act. A discussion took place on para 60. It was agreed that the reference to AONB character should be extended to say 'and features'.

7.2 It was confirmed that the following information should be added to the review of policy changes document.

- East Sussex CC have an AONB Mineral and Waste policy which incorporates the AONB
- Tonbridge and Malling BC have a core strategy encompassing the AONB.

A discussion took place on point 6.3 and the difficulty in defining what is a major development. Sally Marsh informed the group that Cornwall AONB is incorporating a position of no major development within this AONB.

7.2 **Action: Any additional comments for the review of policies should be sent to David Marlow (on the Briefing Paper) and Natalie Bumpus (on the Review) by 24 February so this can presented at the Management Board on 2 March 2016**

**Officers/David Marlow/Natalie Bumpus**

## 8. Design Working Group

Sally Marsh apologised to the officers for not circulating the design guidance collated from other AONBs but she was still waiting for more information to be received.

The setting up of a task/finish group was discussed which will support the development of the design guidance framework. The

group agreed that this would be the next step once the Planning Advisor was in place.

**8.1 Action: the Unit will prepare a brief for the working group to be circulated at the next meeting** **Sally Marsh**

**9 AOB AND DATES FOR NEXT MEETING**

9.1 Items to be put on the Management Board agenda :

- Neighbourhood Planning Guidance
- Local Authority Planning Policy Guidance

9.2 Tunbridge Wells BC has funding to update the existing Rural Lanes SPD. They are also looking at updating the Historic Landscape Characterisation of the borough.

9.3 The steering group was informed that Defra has offered a four year settlement for AONBs with an inflationary increase. Formal notification of this will be sent to the LAs.

9.4 Jennifer Hollingum has been asked to gather information on the Designation Order (4th December 1980) and the Confirmation Order (23rd October 1983) for the High Weald AONB as well as all the supporting technical evidence that accompanied the designation, specifically relating to Mid Sussex.

The officers were informed that the Unit have a report on the designation history and some supporting documents but other background information is currently held in Natural England archives and is not easily accessible. The Unit agreed to circulate the information it has. Virginia Pullan indicated that East Sussex CC may also hold some of this material.

9.5 Sally Marsh informed the group that they were now two years into the Management Plan cycle for 2014-2019 and that a scoping document for reviewing the Management Plan would be prepared for the JAC in 2016/17.

**Action: This would be circulated to the officers for comment** **Sally Marsh**

9.6 Dates for the next meeting will be set for September 2016 by doodle poll.

# **High Weald AONB**

## **Briefing Paper**

### **to Local Planning Authorities**



**This briefing has been prepared by the High Weald AONB Officer Steering Group and endorsed by the Management Board for circulation to partner LPAs**

February 2016

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## A. Introduction and Purpose

1. This document has been produced by the High Weald Officer Steering Group to assist Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) in fulfilling their duties to have regard to the conservation and enhancement of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).
2. In particular, it:
  - a) *provides a clear expression of the legislative and national policy context for planning in AONBs;*
  - b) *contributes to demonstrating how the LPA partners are fulfilling their 'duty to cooperate', notably via the work of the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.*
  - c) *highlights the High Weald AONB Management Plan and the regard to be had to it;*
  - d) *reviews how current local plans have regard to the AONB designation;*
  - e) *offers guidance to LPA partners to assist their consideration of policies and proposals within or affecting the High Weald AONB;*
3. This paper is advisory. It does not bind any of the constituent LPAs nor does it propose a common policy prescription. Policy approaches will be influenced by the extent of the AONB in any LPA area and the particular local characteristics of different parts of the AONB; hence, policy coverage will reasonably vary. However, this paper should assist in developing local planning policies and in determining relevant planning applications with a sound understanding of High Weald AONB considerations.

## **B. High Weald AONB – Key information**

### **The High Weald AONB**

4. The High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is one of England's finest landscapes, a nationally protected area since 1983.
5. It lies at the heart of the South East and covers parts of Kent, East Sussex and West Sussex. At 1,461 square kilometres, it is the largest AONB in the South East and the fourth largest in England and Wales.
6. The High Weald is considered to be one of the best surviving, coherent medieval landscapes in Northern Europe. The components that make the area special are:
  - rolling hills, dissected by steep-sided gill streams and studded by sandstone outcrops
  - small, irregular-shaped fields and open heaths
  - abundant, interconnected ancient woods and hedges
  - scattered farmsteads and hamlets, largely developing from temporary dwellings in wooded areas or 'dens' where farmers from the Downs grazed their pigs
  - and narrow, sunken lanes arising from pannage – the movement of animals from the Downs to the High Weald in the autumn.

### **The Joint Advisory Committee**

7. The High Weald Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) is a partnership of 15 local authorities, Defra, Natural England and organisations representing farming, woodland, access and community interests.
8. It is responsible for publishing and monitoring the statutory AONB Management Plan. It is supported by an Officer Steering Group and has a small, dedicated staff team – the High Weald Unit. Further information [www.highweald.org](http://www.highweald.org)

## The High Weald AONB Management Plan 2014-2019

9. The Management Plan has been adopted by the Area's 15 constituent local authorities in order to help conserve and enhance this natural beauty. The Management Plan defines the Area's natural beauty, its 'character components', and sets objectives for these components. To view the current Management Plan, visit: <http://www.highweald.org/high-weald-aonb-management-plan.html>).
10. Whilst the AONB Management Plan does not form part of the statutory development plan for a local authority, nor is it a planning policy document, it is a material consideration that can be taken into account when preparing Local Plans and Neighbourhood Plans, as well as in determining planning applications. It may contribute evidence or principles in relation to the strategic context for development.
11. The High Weald AONB Management Plan includes the 'Statement of Significance' which defines what makes the High Weald special and identifies the qualities that justify its designation as a nationally important landscape. It defines its natural beauty in terms of its five key character components:

**Geology, landform, water systems and climate**

- Sandrock outcrops
- Gill streams

**Settlement:**

- Dispersed settlement pattern
- Historic farmsteads

**Routeways:**

- Drove ways
- Sunken lanes

**Woodland:**

- Ancient woodland
- Archaeological remains

**Field and heath:**

- Unimproved grassland
- Heathland
- Historic field boundaries

12. Individual features that are locally distinctive or nationally important are not necessarily reflected in the Statement of Significance; rather, it sets out those qualities that make the area as a whole recognisable and distinctive, and different from surrounding areas.

## C. The legal and national policy framework for AONBs

### The legal framework

13. Designation of AONBs is provided for by Section 82 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CRoW) 2000 in relation to an area that is *'of such outstanding natural beauty that it is desirable that the provisions of this Part relating to areas designated under this section should apply to it'*.
14. All relevant authorities (including government, local authorities, parish councils and statutory undertakers) are required under Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 to have regard to the purpose of the AONB designation — i.e. the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty.

*"In exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in an area of outstanding natural beauty, a relevant authority shall have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty"* Section 85, CroW Act 2000

Section 85 can be viewed at: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/37/section/85>

15. The duties set out by the CRoW Act<sup>1</sup> relate to all council functions, which clearly include their role as local planning authorities, although it should also be noted that it applies to estates, highways and leisure functions for example.
16. Also, Section 85 can be seen as being not restricted to developments (or other activities) within an AONB, but also those that "affect" it.
17. To further AONB objectives, Section 89 of the CRoW Act 2000 places a statutory duty on local planning authorities to act jointly to prepare a management plan for an AONB within or partly within their administrative areas which *'formulates their policy for the management of the area and for carrying out of their functions in relation to it'*.

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<sup>1</sup> Note that s54 gives local planning authorities contains a power to LPAs to take all such action as appears to them expedient for the accomplishment of the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty in their area.

## The National Planning Policy Framework

18. The [National Planning Policy Framework](#) (NPPF) provides a single statement of national planning policies.
19. It identifies the purpose of the planning system to contribute to sustainable development and identifies three threads - economic, social and environmental - of sustainable development and states (at paragraph 8) that these should be sought jointly and simultaneously.
20. At the heart of the NPPF is the 'presumption in favour of sustainable development' which should be seen as a 'golden thread' running through both plan making and decision taking. In this regard, paragraph 14 states that local planning authorities should seek to meet their objectively assessed development needs and grant development proposals unless:
  - any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole; or
  - specific policies in this Framework indicate development should be restricted.
21. Paragraph 14 also states that development proposals which accord with the development plan should be granted without delay, however where the development plan is absent, silent or policies are out of date permission should be granted unless:
  - any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole; or
  - specific policies in this Framework indicate development should be restricted.
22. Footnote 9 in paragraph 14 states that such policies include those relating to AONBs as well as other protected landscapes and national nature conservation areas such as sites protected under the Birds and Habitats Directive; SSSIs; National Parks; Heritage Coasts and Green Belt.

23. Paragraphs 115 and 116 of the NPPF relate specifically to nationally important landscapes, including AONBs. They state:

*115. Great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty. The conservation of wildlife and cultural heritage are important considerations in all these areas, and should be given great weight in National Parks and the Broads.*

*116. Planning permission should be refused for major developments in these designated areas except in exceptional circumstances and where it can be demonstrated they are in the public interest. Consideration of such applications should include an assessment of:*

- the need for the development, including in terms of any national considerations, and the impact of permitting it, or refusing it, upon the local economy;*
- the cost of, and scope for, developing elsewhere outside the designated area, or meeting the need for it in some other way;*
- any detrimental effect on the environment, the landscape and recreational opportunities, and the extent to which that could be moderated.*

24. In addition to the above, the NPPF also contains several generic statements in relation to countryside and landscape planning policy considerations that should be taken into account in any policy or proposal for development within AONBs:

Paragraph 109 - requires local plans to contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes.

Paragraph 113 - local planning authorities should set criteria based policies for any development on or affecting protected landscapes. The policies should be set within the hierarchy of designated sites (international, national and local) so that policy requirements are commensurate with the level of designation.

Paragraph 123 - planning policies and decisions should aim to identify and protect areas of tranquillity which have remained relatively undisturbed by noise and are prized for their recreational and amenity value for this reason

Paragraph 125 refers to planning policies limiting the impact of light pollution from artificial light on local amenity; intrinsically dark landscapes and nature conservation.

### **Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)**

25. The PPG does not include specific policy requirements for AONBs; however, it does provide guidance on the legislation and considerations that should be taken into account when formulating planning policies which may have an impact on AONB designated areas. Importantly, the Guidance states that local authorities should have regard to management plans for AONBs, as these documents underpin partnership working and delivery of designation objectives.
26. In regards to 'major' development in an AONB, the PPG also does not contain a definition but rather states that '*whether a proposed development in designated areas should be treated as a major development, will be a matter for the relevant decision taker, taking into account the proposal in question and the local context*'. It does however reiterate the requirement within the NPPF that great weight should be given to conserving the landscape and scenic beauty of designated areas, irrespective of whether paragraph 116 applies.

### **Briefing**

27. Pursuing sustainable development as sought by the NPPF means to achieve economic, social and environmental gains jointly and simultaneously through the planning system. This may be taken as encouraging LPAs to seek positive environmental benefits from a development, rather than simply weighing the environmental harm against, say, economic benefits.

28. Hence, regard should be had to any benefits in terms of conserving or enhancing natural beauty, as well as to any harm caused, in considering a site or proposal, drawing on Paragraph 9 of the NPPF which states that: *'Pursuing sustainable development involves seeking positive improvements in the quality of the built, natural and historic environment, as well as in people's quality of life ...'*,
29. While Section 85 of the CRoW Act 2000 places a duty of "regard" to the purpose of AONB designation, paragraph 115 elaborates on this in terms of the weight to be given, namely that *"great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty"*.
30. The use of the terms *"landscape"* and *"scenic beauty"* in the NPPF is significant. Landscape embraces aspects of landform, geology, flora and fauna, landscape features and the settlement pattern, developed over centuries. Hence, it is expected that both the visual impacts on the intrinsic scenic qualities of an AONB and the impacts of any site or proposal on its landscape character or features are considered in any landscape assessment.
31. At the same time, it should be appreciated that AONB designation does not preclude all development within an AONB. Indeed, certain development is necessary to enable the rural economy, from which much of the High Weald's character derives, to thrive and thereby enable the management necessary to conserve and enhance the Area's natural beauty. Social and economic needs are specifically recognised.
32. While AONBs are not exempt from new development to meet identified needs, it can be seen that paragraph 14 of the NPPF differentiates, in both plan-making and decision-taking, between the approach to be taken where *'specific policies in this framework indicate development should be restricted'* (which includes AONBs) and elsewhere.
33. Specifically, this paragraph reads that the "high bar" of determining that either meeting development needs or granting permission unless the *'any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits'* is not applicable in protected areas such as AONBs.

34. Paragraph 116 carries a presumption against major development in an AONB except in exceptional circumstances where it can be demonstrated that they are in the public interest. Criteria for assessing the public interest are given, but it does not define (nor does the PPG) what constitutes 'major' development. This is considered further below in the local context.
  
35. Development proposals that are situated outside AONB boundaries may be seen as affecting the purposes of designation (s85 of the CRoW Act) where they impact on the setting of the AONB or implementation of Management Plan objectives.

## **D. Local Plan policy coverage**

### **Existing situation**

37. The regard to the High Weald AONB of both existing and emerging/published Local Plans is reviewed in a supporting paper prepared by Wealden District Council.
38. All the reviewed Local Plan documents make reference to the AONBs within their areas, and mostly refer to the High Weald AONB Management Plan, either in policy or supporting text.
39. While the level of policy coverage varies, this is to be expected depending on the degree to which AONB designations affect the administrative area of an authority and also the nature of the Local Plan.
40. A few Plans have stand-alone AONB policies; Mid Sussex within their draft District Plan and Tandridge within their Core Strategy (covering the Surrey Hills AONB as well as High Weald) and these do refer to protecting and enhancing the AONB and its constituent elements. Within other Plans, planning policies applicable to AONBs are contained within the more general environmental and/or landscape policy areas.
41. Some of the LPA's Local Plan documents have policies which state that development should respect the character and settlement patterns of the AONB or that the proposals should be of a scale, form and design that is in line with the character of the AONB, but this is in relation to specific sites rather than the AONB as a whole (e.g. Tunbridge Wells and Ashford).
42. References to landscape attributes (character, sense of place, viewpoints etc.) are contained within the Local Plans reviewed but these tend to be fairly generic and do not necessarily relate to the AONBs specifically. However, some Local Plan documents do make reference to the use of Landscape Character Assessments in determining proposals within or close to AONBs. Some Local Plans make reference to protecting views in and out of AONBs from the impact of development.

- 43. Some Local Plans do include reference to the socio-economic considerations of development within AONBs, with Horsham expecting such proposals to demonstrate how they support the economy and contribute to the social wellbeing of the area.
- 44. Design issues are almost universally dealt with through generic policies within the Local Plans reviewed.

### **Briefing**

- 45. *In drawing out key points below, it is appreciated that they may not be universally applicable, as circumstances vary between LPAs' areas in terms of their coverage of the AONB, the stage of their plan-making, other policies and local style of plans.*

<p><b>1. Have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the High Weald AONB</b></p>
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- 46. All LPAs do have policy frameworks that identify the High Weald AONB and provide for due regard to impacts of development on it to be properly considered.
- 47. Given the national status of AONBs and the distinctive landscape characteristics of the High Weald, a specific policy relating to the High Weald AONB should be considered. Whether this is necessary will depend on the nature of the plan, amount of AONB covered by it and existence of other policies that provide a “hook” for the proper consideration of the impact on the landscape and scenic beauty of the AONB.
- 48. The AONB status of a site will be relevant in allocating land for development and considering planning applications – and should be highlighted.
- 49. LPAs should be aware of the subtle difference between the primary purpose of AONB designation - to conserve and enhance natural beauty – and the NPPF reference to ‘conserving landscape and scenic beauty’. Both are valid, while the NPPF wording may be taken as a clarification on how “natural” beauty is to be viewed (appreciating the impact of human influences over centuries).

50. The consideration of whether development is ‘major’ may be key to having due regard to AONB considerations. This issue is addressed in the following section.

**2. Have regard to the current High Weald AONB Management Plan**

51. LPAs should have regard to the current Management Plan in plan-making and in determining planning applications, which may be demonstrated by referring to it in relevant plans and reports.
52. Although not a planning policy document per se, it is statutorily prepared and subject to a sustainability appraisal. Moreover, as the main reference to its defining features, as well as key issues and priorities, reference to it can be an effective way of highlighting particular considerations/concerns in a plan area.

**3. Have regard to principal landscape components and key features of the High Weald AONB**

53. LPAs should consider whether it would be appropriate in the context of the plan being prepared whether to add details of key components of natural beauty specific to the High Weald, as identified in the Management Plan, in order to clarify key considerations.
54. These are probably too detailed for a strategic plan, but consideration may be given to highlighting the main attributes relevant to particular localities under the five components of character (Geology, landform, water systems and climate; Settlement; Routeways; Woodlands; Fields and heath) in more detailed plans and/or guidance.
55. These are articulated in the [Management Plan](#) and in the ‘[Statement of Significance](#)’. The Statement of Significance can be used as character-based criteria to judge impact (or harm) to the AONB from development or other activity, and help tailor positive policies and actions to support conservation of the area see [Using the AONB Management Plan](#).

56. The [National Character Area profile for the High Weald](#) as well as relevant County or District Landscape Character Assessments (LCAs) may usefully refine the overall characterisation and identify sub-areas. These can be valuable in both informing the meaning of ‘local distinctiveness’; in considering the impacts on local character and in ensuring appropriate layout and design (see below). Such references could be in supporting text.
57. It should be appreciated that the boundaries of character areas may well not follow the AONB boundary exactly, so care needs to be taken in drawing upon these. However, insofar as they highlight the continuity of landscape, they may still be useful when considering the impact of development close to the AONB.
58. A landscape and visual impact assessment (LVIA) which may accompany an application should reference the Management Plan and local components of character. Care should be taken in reviewing these, to guard against a tendency to focus on visual and scenic aspects more than character, at the expense of the key components which contribute to sense of place, distinctiveness, heritage, tranquillity.
59. Particularly relevant in a largely enclosed landscape such as the High Weald, while the extent to which development is visible, especially from public vantage points, is an accepted planning consideration, Court has held that the fact that a development is not viewable by the general public does not mean that there is no harm to the intrinsic character of an AONB.<sup>2</sup>

**4. Give due attention to the fact that the layout and design of development, as much as its location, will contribute positively (or negatively) to conserving and enhancing the High Weald AONB**

60. LPAs should pay attention to the extent to which the layout and design, including materials, of development proposals are compatible with and reinforce the landscape character of the AONB. Such aspects of proposals may also be identified in any detailed design policies and guidance.

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<sup>2</sup> Great Trippetts Estates v SoS (2010) EWHC 1677

61. Consideration should be given to having specific design criteria or requirements for developments within and likely to affect AONBs. It is envisaged that such guidance will be prepared through the High Weald AONB Partnership, but does not rule out guidance specific to individual LPAs. Where there is reliance upon generic environment/landscape/design policies, encouragement is given to drawing on Management Plan objectives in applying policies in decision-making.

**5. Consider whether development outside the High Weald AONB may affect it**

62. Development close to the AONB has been recognised as a particular issue in relation to housing growth of towns around its fringes – and one that is set to become more significant. It would therefore, make sense to have a fairly common form of wording that highlights the need to consider the impact of development outside but still affecting the AONB.

63. The issue is the geographic extent of the area of influence. The Natural England Landscape Character Area (LCA) or County LCAs, referred to above, may be useful, but it should be recognised that there are parts of the AONB not in the High Weald LCA. A site-specific EIA would need to address this issue, where one is required.

64. Of note, a Court has held<sup>3</sup> that NPPF paragraph 115 includes views from the AONB into the surrounding landscape, effectively taking the view that the beauty of the AONB would be harmed if looking out of it one saw ugliness. However, conversely, it held that paragraph 115 was not intended to cover views of the AONB from outside, which carried less weight.

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<sup>3</sup> Stroud DC vSoS (2015) EWHC 488

## **E. Major development**

65. The question of what constitutes 'major development' is and will continue to be a key issue for LPA partners. This section considers the legal position in the light of national PPG and a number of recent appeal decisions, to assist them in their assessment of individual schemes.
66. The appeals have also looked at what constitutes 'exceptional circumstances' in the public interest for which development within AONBs could be granted planning permission. In addition, more standard policy considerations such as scale and design have been considered.
67. The appeals can be read in more detail in the supporting background paper 'Review of policy approaches to development within and affecting the High Weald AONB'. This paper also discusses what is and is not classified as major through these appeal decisions and the PPG and legislation.

### **Planning Practice Guidance**

68. The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG), issued in March 2014, does include some guidance on the definition of "major development" in paragraph 116 of the NPPF:

*"Paragraph: 005 Reference ID: 8-005-20140306*

*How is major development defined in National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, for the purposes of the consideration of planning applications in these areas?*

*Planning permission should be refused for major development in a National Park, the Broads or an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty except in exceptional circumstances and where it can be demonstrated to be in the public interest. Whether a proposed development in these designated areas should be treated as a major development, to which the policy in paragraph 116 of the Framework applies, will be a matter for the relevant decision taker, taking into account the proposal in question and the local context. The Framework is clear that great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in these designated areas irrespective of whether the policy in paragraph 116 is applicable."*

## Briefing

69. Firstly, none of the Local Plans reviewed define what is considered to be major development in NPPF terms. This naturally flows from the PPG advice above (notably that account must be taken of the proposal under consideration) and a 2013 case (*Aston v SofS*) which clearly stated that it would be wrong to import the definition of ‘major’ in the context of the 2010 TCP (Development Management Procedure) Order for the purposes of defining ‘major’ in the context of paragraph 116. (This view was upheld previous to the 2013 case by an inspector assessing an appeal for Land to the rear of Station Road in Ampleforth, Helmsley in 2012<sup>4</sup>.)
70. A legal Opinion provided to the South Downs National Park Authority in July 2014 (see <https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Guidelines-on-Significance-for-SDNP-Planning-Applications-%E2%80%93-NPPF-Complaint-July-2014.pdf> ) provides a very informative summary of the approach required. It highlights that “*the question of whether a proposal is ‘major development’ is context-specific and dependent on the particular application.*” Hence, it would not be appropriate to define a particular size of development to be regarded as major in the abstract. Rather, the decision-maker must take into account the circumstances of both the specific application and the context of the application site.
71. Of note, the most common consideration in terms of the local context is the size of the development in relation to the size of the settlement. The relationship of the site to the settlement has also been accepted as a factor, while the PPG draws in the circumstances of the ‘particular application’; hence, its scale, character or nature, which may also impact on whether it is major.
72. It has been noted that the NPPF refers to whether developments are major, rather than whether their impacts are major. However, the impacts on the AONB do need to be assessed in accordance with the third bullet point in paragraph 116, namely an assessment of ‘*any detrimental effect on the environment, the landscape and recreational opportunities, and the extent to which they can be moderated.*’

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<sup>4</sup> Please see paragraphs 4.5-4.8 of the supporting evidence paper ‘Review of policy approaches to development within and affecting the High Weald AONB’

73. It is also clear that the majority of decisions are determined in line with standard planning policies covering general design and environment/landscape aspects, based on the individual circumstances of each proposal, regardless of whether the proposal is considered ‘major’ development or not in relation to the AONB.
74. What is classed as exceptional circumstances seems to differ. For example, in the Staunton appeal<sup>5</sup> the inspector held that the lack of a 5 year housing land supply was not a sufficient argument to demonstrate ‘exceptional circumstances’. However, in the Winchcombe and Highfield Farm appeals<sup>6</sup> the severe lack of a housing land supply did constitute ‘exceptional circumstances’.
75. In the only appeal reviewed in the supporting evidence paper not to involve housing (the Thatcham proposal<sup>7</sup>), it is clear the inspector attached great weight to the size of the operation as well as its geographical extent.
76. In terms of defining ‘exceptional circumstances’, the appeal decisions reviewed show that (in common with determining what ‘major’ development is in an AONB), the facts of the individual proposals are key.
77. All cases reviewed consider the scale of the specific proposal rather than the cumulative impact of a number of schemes, which seems consistent with the phraseology in the NPPF, but it may still be a legitimate planning consideration, especially in policy formulation.
78. Finally, in considering whether development is ‘major’, attention is drawn to the advice of the judge in the above-mentioned court case when he confirmed that the meaning of the phrase *major development* was that which would be understood from the normal usage of those words.

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<sup>5</sup> See paragraphs 4.26 – 4.29 of the supporting evidence paper ‘Review of policy approaches to development within and affecting the High Weald AONB’

<sup>6</sup> See paragraphs 4.11 – 4.16 and 4.25 of the supporting evidence paper ‘Review of policy approaches to development within and affecting the High Weald AONB’ respectively.

<sup>7</sup> See paragraphs 4.21 – 4.24 of the supporting evidence paper ‘Review of policy approaches to development within and affecting the High Weald AONB’ respectively.

Committee: **High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee**

Date: **23 March 2016**

Title of Report: **Revenue Budget 2016/17**

By: **Treasurer to the Joint Advisory Committee**

Purpose of Report: **To approve the Revenue Budget 2016/17**

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## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

**The Joint Advisory Committee is recommended to:**

- 1. approve the Revenue Budget for 2016/17;**
  - 2. thank Defra and partner authorities for maintaining their contributions.**
- 

### **1. BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 This report sets out the budget for 2016/17 following a consultation approved by this committee in November 2015.
- 1.2 The budget supports the High Weald AONB Business Plan 2014-2017, which sets out how the High Weald AONB Unit will deliver its core functions and enable implementation of the High Weald AONB Management Plan 2014-2019.

### **2. FINANCIAL APPRAISAL**

- 2.1 Appendix A summarises the forecast out-turn for 2015/16, the proposed budget for 2016/17 and the indicative budget for 2017/18. Appendix B summarises the project budgets.
- 2.2 The Department for Food, Environment and Rural Affairs (Defra) contribution for 2016/17 had been forecast to reduce by £12,800 to £242,800 in the Draft Revenue Budget. However, since the budget was approved, Defra have confirmed an inflationary increase of £4,400, bringing the 2016/17 contribution to £260,000. The additional contribution above the amount previously forecast has been allocated to projects.
- 2.3 Salary savings of £14,200, other income of £9,000 and an allocation of 78% of the Defra single pot contribution to core activities has been required to achieve a balanced budget for 2016/17.

### **3. BUDGET 2015/16**

- 3.1 The High Weald core activities budget is currently forecast to break even in 2015/16. The forecast reserves at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2016 are £104,400.

#### **4. BUDGET 2016/17**

##### Core Budget – Expenditure

- 4.1 The budget for 2016/17 is presented in Appendix A. It is based on the 2015/16 figures with inflation at the ESCC applied rate of 1% for salaries and 0% for other costs. The budget allows for:
- (i) Staff costs: a core team of 5.8 FTE staff with incremental progression as a result of revised grades following the Single Status Review, contributions to the pension fund of 20.30% and estimated inflation of 1% for Single Status and LMG salaries.
  - (ii) Accommodation/office equipment costs: a standstill budget that covers rent, rates, office equipment, office maintenance and running costs.
  - (iii) Partnership running costs: a standstill budget that covers NAAONB membership fees, JAC meetings, representing the partnership at regional and national forums, producing the annual review and miscellaneous public relations costs.
  - (iv) Support services: East Sussex County Council's charges for IT, personnel and financial support.
- 4.2 In order to achieve a balanced budget, savings of £14,200 have been achieved through a reduction in staff costs.

##### Core Budget – Income

###### **Defra**

- 4.3 The Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) has a funding agreement with AONBs which provides for a flexible 'single pot' contribution for core, projects and the sustainable development fund (SDF).

Between 2011/12 and 2015/16 Defra reduced its funding to AONBs by 22.5%. However, over the next 4 years, Defra have advised that the National Parks and AONB budgets will be protected in real terms. The High Weald contribution will therefore increase by £4,400 to £260,000 in 2016/17 rising to £273,400 in 2019/20.

- 4.4 The 2015/16 contribution of £255,600 was allocated as follows: £214,700 to Core and £40,900 to the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) and Projects.
- 4.5 Defra's total contribution for 2016/17 is shown in appendix A. It shows the contribution of £260,000 allocated as £204,000 to Core and £56,000 to Projects.

###### **Local Authority Contributions**

- 4.6 The respective levels of support from each authority are shown in Appendix A.
- 4.7 In respect of core costs, most authorities have confirmed their contributions at 2015/16 levels. One authority has provisionally approved their contribution, totalling £10,000, subject to formal approval of their budgets.

###### **Self-funding projects**

- 4.8 JAC expenditure on self-funding projects is presented at Appendix B and is estimated to be £150,200 in 2016/17. Appendix B indicates contributions from local authority partners to projects, including High Weald Heroes.
- 4.9 It is proposed to allocate £56,000 from the Defra 'single pot' to Projects.
- 4.11 All projects have a balanced budget over the total life of the project. Income is allocated on a pro rata basis over the relevant number of financial years to give a net balance of zero.
- 4.12 Decisions on a grant application with a value of £20,000 p.a. for 5 years is awaited and 2 more funding applications are due to be submitted in the next 3 months. They are not indicated in the 16/17 budget. If successful, expenditure on self-funding projects could increase significantly.

## **5. FINANCIAL ISSUES 2017/18 AND BEYOND**

- 5.1 Confirmation that Defra will maintain its contribution to the JAC in real terms for the next 4 years is very welcome.
- 5.2 The increased Defra contribution of £17,800 over 4 years will help meet the core budget deficit forecast for 2017/18 to 2019/20.
- 5.3 Other income for core services will need to be maintained to balance the budget.
- 5.4 The project budget is sufficient for developing new projects, producing management plan evidence and guidance, delivering High Weald Heroes and enabling land managers and communities to develop and deliver landscape enhancement projects.
- 5.5 Renewal of the Unit's office lease is currently being negotiated by East Sussex County Council and will be a budget pressure for 2017/18 and beyond.
- 5.6 From 2016/17 Defra will not contribute to redundancy costs. All of the estimated reserves at 31 March 2017 of £104,400 will be required in a worst case scenario of all staff being made redundant.

## **6. CONCLUSIONS AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 6.1 The 2016/17 core budget is a balanced budget which provides the JAC with the capacity to deliver its core functions; albeit with a smaller staff team.
- 6.2 The project budget reflects the fact that current projects are more modest in scale with the development and delivery of some dependent on core, not project staff.
- 6.3 On this basis the JAC is recommended to agree the budget.

MARIE NICKALLS  
Treasurer to the High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee

2014/15 Actual	2015/16		2016/17				2017/18	
	Budget	Outturn	Original Budget	Inflation	Budget Pressures	Other	Budget	Indicative Budget
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
<b>Actual Details</b>								
<b>Expenditure</b>								
228.9 Staff costs	237.2	228.1	237.2	1.7	0.0	(14.2)	224.7	226.9
39.1 Accommodation/office equipment	34.2	39.0	34.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	34.2	34.2
7.8 Partnership running costs	11.5	8.7	11.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	11.5	11.5
27.3 Support services	27.3	27.3	27.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	27.3	27.3
<b>303.1 Total Core Expenditure</b>	<b>310.2</b>	<b>303.1</b>	<b>310.2</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>(14.2)</b>	<b>297.7</b>	<b>299.9</b>
80.7 JAC expenditure on self-funding projects	87.6	76.8	87.6	0.0	0.0	(22.3)	65.3	65.3
40.9 Defra expenditure on self-funding projects	40.9	40.9	40.9	0.0	0.0	15.1	56.0	58.2
6.7 Project Enabling Fund expenditure on self-funding projects	9.6	0.0	9.6	0.0	0.0	19.3	28.9	28.9
<b>128.3 Total JAC expenditure on self-funding projects</b>	<b>138.1</b>	<b>117.7</b>	<b>138.1</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>12.1</b>	<b>150.2</b>	<b>152.4</b>
<b>431.4 Total Gross Expenditure</b>	<b>448.3</b>	<b>420.8</b>	<b>448.3</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>(2.1)</b>	<b>447.9</b>	<b>452.3</b>
<b>Core Contributions</b>								
214.7 Defra	214.7	214.7	214.7	0.0	0.0	(10.7)	204.0	206.2
22.4 East Sussex County Council	22.4	22.4	22.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	22.4	22.4
10.0 Kent County Council	10.0	10.0	10.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	10.0	10.0
9.3 West Sussex County Council	9.3	9.3	9.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	9.3	9.3
2.9 Surrey County Council	2.9	2.9	2.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.9	2.9
7.2 Wealden District	7.2	7.2	7.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	7.2	7.2
7.2 Rother District Council	7.2	7.2	7.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	7.2	7.2
5.6 Mid Sussex District Council	5.6	5.6	5.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.6	5.6
6.7 Tunbridge Wells Borough Council	6.7	6.7	6.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	6.7	6.7
4.7 Horsham District Council	4.7	4.7	4.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.7	4.7
3.6 Sevenoaks District Council	3.6	3.6	3.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.6	3.6
0.8 Ashford Borough Council	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.8	0.8
1.5 Hastings Borough Council	1.5	1.5	1.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.5	1.5
2.2 Tandridge District Council	2.2	2.2	2.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.2	2.2
0.3 Crawley Borough Council	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.3
0.3 Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.3
10.4 Other Income	10.8	3.7	10.8	0.0	0.0	(1.8)	9.0	9.0
<b>309.8 Total Core Contributions</b>	<b>310.2</b>	<b>303.1</b>	<b>310.2</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>(12.5)</b>	<b>297.7</b>	<b>299.9</b>
6.7 Project Enabling Fund: (to)/from balances	9.6	0.0	9.6	0.0	0.0	19.3	28.9	28.9
<b>6.7 Total Local Authority Project Enabling Fund Contributions</b>	<b>9.6</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>9.6</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>19.3</b>	<b>28.9</b>	<b>28.9</b>
40.9 Defra contributions to self-funding projects	40.9	40.9	40.9	0.0	0.0	15.1	56.0	58.2
80.7 JAC contributions to self-funding projects	87.6	76.8	87.6	0.0	0.0	(22.3)	65.3	65.3
<b>438.1 Total Contributions</b>	<b>448.3</b>	<b>420.8</b>	<b>448.3</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>(0.4)</b>	<b>447.9</b>	<b>452.3</b>
<b>6.7 Transfer (from)/to reserves</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>(1.7)</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>(0.0)</b>
(6.7) Total (surplus)/deficit for year	0.0	(0.0)	0.0	1.7	0.0	(1.7)	(0.0)	0.0
97.7 Reserves Brought Forward	104.4	104.4	104.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	104.4	104.4
6.7 Transfer (from)/to reserves	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	(0.0)
<b>104.4 Reserves Carried Forward</b>	<b>104.4</b>	<b>104.4</b>	<b>104.4</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>104.4</b>	<b>104.4</b>

## SELF FUNDING PROJECTS BUDGET 2015/16 &amp; INDICATIVE BUDGET 2016/17

	Budget 2015/16			Outturn 2015/16			Indicative Budget 2016/17		
	Exp £'000	Income £'000	Net £'000	Exp £'000	Income £'000	Net £'000	Exp £'000	Income £'000	Net £'000
<b><u>1 Community Outreach Project</u></b>									
JAC expenditure	25.1			19.4			36.8		
Defra		(25.1)			(19.4)			(18.4)	
Project Enabling Fund		0.0	0.0		0.0	0.0		(18.4)	0.0
<b><u>2 Management Plan Evidence and Guidance</u></b>									
JAC expenditure	4.7			18.1			17.2		
Defra		(1.2)			(2.1)			(17.2)	
Other		(3.5)	0.0		(16.0)	0.0		0.0	0.0
<b><u>3 High Weald Heroes</u></b>									
JAC expenditure	19.2			22.5			21.0		
Defra		(9.6)			(19.3)			(10.5)	
Project Enabling Fund		(9.6)			0.0			(10.5)	
Other		0.0	0.0		(3.2)	(0.0)		0.0	0.0
<b><u>4 Landscape Enhancement Initiative</u></b>									
JAC expenditure	84.0			57.6			65.3		
Environment Agency		0.0			(20.0)			0.0	
Local authorities		(60.0)			(6.8)			(65.3)	
Other		(24.0)	0.0		(30.8)	0.0		0.0	0.0
<b><u>5 Project Development</u></b>									
JAC expenditure	5.0			0.0			9.9		
Defra		(5.0)			0.0	0.0		(9.9)	0.0
JAC expenditure (to Appendix A)	138.0	(87.5)		117.7	(76.8)		150.2	(65.3)	
Project Enabling Fund expenditure (to Appendix A)		(9.6)			0.0			(28.9)	
Expenditure Funded by Defra (to Appendix A)		(40.9)			(40.9)			(56.0)	
<b>TOTAL JAC expenditure/income</b>	<b>138.0</b>	<b>(138.0)</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>117.7</b>	<b>(117.7)</b>	<b>(0.0)</b>	<b>150.2</b>	<b>(150.2)</b>	<b>0.0</b>

**Committee:** High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee

**Date:** 23 March 2016

**Title of Report:** Landscape Enhancement Programme

**By:** AONB Business Manager

**Purpose:** To consider and agree the approach to landscape enhancement advice and support.

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## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Joint Advisory Committee is recommended to approve:

the Landscape Enhancement Programme approach as set out in paragraphs 2.9 to 2.11.

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### **1.0 Background**

- 1.1 Enthusing and supporting the area's land managers to conserve and enhance the High Weald is essential to achieving many of the AONB Management Plan objectives.
- 1.2 The AONB Unit has a track record in working with land managers having successfully developed and delivered a range of AONB wide land management initiatives in partnership with others (listed in Appendix 1 as a reference for new committee members).
- 1.3 Financial support from local authorities, Defra, INTERREG, charitable trusts and the Heritage Lottery Fund in particular, has been instrumental in enabling these initiatives; all of which have benefited from dedicated project officers.
- 1.4 However, increasing competition for Heritage Lottery Fund support and reducing public sector funds, means that securing resources for the strategic land management initiative 'model', a 3-5 year, AONB wide project supported by a dedicated officer(s), is no longer viable.
- 1.5 In June 2015, due to declining funds, the High Weald Community Landscape Fund (CLF), which has run in parallel with the Partnership's land management initiatives, was also closed down.

- 1.6 Within this context the Unit has considered how it continues to support land managers and is proposing a revised approach.

## **2.0 Supporting Information**

### Opportunities

- 2.1 There are an increasing number of bodies running grant-aid programmes that could support site-specific landscape conservation and enhancement projects across the AONB.
- 2.2 These include national schemes, such as Countryside Stewardship and the Heritage Lottery Fund's grant programmes, but also local schemes; the Partnership's Brede Habitat Enhancement Grant Scheme; the newly launched LEADER programme; Sussex Lund; and the soon to be launched National Grid's Visual Impact Provision - Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI).
- 2.3 Further information on key schemes, and some analysis of their value in meeting AONB Management Plan objectives, is attached as Appendix 2.
- 2.4 The National Grid LEI and Sussex Lund could potentially lead to an investment of £2million into the area over a 5 year period, if these experimental schemes are successful and ongoing.

### Weaknesses

- 2.5 For the High Weald landscape to benefit from these programmes there is a need for good quality projects to be developed and submitted.
- 2.6 In the past Natural England (and its predecessors English Nature and the Countryside Agency), local authority specialists, for example ecologists and archaeologists, or countryside management services would encourage and support the development of such projects. A reduced public sector means this support is now limited.
- 2.7 The Farming and Wildlife Group (FWAG) also played an important role in encouraging projects but unfortunately has dissolved. Other charities, such as Butterfly Conservation and Buglife, have developed their land management advisory role to meet the advisory gap, however initiatives are often species-specific, time limited and the dedicated project officers are spread thinly, normally across the South East region.
- 2.8 Without organisations promoting the grant programmes, and enabling land managers to develop suitable landscape enhancement projects, there is a risk that the area will not capitalise from the grant programmes listed in Appendix 2.

## Approach

- 2.9 In recognition of the Unit's strengths, and the opportunities and weaknesses set out above, the Unit is proposing to run a new Landscape Enhancement Programme until March 2018.
- 2.10 The objectives of the programme will be to:
- Proactively encourage the development of landscape enhancement projects
  - Assist land managers with securing resources to conserve and enhance the area's character components from the grant schemes listed in Appendix 2.
  - Help remove barriers to project development and delivery
  - Foster a landscape-scale approach to projects amongst landowners and to
  - Enable land managers to gain the knowledge and skills needed to care for the High Weald.
- 2.11 Some financial support for the project will come from the Defra contribution to the High Weald AONB Partnership. The remainder will come from a range of sources and the annual work plan will be led by these sources. For example, funding through the Rother and Romney Water Partnership, the Brede Habitat Enhancement Grant Scheme and the Environment Agency has led to a focus on wetland restoration projects during 2015/16. A successful application to the Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund for £100,000 to support the Upper Rother and Dudwell land manager network will result in a focus in this area from 2016 to 2021.
- 2.12 To deliver the programme Matt Pitts, an existing member of staff, has had his contract renewed and he is now employed as an Outreach Officer (0.8FTE) and Tamara Taylor, who has complementary skills, has been recruited as a Land Management Adviser (0.4FTE) giving the project a dedicated resource of 1.2FTE.
- 2.13 Over the last 6 months the project officers have:
- developed relationships with landowners in the areas being prioritised by grants schemes;
  - identified potential land management projects in priority areas;
  - provided site-specific land management advice across the wider AONB on request;
  - created the beginnings of an Upper Rother and Dudwell Land Manager Network;
  - initiated a landscape-scale grassland enhancement and restoration project; and
  - encouraged and supported community-led applicants to Sussex Lund.

- 2.14 Once the National Grid LEI has been launched a steering group for the Landscape Enhancement programme will be established drawing on support from CLF members.
- 2.15 Identifying grant programmes or other funding sources that have objectives and criteria that closely align with the objectives and activities proposed for the Restocking the Weald project is ongoing and it is hoped that the scope of the Landscape Enhancement programme will be expanded in future.
- 2.16 Another Landscape Partnership Scheme proposal 'Fields of Dreams' is being developed for submission to the Heritage Lottery Fund at the end of May.

### **3.0 Conclusions and Recommendation**

- 3.1 There are currently a range of grant programmes that could support the delivery of site-specific landscape enhancement projects.
- 3.2 A new, High Weald Landscape Enhancement Programme is proposed which will focus on enabling land managers to capitalise on the opportunities offered by these grant programmes.
- 3.3 Although small-scale, site-specific projects are currently favoured by grant programmes the Unit will continue to explore funding opportunities for large-scale, more strategic projects such as Restocking the Weald.
- 3.4 Members are asked to endorse the approach set out in the report.

Contact: Gerry Sherwin, AONB Business Manager, [g.sherwin@highweald.org](mailto:g.sherwin@highweald.org)

## **Appendix 1**

### **Past High Weald Land Management Initiatives**

#### **Weald Meadows Initiative**

*Purpose:* To ensure the long term survival of the irreplaceable species-rich grassland of the Heathfield to Battle Ridge and the Weald in general and secure their productive and economic use.

*Partners:* High Weald Landscape Trust, the Tubney Charitable Trust, INTERREG IIIB *Lifescape Your Landscape*, WARR Partnership, Natural England, the Environment Agency, East Sussex County Council, Wealden District Council, Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) and Agrifactors (Southern)Ltd.

*Timescale:* 1996 to 2010

#### **Weald Heathland Initiative**

*Purpose:* To secure for the benefit of wildlife and the local community, a heathland matrix across the acid soils of the Weald - to include Ashdown Forest, the largest area of 'wildspace' in South East England.

*Partners:* Heritage Lottery Fund, English Nature, RSPB, West Sussex County Council, East Sussex County Council, Countryside Agency, Hastings Borough Council, Forestry Commission, DEFRA and landowners.

*Timescale:* 2001 to 2006

#### **Ancient Woodland Restoration Project**

*Purpose:* To provide specialist management advice to landowners, land managers and forestry contractors on the restoration of plantations on ancient woodland sites in the High Weald AONB.

*Partners:* Woodland Trust, Forestry Commission, INTERREG IIIB *Lifescape Your Landscape*.

*Timescale:* 2005 to 2012

#### **Weald Forest Ridge Landscape Partnership Scheme**

*Purpose:* A 3.3 million project that widened access to and conservation of, the Weald Forest Ridges' special landscape, cultural and historic features, by involving local people and organisations in the area's integrated management.

*Partners:* Heritage Lottery Fund, NE, local authorities, BTCV, the Conservators of Ashdown Forest, East Sussex Archaeology and Museums Partnership, East Sussex County Council, ESUS Forestry & Woodlands Ltd, FWAG (Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group), the Forestry Commission, Gatwick Greenspace Partnership, Highbrook Village Hall Committee, Horsham District Council, Kent High Weald Project, Plumpton College, RSPB, Sussex Police, Sussex Wildlife Trust, THE SOUTH, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, and the Weald & Downland Open Air Museum.

*Timescale:* 2009 to 2012

#### **Cultural Heritage Initiative/Living Woods**

*Purpose:* To further landowners understanding of the special features on their land holding and bring land managers together to further protection of ancient woodlands, in particular their archaeological heritage

*Partners:* Heritage Lottery Fund, Woodland Trust, Forestry Commission.

*Timescale:* 2012 to 2015

## **Appendix 2**

### **Delivering the High Weald AONB Management Plan**

#### **- Relevant Grant Schemes**

#### **A. Countryside Stewardship**

Countryside Stewardship provides financial incentives for land managers to look after their environment through activities such as:

- conserving and restoring wildlife habitats
- flood risk management
- woodland creation and management
- reducing widespread water pollution from agriculture
- keeping the character of the countryside
- preserving features important to the history of the rural landscape
- encouraging educational access.

The scheme is:

- open to all eligible farmers, woodland owners, foresters and other land managers
- suitable for many types of land use (e.g. conventional and organic farmland, coastal areas, uplands and woodlands)
- competitive
- scored against local priority targets to maximise environmental benefit.

The scheme is led by Natural England working with Forestry Commission England, Environment Agency and the Rural Payments Agency (RPA).

#### ***Unit comment***

This Scheme has recently changed and Natural England staff are focused on enabling 'higher-tier' grants targeted at Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), such as Ashdown Forest, and areas in the immediate vicinity of SSSIs. There is little support to help landowners elsewhere to access 'mid-tier' grants and unfortunately small land holdings are unlikely to score highly enough (affecting many meadow owners) to achieve these grants. Capital payments for boundary enhancements are available for one-off projects on a competitive basis. The Scheme directs approximately £4 million into enhancements in the High Weald per annum. Targeted support from the Unit may enable support for other high priority sites/areas and there may be financial support for this role through the Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund.

#### **B. LEADER Programme**

LEADER is part of the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE). Funding is available to local businesses, communities, farmers, foresters and land managers. The Local Action Group (LAG) decides which projects they will fund in their area. A LAG is made up of people from the local community and the local public and private sector.

The projects that are funded are dependent on their priorities but all projects must

support one or more of the 6 LEADER priorities. These are to:

- support micro and small businesses and farm diversification
- boost rural tourism
- increase farm productivity
- increase forestry productivity
- provide rural services
- provide cultural and heritage activities.

There are 3 LAGs delivering LEADER grants in the High Weald which means that collectively the Scheme is relevant to all of the AONB.

***Unit comment***

This scheme supports the High Weald's rural economy. Projects considered ineligible for LEADER that benefit the AONB landscape may be eligible for support under other programmes, for example Sussex Lund.

### **C. Heritage Lottery Fund**

The Heritage Lottery Fund has a number of different grants programmes, funding all kinds of heritage projects with grants from £3000 to over £5million. In assessing applications they take account of the outcomes for heritage, people and communities that projects will achieve.

**Sharing Heritage** grants of £3,000 to £10,000 support projects that help people explore their community's heritage. **Our Heritage** grants of £10,000 to £100,000 can help protect and share the heritage people care about and can focus on anything from personal memories and cultural traditions to archaeological sites, museum collections and rare wildlife.

***Unit comment***

There is significant scope for HLF grant programmes to support site-specific community-led projects similar to those that have been supported by the High Weald Community Landscape Fund in the past.

### **D. Battle and Brede Habitat Enhancement Scheme**

The Unit has been administering a grant scheme to support habitat enhancements in and around the Brede area since 2015, supported by a consultant who has been proactive in contacting and developing projects with landowners. A significant proportion of the budget is still available.

***Unit comment***

There is still a need for proactive work to encourage applications to this scheme. Using a consultant has achieved the required outcomes but without the other benefits that arise from having an officer based within the Unit leading on the project. The Unit's Landscape Enhancement team will lead on this grant programme in 2016/17.

## **E. National Grid VIP - Landscape Enhancement Initiative**

The overall objective of this initiative is to reduce the landscape and visual impact of National Grid's existing electricity infrastructure and enhance the quality of the affected designated landscapes. Where the visual impacts of the electricity transmission line cannot be directly screened or otherwise mitigated it may be possible to shift emphasis away from the transmission line by enhancing the landscape in other ways.

### ***Unit comment***

It has been agreed nationally that AONB Partnerships will develop and submit applications to National Grid on behalf of land managers in their protected landscapes, and, assuming applications are successful, the Partnerships will administer the funds to local projects. The LEI is relevant to an area within 3km of the National Grid's powerline at the eastern end of the High Weald. National Grid has a fund of £26 million to support this Initiative which is to be launched shortly.

## **F. Sussex Lund**

This grants programme was launched in early March and has been established by Peter Baldwin and Lisbet Rausing. It will support small-scale, practical projects that improve the ecology and landscape of the High Weald. Grants of between £500 and £10,000 are available to charities, community groups, schools, churches, councils, farmers and landowners.

### ***Unit comment***

This new grant programme has significant potential to support projects that are otherwise not eligible under other grant schemes, for example projects that tackle light and sign pollution.

## **G. Water Catchment Grants**

The Catchment Sensitive Farming Project is led by Natural England with (in certain areas) financial support from South East Water and Southern Water. The project offers grants to landowners to help manage runoff and leaching from their land thus reducing sediment, pesticide and nutrient losses from yards and fields into rivers. Additionally the Rother and Romney Water Catchment Partnership (of which the Unit is a member) has had and continue to have funds to support capital projects, for example fish habitat enhancements.

### ***Unit comment***

Proactive work by the Unit has been essential to the AONB benefiting from the Defra funding available to the Rother and Romney Water Catchment Partnership in 2014/15 and 2015/16.

## **H. Woodland Trust MORE woods**

Financial and practical woodland creation available to people and organisations wanting support for small woods or scattered plantings covering at least half a hectare (1.25 acres) which can combine field corners, shelterbelts or strips of land together to meet the minimum requirement. If landowners plant the trees, there is a

contribution of 60% towards the project costs. If project involves a tree planting contractor, 50% of the costs are paid. A planting and maintenance plan and budget needs to be agreed, after which the Woodland Trust sorts and delivers the trees.

***Unit comment***

This programme can add value to Countryside Stewardship. Input from the Unit is useful to ensure that projects avoid wildlife-rich grassland.

**I. Gatwick Airport Community Trust**

An independent charity that awards grants annually for deserving projects within the area of benefit covering parts of East and West Sussex, Surrey and Kent. In particular, funds are channelled to those areas where people are directly affected by operations at Gatwick Airport. It supports schemes that are targeted towards the development of young people, the arts, sporting facilities, environmental improvement and conservation, improvements to community facilities, volunteering, the elderly and the disabled. The normal level of grant is from £1,000 to £5,000.

***Unit comment***

With encouragement and support to potential applicants there is probably scope for this Fund to support more projects that meet AONB Management Plan objectives.

## Agenda Item No. 9

**Committee:** High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee

**Date:** 23 March 2016

**Title of Report:** Neighbourhood Planning

**By:** AONB Landscape Advisor

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### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Members are recommended to note the report.

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#### **1.0 Background**

- 1.1 Neighbourhood Planning, which was introduced through the Localism Act in 2011, has the potential to significantly affect the location and appearance of future development across the AONB. Consequently, the neighbourhood plan process represents an important opportunity for the AONB Unit to positively influence development in a way that meets the Management Plan objectives and thereby conserves and enhances the area's natural beauty.
- 1.2 In the last few months there has been an increase in parishes contacting the Unit asking for information about the AONB. This need is being driven primarily by an increase in the production of Neighbourhood Plans.
- 1.3 The Unit holds a large amount of GIS character component data that it would like to share more widely with its stakeholders, including local authorities and residents, in a way that is accessible and useful.

#### **2.0 Supporting information**

- 2.1 In response to the above, the AONB Unit, –with input and advice from the Officers Steering Group and Management Board, has produced a guidance note on how to consider the AONB in Neighbourhood Plans.
- 2.2 The guidance provides a brief introduction to the Neighbourhood Planning process and the landscape of the High Weald AONB, as well as guidance on how to consider the AONB in a Neighbourhood Plan.
- 2.3 The note also lists sources of data and evidence relating to the AONB (including High Weald character component data linked to objectives in the Management Plan) that can be used to inform planning decisions.
- 2.4 In addition to the guidance note, the character component data used in the production of the Management Plan has been mapped for all of the 99 parishes in the High Weald AONB. This was achieved by researching and testing a new way of producing maps automatically in large batches using the open source software, QGIS. The result was a total of 495 new maps displaying key component data for every parish in the High Weald AONB.

- 2.5 The resulting maps display the extent of sandstone outcrops, ponds, rivers, wildflower meadows, heathland, historic field boundaries, historic routeways, historic settlement boundaries, historic farmsteads, and ancient woodland across each of the parishes within the High Weald.
- 2.6 To help with the interpretation and understanding of the mapped data a summary of what the data shows and how it was created (metadata) has been produced.
- 2.7 The Neighbourhood Planning Guidance, the character component maps, and the character component metadata will be made available for download from [www.highweald.org](http://www.highweald.org) over the coming weeks. Making this information available online should help raise awareness of the AONB and ensure it is properly considered in any future Neighbourhood Plans. It should also be of use to Local Authority Planning Departments as well as residents of the area.
- 2.8 To help raise awareness of this data and guidance, every parish has been contacted and asked to submit expressions of interest. Further promotion will be done through the High Weald AONB e-newsletter and website.

### **3.0 Conclusions and Recommendation**

- 3.1 Given the Unit's limited resources and staff time, the approach taken (i.e. automatically generating maps for each parish in large batches and making all the information available to download on our website) ensures we can make our data available to all 99 High Weald parishes in an efficient and cost effective manner.
- 3.2 With the appointment of a new Planning Officer the Unit plans to continue its engagement with the neighbourhood planning process and the High Weald's constituent parishes.
- 3.1 Members are asked to note the report.

Contact: Charles Winchester, Landscape Advisor, [charles.winchester@highweald.org](mailto:charles.winchester@highweald.org)

# Neighbourhood Development Plans:

considering the High Weald AONB in your plan



Produced by the High Weald AONB Partnership [www.highweald.org](http://www.highweald.org)

March 2016

## Introduction

Neighbourhood Plans, like Local Plans, must have regard to the implications of their policies and proposals for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs). This guidance note sets out how Neighbourhood Plans being prepared in areas within or adjoining the High Weald AONB can take proper account of its designation.

## What are Neighbourhood Plans?

Neighbourhood planning was introduced through the Localism Act in 2011. The aim was to enable communities to shape development in their areas by producing Neighbourhood Development Plans<sup>1</sup>, as well as Neighbourhood Development Orders and Community Right to Build Orders<sup>2</sup> (for more information, visit [GOV.UK](http://GOV.UK) and [My Community Rights](#)).

Essentially, the purpose of Neighbourhood Plans is to establish planning policies for the development and use of land in a 'neighbourhood' – often, but not exclusively, a town or parish council area. Therefore a Neighbourhood Plan will include policies that specify:

- Where new homes and offices should be built;
- What these new homes and offices should look like.

Neighbourhood Plans ultimately become part of the statutory 'development plan' for the area and their policies can then be used in the determination of planning applications.

Neighbourhood Plans provide local communities the opportunity to apply the broader-scale strategies made in Local Plans, which are drawn up by local councils, to reflect local circumstances. However, they are still required to conform generally to such strategic policies, which in most cases will mean providing for the housing and other development needs in the area set out in the relevant Local Plan. It should be stressed that the Neighbourhood Plan policies cannot block development that is already part of the Local Plan. What they can do, however, is decide the location and form of development.

<sup>1</sup>Hereafter Neighbourhood Development Plans will simply be referred to as 'Neighbourhood Plans', as in practice this is the more commonly used term.

<sup>2</sup>Neighbourhood Development Orders and Community Right to Build Orders allow communities to grant planning permission, in full or in outline, for the types of development they want to see in their areas.

## The legal framework for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

### *Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000*

All relevant authorities (including statutory undertakers, regulators, parish councils, and holders of public office in addition to government and local planning authorities) are required under Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 to consider the purpose of the AONB designation — i.e. the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty (see below). For more information, please see [Section 85 of the CRoW Act 2000 in its entirety](#).

#### **The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000**

"In exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in an area of outstanding natural beauty, a relevant authority shall have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty"

- **Section 85, CroW Act 2000**

In addition, Defra recommends that these same public bodies be able to clearly demonstrate that they have considered the purpose of AONBs in their decision making.

#### **Duty of regard**

In addition to Section 85, a [Defra Guidance Note on AONBs](#) that expands on this duty of regard states that the relevant authorities "should be able to clearly show how they have considered the purposes of these areas in their decision making."

- **Defra 2005**

## National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

National planning policies are contained in the [NPPF](#). Its focus is on sustainable development, the meaning of which is defined in paragraph 8 as simultaneously seeking economic, social and environmental gains.

Paragraphs 115 and 116 relate specifically to development in AONBs:

### National Planning Policy Framework

115. Great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty. The conservation of wildlife and cultural heritage are important considerations in all these areas, and should be given great weight in National Parks and the Broads.

116. Planning permission should be refused for major developments in these designated areas except in exceptional circumstances and where it can be demonstrated they are in the public interest. Consideration of such applications should include an assessment of:

- the need for the development, including in terms of any national considerations, and the impact of permitting it, or refusing it, upon the local economy;
- the cost of, and scope for, developing elsewhere outside the designated area, or meeting the need for it in some other way;
- any detrimental effect on the environment, the landscape and recreational opportunities, and the extent to which that could be moderated.

## Implications for Neighbourhood Plans

Paragraphs 115 and 116 of the NPPF complement Section 85 of the CRoW Act 2000 by expecting planning bodies, which includes those preparing Neighbourhood Plans, to not only have regard for the conservation and enhancement of AONBs, but to also give it great weight.

The use of the terms “*landscape*” and “*scenic beauty*” in paragraph 115 highlights the need to consider both the visual impacts on the scenic qualities of an AONB and the impacts on its intrinsic landscape character, which embraces aspects of landform, geology, flora and fauna, landscape features and historic settlement pattern, developed over centuries.

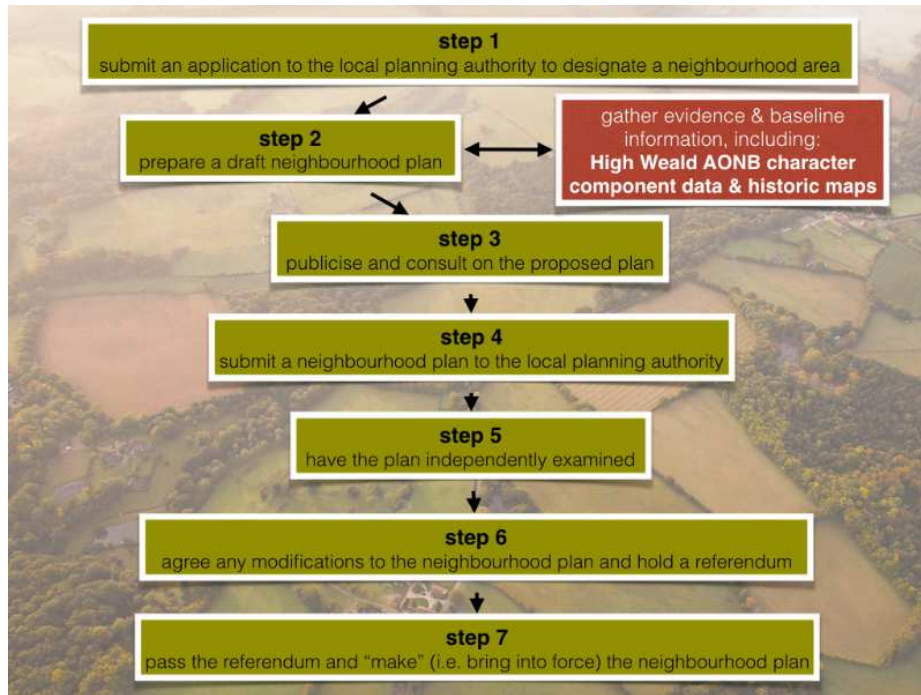
Also, the emphasis on sustainable development may be taken as encouraging plans to seek developments that offer benefits in terms of conserving or enhancing natural beauty. For example, a strong rural economy in which farm and woodland enterprises thrive enables the management necessary to conserve key landscape features.

## Key stages in Neighbourhood Plans and building an evidence base

There are a number of stages in the preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan. The basic steps are outlined in the diagram below, along with an indication of where evidence relating to the AONB should be incorporated. For a more detailed account of these stages, please see the government’s [planning portal guidance on neighbourhood plans](#) as well as Locality’s [neighbourhood planning roadmap](#).

Although this only provides a broad overview of the steps involved, it clearly indicates that AONB-related evidence and data should be sought early in the process — ideally soon after a neighbourhood plan area has been agreed upon and designated. This will help ensure that planning policy and proposals are based on a meaningful understanding of the AONB and robust information about the local area (i.e. the “evidence base”).

Figure 1: Summary of key stages in producing a Neighbourhood Plan



## Introduction to the High Weald AONB

A medieval landscape of wooded, rolling hills studded with sandstone outcrops, small, irregular-shaped fields, scattered farmsteads, and ancient routeways, the High Weald is one of Britain's 46 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and a nationally significant designated landscape. Its natural beauty is defined by its five character components:

### Key components of natural beauty in the High Weald AONB

1. **Geology, landform, water systems and climate**
  - Sandrock outcrops
  - Gill streams
2. **Settlement:**
  - Dispersed settlement pattern
  - Historic farmsteads
1. **Routeways:**
  - Droveaways
  - Sunken lanes
2. **Woodland:**
  - Ancient woodland
  - Archaeological remains
3. **Field and heath:**
  - Unimproved grassland
  - Heathland
  - Historic field boundaries

Together, these character components — which are found consistently across the High Weald, from Rye in the east to Horsham in the west — help constitute the fundamental character of the area. They have made the High Weald a recognisably distinct landscape for at least the last 700 years and will continue to define it in the future.

The [High Weald AONB Management Plan](#) has been adopted by the Area's 15 constituent local authorities in order to help conserve and enhance this natural beauty. The Management Plan defines the Area's natural beauty — its 'character components' — and sets objectives for these components. Neighbourhood Plans should have regard to the AONB Management Plan and its objectives in its assessment of proposals.

## Evidence to help you conserve the High Weald AONB

In order to effectively conserve and enhance the AONB it is first necessary to know the location and extent of important features in the landscape. Once known, any potential impacts can be avoided or mitigated and may even be directed towards the conservation and enhancement of the landscape.

The following mapped data can be supplied by the High Weald AONB Unit to support the production of your Neighbourhood Plan:

### *Character component data*

These are the most important datasets in terms of the AONB designation as they represent those features that constitute the High Weald's natural beauty. These data consist of:

- Water systems data (watercourses, ponds, reservoirs and openwater)
- Geology data (bedrock geology and sandstone outcrops)
- Settlement data (historic settlement pattern and historic farmsteads)
- Historic routeways data
- Woodland data (ancient semi-natural woodlands and plantations on ancient woodland site)
- Field and heath data (historic field boundaries, heathland, and wildflower grassland)

### *Additional contextual data*

These datasets provide additional information to help interpret the character component data, to help highlight locally important features, and to provide general historical context. These data consist of:

- Historic maps (OS Epoch maps, tithe maps, OSD and estate maps)
- Historic Landscape Characterisation data
- Aerial images
- LiDAR data (only partial coverage of the AONB)

By providing data that can be used to inform Neighbourhood Plans, we aim to support the duty of all public bodies and statutory undertakers set out in Section 85 of the CROW Act 2000 to 'have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty'. These spatial data should help to fulfill this duty of regard by identifying features that – together with other sources of information – will lead to a better understanding of the landscape and its sensitivity to change.

Although examining mapped data and other sources of information can be useful, when it comes to the natural and historic environment there is no substitute for undertaking an on-the-ground field survey. Undertaking or commissioning surveys has the advantage of potentially picking up important features or species missed by existing datasets, or identifying important changes that have occurred since a mapped dataset was originally created.

## Other useful information and data

There are a range of additional information sources that are also relevant to High Weald AONB objectives and which may be consulted during the production of your Neighbourhood Plan. They may be divided up into four broad categories: landscape, environment, historic and other.

### *Landscape*

Landscape Character Assessments (LCAs) provide useful descriptions of the landscape character more locally. They take account of the framework provided by the larger-scale National Character Areas (NCAs) defined by Natural England (see the [High Weald NCA](#)) and describe variations in the landscape character at a sub-county scale. Click on the links below to find your relevant Landscape Character Assessment:

- [East Sussex](#)
- [West Sussex](#)
- [Kent](#)
- [Surrey](#)

## Environment

A good starting point for environmental data is the government's [Magic website](#). Through Magic you can access information on habitats, species, designations (both landscape-scale and site-scale), geology, soils, and the Agricultural Land Classification (ALC). All data are presented in an interactive map viewer (see the screenshot below) which does not require any special software to use.



It is also worth consulting your county biological records office for biodiversity information relating to the local area. For non-commercial use this data is usually supplied free of charge in the form of a report listing things like protected species, invasive species, rare species, habitats and designated areas. Please follow the links below to find out more about obtaining data from your county biological records office:

- [Sussex Biodiversity Records Office](#)
- [Kent Biological Records Office](#)
- [Surrey Biodiversity Information Centre](#)

The [National Biodiversity Network \(NBN\) Gateway](#) is another useful way to access an enormous number of species records from all across the UK. Like the Magic website these records can be viewed online on an interactive map (see the screenshot below).



Undertaking a rapid survey of the grassland in your parish is also recommended. This will help ensure any habitat of high biodiversity value (i.e. species-rich meadow) is picked up at an early stage. It will also help to fulfill the requirement outlined in [Paragraph 117 of the the NPPF](#) to promote the preservation, restoration and re-connection of [priority habitats](#) – of which [lowland meadows](#) are one. For further information about how to go about doing this please contact the High Weald AONB Unit using the details provided at the end of this document.

Finally, it is important to consider potential impacts on light pollution and tranquillity in the preparation of Neighbourhood Plans. To this end it is worth consulting the following sources of information:

- The Campaign to Protect Rural England [tranquillity data](#) and [guidance](#)
- [The Commission for Dark Skies](#) (information on light pollution and its harmful effects, as well as guidance and tips on how it can be prevented)
- [The International Dark-Sky Association](#) (information on light pollution and its harmful effects, as well as guidance and tips on how it can be prevented)
- [The Institute of Lighting Professionals](#) (information and technical guidance on lighting and the prevention of light pollution)
- [Ashford Borough Council](#) (a good example of how to take dark skies and dark sky conservation into account in a planning document)

### Historic

In terms of historic data you should first consult your county record office or county council website. Typically they offer an online map viewer (see the screenshot below) which allows you to display a variety of historic data for your area of interest (NB: West Sussex County Council does not offer an online record viewing service and instead requires a formal request for data to be made directly to them).

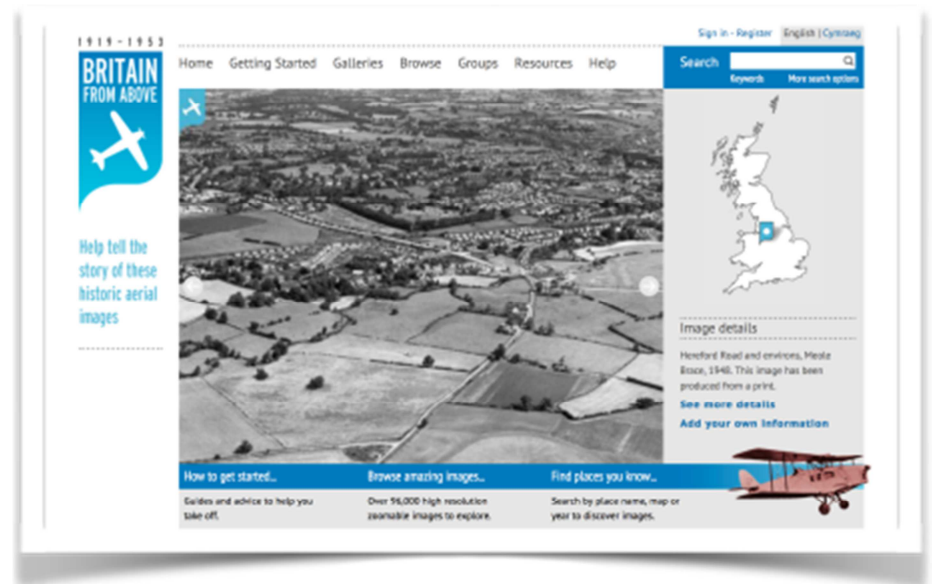


Primarily these data comprise the Historic Environment Records (HER) database for that county, but they may also include various historic maps, historic aerial photographs, and [Historic Landscape Characterisation](#) or HLC data (for more information please refer to the Historic England [guide on how to use HLC data](#)). Please follow the links below to find out more about accessing data in your county:

- East Sussex Record Office's [The Keep](#)
- West Sussex County Council's [Historic Environment Record](#)
- Kent County Council's [Heritage Maps](#)
- Surrey County Council's [Exploring Surrey's Past Maps](#)

For more information on HERs and the kinds of information they include, see Historic England's [guide to Historic Environment Records](#).

Finally, a series of unique aerial images – dating from between 1919 and 1953 and often taken from low altitudes at oblique angles – can be accessed on the website [Britain From Above](#) (see the screenshot below).



## Environmental and Habitats Regulations Assessments

Neighbourhood Plans should be based on sustainability principles. Although a formal sustainability appraisal is not legally required, Neighbourhood Plans which identify sites for development in the High Weald AONB will most likely be required to undertake a 'Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)'. It is for the Local Planning Authority to determine, via a 'Screening Opinion', whether a Neighbourhood Plan is likely to cause significant environmental effects – something which, if deemed to be the case, would trigger an SEA. Also, where a Neighbourhood Plan may have impacts on a site of international nature conservation importance, a further assessment under the Habitats Regulations could be required. This is referred to as a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA).

If an SEA (and potentially a HRA) is found to be required, the gathering of evidence for its preparation can be integrated into the process of producing the Neighbourhood Plan. In this event it will be important to work closely with your Local Planning Authority and, through them, with Natural England.

However, these are complex issues and it therefore makes sense to contact your Local Planning Authority for a screening opinion on emerging Neighbourhood Plan proposals at an early stage.

## Further guidance

For further guidance on Neighbourhood Plans, their preparation and planning policy in general, visit:

- [The Government's Planning Practice Guidance website](#)
- [The Forum for Neighbourhood Planning](#)

For technical support and to apply for funding to aid in the production of your Neighbourhood Plan, visit the [My Community Rights website](#) which has details about grants from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) up to £9,000. It may also be worth contacting your Local Authority to see what support they are able to provide during your neighbourhood planning process (see the contact information on the following page).

## Contact information

This guidance was produced by the High Weald AONB Unit. If you have any queries about the AONB itself, or the character component data supplied by the High Weald AONB Unit, please contact us using the following details:

High Weald AONB Unit  
Woodland Enterprise Centre  
Hastings Road, Flimwell  
East Sussex, TN5 7PR  
**Tel:** 01424 723011  
**Fax:** 01580 879499  
**Email:** [info@highweald.org](mailto:info@highweald.org)

If, however, you have a question regarding the neighbourhood planning process, you should contact your Local Authority. Full contact details of each Local Authority in the High Weald AONB can be found by following the appropriate link below:

- [Ashford Borough Council](#)
- [Crawley Borough Council](#)
- [Hastings Borough Council](#)
- [Horsham District Council](#)
- [Mid Sussex District Council](#)
- [Rother District Council](#)
- [Sevenoaks District Council](#)
- [Tandridge District Council](#)
- [Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council](#)
- [Tunbridge Wells Borough Council](#)
- [Wealden District Council](#)

**Committee:** High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee

**Date:** 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2016

**Title of Report:** Risk Management

**By:** AONB Director

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## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Members are recommended to:

1. Note the report and;
  2. Request that the Management Board continue to meet to review significant risks as required and develop options for their management.
- 

### **1.0 Background**

- 1.1 For the last eight or so years and following a requirement put in place by the Audit Commission, the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee's annual external accounts have been audited by an external and third party organization (in addition to the annual audit undertaken by ESCC) and these accounts have been assessed against ten control objectives. One of those control objectives was to record and assess significant risks to the achievement of the High Weald JAC objectives and review the adequacy of arrangements to manage the risks.
- 1.2 On the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015 the Audit Commission was closed and although there is now no requirement for the external audit, we will continue the biannual report on recording and assessing the significant risks facing the High Weald JAC as this has proven to be of value and is a generally accepted form of 'good practice'.
- 1.3 The key risks to the Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) are set out in Appendix A.
- 1.4 The JAC is a strong partnership supported by the AONB Unit, a small specialist team providing advice and guidance on the conservation and enhancement of a nationally important landscape. The work of the JAC relies on three things: partnership contributions to the core budget; success raising external funds to the project budget and; retaining/recruiting staff with the appropriate skills and experience to do this work. Given this, the most significant risks to the work of the JAC are constraints on both the financial and personnel resources of the AONB Unit.
- 1.5 Members will be acutely aware that since 2010 the AONB Unit has accommodated cuts of £70,000 in the Defra contribution to the core budget but over the same period the local authority partners on the JAC have worked very hard to maintain the local authority contributions to the core budget, albeit without an increase in line with inflation.

## **2.0 Key risks 2016/17 and beyond**

- 2.1 Although further cuts to the Defra contribution for 2016-2018 were expected to follow the 2015 Comprehensive Spending Review and Autumn Statement, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced towards the end of January 2016 that the funding in real terms for Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty partnerships (and National Park authorities) would be protected for the next four years up until 2019/20.
- 2.2 This decision has been warmly welcomed and gives the necessary breathing space to continue to innovate against a backdrop of greater certainty and support and contribute to the role and remit of the local authorities with an interest in the High Weald AONB. However, it should be noted that local authority contributions towards the core business of the JAC will remain under pressure during this period and there remains the risk that the Chancellor of the Exchequer may at any time choose to revoke the funding settlement for AONB partnerships made in January 2016.

## **3.0 Risk mitigation**

- 3.1 The High Weald AONB Unit's current business strategy (2014-2018) responds to the risks to the work of the JAC caused by the constraints on both the financial and personnel resources of the AONB Unit. This strategy is tailored to the local circumstances and specific needs of the High Weald and it covers the first four years of the revised AONB Management Plan 2014 – 2019.
- 3.2 Unlike previous business plans, which proposed ambitious work programmes and sought external funds to realize them, the 2014-2018 strategy is informed by the financial cuts since 2010 and the likely budget constraints for the current business strategy period and focuses on maintaining effective delivery of the JAC's core activity. Raising external funds to support the work is still difficult and it has become increasingly competitive and the pragmatic approach has been a move during 2015-2016 to a smaller, more resilient core team that is competent across a range of disciplines. However, the AONB Unit needs to retain a capacity for responding positively to opportunities to secure new resources and develop new partnerships to achieve AONB management plan objectives and support the work of others in the AONB.
- 3.3 The development of secure and alternative long-term income streams adequate enough to support the core remit of the JAC may be possible (although the difficulties achieving this are often under-estimated) but they are unlikely to address any shortfall in contributions within the strategy's timescale. The potential for charitable trusts and social enterprise companies to play a role in the future has been considered and will be kept under review but the focus for this business plan period is to remain a local authority supported partnership with a close relationship to government bodies whose policies influence management of the AONB landscape.
- 3.4 During the preparation of the current business strategy a risk assessment was undertaken in 2014 to identify priorities and make further decisions on financial,

staff and other resource allocation. Following this, a report considering the impacts of the cuts and options to safeguard the service the JAC provides was presented to and approved by the Management Board in March 2014.

3.5 This report has informed and shaped the current business strategy and the AONB Unit has actively pursued a variety of options to address the risk of declining financial and personnel resources. To date the following measures have been put in place:

- A significant reduction in accommodation and office costs;
- A reduction in ESCC support service costs;
- A reduction in the communications budget including the loss of the High Weald Anvil magazine;
- The use of project reserves to support an expanded project programme that encourages financial contributions from new partnerships and organizations;
- Testing the viability of an AONB consultancy to undertake contract work eg. events management, Good Woods Project, Sussex Walks Festival;
- Charging for hosting and/or managing self-financing projects;
- The use of internships to support the core work programme and provide valuable work experience for the successful applicants;
- Continuing to apply to external sources of funds from private businesses, charitable trusts, government agencies to support community, research, and demonstration projects;
- Sharing/secondment of staff with partner organizations and other AONB Units and National Park Authorities;
- Restructuring of the AONB Unit to ensure staff have the appropriate skills and experience to achieve the statutory AONB Management Plan and support the JAC partnership;
- Narrowing of the scope of the work undertaken by the AONB Unit;

The following measures will be put in place:

- Investigating the feasibility of establishing a 'charging policy' for pre-application advice;
- Looking at the opportunities for a closer relationship with the High Weald Landscape Trust (set up by the AONB Unit in 2004);
- Investigating further the opportunities for corporate sponsorship;
- Investigating the opportunities for encouraging philanthropic donations towards the work of the JAC;
- Investigating alternative funds to support the work of the JAC e.g. Corporate Social Responsibility, corporate investment;
- Investigating the viability of setting up a company or social enterprise limited by guarantee (such as High Weald Design, established by the AONB Unit in 1994).

#### **4.0 Conclusions and Recommendations**

4.1 Risk management systems are in place and conform to the appropriate East Sussex County Council policy.

- 4.2 The years 2016 to 2018 will continue to be characterised by constraints on both the financial and personnel resources of the AONB Unit and this remains the most significant risk to the core work of the JAC.
- 4.3 The High Weald AONB Unit's current business strategy (2014-2018) is tailored to the High Weald's local circumstances and specific needs and aims to address the risk to the work of the JAC associated with declining financial contributions to the core work for 2016/17 and beyond.
- 4.4 The business strategy will ensure that by the end of the period the JAC will remain as a strong partnership supported by a small dedicated team providing specialist technical advice to conserve and promote the value of this nationally protected landscape. An appropriate organisational structure has been established to manage self-funded projects supporting AONB Management Plan objectives, and develop income generating activities.

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## Risk Log

<b>Likelihood Ranking</b>	1 = Improbable (<10%); 2 = Unlikely (10-30%); 3 = Less than Likely (30-50%); 4 = More than Likely (50-80%); 5 = Probable (>80%)
<b>Consequence Ranking</b>	1 = Minor; 2 = Moderate; 3 = Significant; 4 = Substantial; 5 = Grave

<b>Likelihood</b>	5					
	4					
	3					
	2					
	1					
		1	2	3	4	5
		<b>Consequence</b>				

<b>Control Rating</b>	
1. Excessive	Controls exceed the level required to manage the risk
2. Optimal	Controls are comprehensive & commensurate with the risk. All controls are working as intended.
3. Adequate	Some shortfall in level of controls but these do not materially affect the level of residual risk.
4. Inadequate	Weaknesses & inefficiency in controls do not treat the risk as intended.

Unit ref	Risk no	Risk What can go wrong	Root Causes How it can go wrong	Owner	Inherent Risk			Controls / Mitigating Actions Preventative & reactive control measures	Control Owner	Residual Risk			
					Likelihood	Consequence	Matrix Zone			Control Rating	Likelihood	Consequence	Matrix Zone
	1	Reduced activity/service due to declining budgets 2015/16 and beyond. JAC with a lower profile as a champion for the High Weald. Less proactive work to enable public understanding, management and enjoyment of the AONB.	Public sector spending cuts affecting Defra and local authorities leading to a further reduction in the JAC's budget.	AONB Director	4	4	Red	Unit to take into account direction of government and local authorities. JAC members and officers involved in and supportive of partnership and able to lobby robustly for funds internally and externally. JAC Chairman, on behalf of partnership, to lobby robustly for maintaining contributions. Alternative sources of core income sought. Options to reduce expenditure e.g. accommodation without adversely affecting on service explored. Planned change in scope of JAC's core work programme.	AONB Director	2	4	4	Red

2	Unit unable to attract external funding for the implementation or coordination of projects that meet AONB Management Plan objectives.	Public sector cuts resulting in difficulties securing funds to match external grants e.g. Heritage Lottery Fund. Without commitment from 'local' partners bids for external funds are rarely feasible and considered weak by potential donor organizations. Unit objectives do not align with grant-aiding bodies objectives. Increased competition for fewer and smaller grants. Target audiences for grant-aiding bodies do not exist within the High Weald.	AONB Director	4	4	Red	Partnership organizations and others consider identifying funds to ensure local matched funds can be used to attract external grants and allow partnership projects to be developed. Keep a clear understanding of grant-aiding bodies objectives. Unit to take into account direction of grant-aiding bodies. Fundraising expertise within the Unit developed and maintained. Alternative fundraising options explored.	AONB Director	2	3	4	Red
3	IT needs not met, Unit unable to work efficiently and undertake research activity, fewer outputs, direction of JAC work programme compromised	Poor links to computer network/server results in slow machine operation, inability to download GIS data, update website etc.	AONB Director	3	3	Amber	Technical advice sought and recommendations/solutions implemented.	AONB Director	3	3	3	Amber
4	Loss of grant aid due to self-financing project outputs not being met.	Project staff seeking and moving to new jobs as the current contract end date approaches. Project objectives not completed, undue workload on the remaining AONB core staff to complete project work. Adverse affect to the AONB core work remit and much reduced capacity and time to raise funds to support core work.	AONB Director	2	2	Green	Support and funding secured for retention bonuses. Longer notice periods for project staff. Projects developed and managed to ensure that the completion of key/complex outputs are not planned for the end of the contract. Flexibility built into core staff work programmes in order that there is a capacity to finish self-financing projects if required.	AONB Director	2	2	2	Green
5	AONB advice given by Unit staff not up to date and opportunities missed to ensure AONBs remain at the forefront of national policy.	A rapidly changing external policy environment in terms of planning and land use affecting the AONB.	AONB Director	4	4	Red	Continue the close liaison with SEEPL colleagues in the region, NAAONB and local authority colleagues to share information. In the short term scrutinize national policy and consider and examine potential future issues, opportunities and developments.	AONB Director	3	3	3	Amber
6	Future possibility that what is being implemented and coordinated by the AONB Partnership is not valued by Defra due to the loss of the dedicated Landscape Policy Unit within Defra. National Election and/or Cabinet re-shuffle resulting in the loss of supportive Defra Minister.	Total loss or severe reduction of national government funding and commitment to AONB Partnerships.	AONB Director	3	5	Red	Continued and concerted engagement with Defra and Natural England and ongoing liaison with and reporting on NAAONB/SEEPL work programmes. Active engagement with Defra Ministers directly and in conjunction with NAAONB and SEEPL. Active engagement of High Weald AONB Patrons and supportive High Weald MPs.	AONB Director	2	3	5	Red