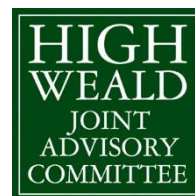


High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee



Agenda

Wednesday 31 March 2021, 10.30am, by Microsoft Teams.

1. Dark Skies presentation

Presentation on High Weald Dark Skies project by Samantha Nicholas, AONB Team Support Officer.

2. Tree Establishment presentation

Presentation on the draft Tree Establishment Strategy by Gerry Sherwin, the AONB Business Manager

3. Apologies

4. 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.

5. 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.

6. Minutes of the JAC meeting

To consider the minutes of the last meeting of the JAC held on 25 November 2020 (page 3)

7. Minutes of the Management Board Meeting

To note the matters arising from the Management Board meeting held on 10 March 2020 (page 8)

8. Minutes of the Officer Steering Group

To note the minutes of the last meeting of the OSG held on 10 February 2021 (page 15)

9. Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL)

To consider a report on FiPL by Gerry Sherwin, AONB Business Manager (page 24)

10. Revenue Budget for 2021/22

To consider and approve a report by the Treasurer on the draft Revenue Budget 2021/22 (page 28)

11. Risk Management

To consider a report by the AONB Co-Director on risk management (page 32); Appendix A: High Weald JAC - Key Risks

12. CPRE Request to Natural England to Extend AONB Boundaries

To consider a verbal report by the AONB Planning Advisor on the correspondence appended (after page 35)

13. Any other business

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

Samantha Nicholas
Clerk to the High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee
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Agenda item: 6

High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee

Minutes of Meeting



Held on the 25 November 2020 at 10.30am using Microsoft Teams

Members present:

Cllr P Bradbury	West Sussex County Council/Mid Sussex District Council (Vice-Chairman)
Cllr P Dixon	Wealden District Council
Cllr J Vine-Hall	Rother District Council
Cllr A Pickering	Ashford Borough Council
Cllr M Dickins	Sevenoaks Borough Council
Cllr L Lockwood	Tandridge District Council
Cllr J Soyke	Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
Cllr L Levane	Hastings Borough Council
Cllr I Irvine	Crawley Borough Council
Cllr T Hogden	Horsham District Council
Cllr L Steeds	Tandridge District Council
Mr C Harrison	Forestry Commission
Mr T Bamford	CLA
Ms L Newland	Natural England

Officers:

Ms G Sherwin	AONB Business Manager
Ms C Tester	AONB Planning Adviser
Mrs E White	AONB Communication Adviser
Mr R Wingfield	AONB Land Management Adviser
Ms Sarah Brotherton	AONB Landscape Research Adviser
Mr A Fowler	Finance Manager, East Sussex County Council
Ms J Hollingum	Planning Officer, Mid Sussex District Council
Mrs D Russell	Design Officer, Rother District Council
Mr M Davidson	Natural Resources Manager, Hastings Borough Council
Ms N Bumpus	Policy Manager, Wealden District Council
Mr D Greenwood	Team Project Manager, Surrey County Council
Ms K Culbert	Policy Manager, Hastings Borough Council
Ms J Knowles	Planning Officer, Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council
Ms K Sharpe	Policy Manager, Wealden District Council
Ms C Petit	Deputy Team Planning Leader, Ashford Borough Council
Ms B Hall	Planning Policy Officer, Ashford Borough Council

Guests:

Ms M Ashdown	Sussex and Kent Team Manager, Natural England
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Cllr Bradbury, Vice-Chairman, welcomed the attendees and explained that he would be chairing the meeting because the Chairman, Cllr Tidy is unwell. He extended the Committee's best wishes to Cllr Tidy and wished her a speedy recovery.

1. Nature and Health & Wellbeing

- 1.1 Sally Marsh introduced the presentations that have been produced in the context of the 25 Year Environment Plan and the Glover Review recommendations.
- 1.2 Marian Ashdown, Natural England presented to the Members on Nature and Wellbeing.
- 1.3 Gerry Sherwin provided information in the chat function that the High Weald AONB Partnership has developed 50 Welly Walks with primary schools as part of running a twelve-year programme in primary schools to help teachers undertake outdoor learning in school grounds and the wider countryside. The model is being promoted to Defra by the National Association of AONBs as it could be extended to other areas.
- 1.4 Sally Marsh asked whether it would be possible for the references to the benefits of nature surveys conducted by NE to be circulated to the Committee.

2. High Weald Walking Festival

- 2.1 Emma White, AONB Communication officer presented the success of the High Weald Walking Festival and how it will be developed in 2021.
- 2.2 Craig Harrison informed the Members that there may be opportunities to link next year's Walking Festival to the Slow Ways Project. Slow Ways is a project to create a network of walking routes that connect Great Britain's towns and cities as well as thousands of villages. www.slowways.uk
- 2.3 The Unit is looking to reach a wider audience in and around the High Weald to enable a greater diversity of walkers to access the 2021 Walking Festival.

3. England Tree Planting Strategy

- 3.1 Craig Harrison, Forestry Commission, Area Director South East England & London presented on the England Tree Strategy, on Nature for Climate Fund, England Tree Planting programme and priorities in SE England.
- 3.2 Craig Harrison confirmed that Forestry Commission is working on improved guidance about natural colonisation when it is appropriate and desirable. The Forestry Commission would welcome working in partnership with the AONB on natural regeneration projects.

4. Good Soil Bad Soil and the Barn Owl Box Project

- 4.1 Ross Wingfield, AONB Land Management Advisor, presented on the difference between good soil and bad soil, and the Sussex Lund Barn Owl Box Project supporting the Upper Rother and Dudwell Farm Cluster.

- 4.2 The Unit are promoting the Barn Owl Box Project widely and encouraging other landowners to work with adjacent landowners on similar projects. These could be funded through Sussex Lund. It is an aspiration to have well-placed boxes across the whole AONB.
- 4.3 Ross Wingfield informed the Members that around 8% of the additional barn owl boxes may be utilised within the year. The Sussex Barn Owl Study Group has agreed to survey the new barn owl boxes as well as carry out training for the landowners.

To view the full presentations: [High Weald JAC Meeting 25.11.20 - Presentations - YouTube](#) and soil video <https://youtu.be/CaBJS9O0gn8>

4.4

5. Apologises

- 5.1 Cllr S Tidy, Cllr M Balfour, Cllr D Lettington, Jason Lavender, Jill Davison; Richard Mosinghi, Elizabeth Brigden, David Scully

6. Members Interests

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

7. Urgent Matters

- 7.1 No urgent matters were raised by the Members.

8. Minutes of the Management Board held on 14 October 2020

- 8.1 RESOLVED to note the minutes of the Management Board held on 14 October 2020.
- 8.2 Minutes of the Officer Steering Group on 30 September 2020
- 8.3 RESOLVED to note: The Minutes of the Officer Steering Group held on 30 September 2020.

9. Draft Revenue Budget for 2021/22

- 9.1 The Committee considered a report by Finance Manager, Andy Fowler, on the Draft Revenue Budget for 2021/22. The Members were taken through the key areas of the draft budget.
- 9.2 With reference to Appendix B: Core Budget there is a small surplus of additional income, £4,200 which will go into reserves. In 21/22 budget there was an increase in staff costs due to county council wide pay awards and a re-evaluation of a post. There is also a small increase in accommodation and office running costs which has been balanced out by the savings in meeting rooms and refreshments.

- 9.3 The income funding has not changed from local authorities and Defra which leaves a deficit of £6,700, which will come from a planned withdrawal from the reserves to ensure a balanced budget. It was also highlighted that in the 2022/23 indicative budget the deficit may potentially rise to £17,000.
- 9.4 The draft budget assumes no inflationary increase to the core contributions of local authorities and assumes that they will commit to maintain contributions at the 2020/21 level.
- 9.5 The reserves are estimated to be £179,000. There is a requirement to hold £95,000 in the reserves to cover redundancy costs.
- 9.6 With reference to Appendix C, Project Budgets: the Partnership's project budget is presented as 4 programmes; Community Engagement (including High Weald Heroes); Management Plan Research and Evidence; Landscape Enhancement; and Project Development. The Defra grant contribution allocated to Partnership Projects is £45,000, 16.2% of the total Defra contribution.
- 9.7 It was noted that local authority contributions in the region of £116,500 in 2021/22 are likely to generate additional funds for core activities and projects of at least £639,500.
- 9.8 The Vice-Chairman explained that there is extreme pressure on the local authorities' budgets and that they would have to find unprecedented savings next year due to the impact of Covid-19.
- 9.9 **It was agreed that the AONB would produce a short cost/benefit report to support the Members discussions on 2021/22 budgets contributions with their local authorities.**
- 9.10 **RESOLVED to note the report and:**
- (1) approve the Draft Revenue Budget for 2021/22.**
- (2) the commencement of budget consultation with the local authorities and Defra.**
- 10. Planning update**
- 10.1 The Committee considered the appended planning consultation responses to the changes to the current planning system and the Planning White Paper. The planning update for High Weald Network 2020 was also appended.
- 10.2 **RESOLVED to note the appended planning responses for changes to the current planning system and the Planning White Paper.**

11. Risk management and staff update

- 11.1 The Committee considered a report by Jason Lavender on risk management and staffing updates and the associated risk management matrix.
- 11.2 Gerry Sherwin took the Members through the report highlighting that the short and medium risks are to secure core funding for the AONB. However, the project funding looks more secure with the continuation of the Sussex Lund Grant Programme. The National Grid Scheme is also being extended for another five years. The Unit has also secured funding from the Environment Agency to appoint a Land Management Project Officer for three years, Dean Morrison will join the Unit in January 2021.
- 11.3 The Unit has appointed Sarah Brotherton, Landscape Research Advisor(0.6FTE) in November 2020.
- 11.4 **RESOLVED to note the reports and request that the Management Board continue to meet to review significant risks as required and develop options for their management.**

12. Update on the work of the National Association for AONBs

- 12.1 The Committee considered a report by Jason Lavender on an update on the work of the National Association for AONBs.
- 12.2 Sally Marsh informed the Members that the AONBs are seeking an increased financial commitment from Defra to implement the Glover Review's recommendations. The Unit will circulate full details of the Defra contribution to the Committee once confirmed.
- 12.3 **RESOLVED to note the report on the update on the work of the National Association for AONBs.**

13. A.O.B

- 13.1 Date of the next JAC Meeting is set for Wednesday 31 March 2021.

Agenda item: 7

HIGH WEALD JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE – Management Board

Minutes – Wednesday 10 March 2021 at 10.30 am, using Microsoft Teams

Samantha Nicholas
Clerk to the High Weald AONB
Joint Advisory Committee

Present: Members:

Cllr Mrs Sylvia Tidy	East Sussex County Council (Madam Chairman)
Cllr Peter Bradbury	West Sussex County Council/Mid Sussex District Council
Mrs J Davison	Community Co-optee
Cllr J Vine-Hall	Rother District Council
Cllr P Dixon	Wealden District Council
Cllr M Balfour	Kent County Council

Also Present:

Jason Lavender	AONB Director (job share)
Claire Tester	AONB Planning Advisor
Gerry Sherwin	AONB Business Manager
Jennifer Hollingum	Mid Sussex District Council

Agreed Actions

Paragraph 8.	It was agreed that the Unit could hold another Parish communication event in the Summer with Dark Skies on the agenda.
Paragraph 15.	The Unit will organise a meeting on major development issues within AONB for the Members.
Paragraph 16.	Agreed to send the Partnership's response to the NPPF consultation.
Paragraph 22.	The Unit will develop a project plan and risk register for FiPL once full information is known and a meeting will be arranged for April/May 2021 to discuss the detail.
Paragraph 22.	The Unit will develop a project plan and risk register once full information is known and a meeting will be arranged for April/May 2021 to discuss the detail.

Apologies

1. Apologies were received from Sally Marsh.

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 2020

3. The minutes of the last meeting, held on 14 October 2020, were agreed as a correct record.

Matters arising from the minutes

4. No matters arose from the minutes.

Officer Steering Group update

5. Jennifer Hollingum reported that the recent Officer Steering Group (OSG) was again well-attended and positive discussions took place on the agenda items covered:
 - The OSG noted the delay to Environment Bill and guidance on the Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Metric. Once the guidance has been published there will be further discussion on this through the BNG Sub-Group. However, there is ongoing training opportunities with other organisations such as the Sussex Local Nature Partnership and the Kent Local Nature Partnership is developing further guidance to encourage a consistent approach across the county.
 - Samantha Nicholas presented a Dark Skies update highlighting the ongoing work that the Unit are carrying out with Parishes and local communities, through light meter readings. CPRE are producing further light pollution satellite maps in partnership with the AONB. The officers were interested in setting up a meeting to discuss creating better technical guidance for planning officers and potential training using organisations such as the Institute of Lighting Professionals.
 - The OSG also discussed the consultation on changes to the NPPF and the new national model design code. The Group is looking at how the AONB Design Guide could be used to support the requirement for local planning authorities to produce design guidance.
6. A discussion took place on whether a local authority can apply local policies to require Biodiversity Net Gain of more than 10%. The legislation is currently indicating a minimum of 10%. It was confirmed that Kent Local Nature Partnership is advocating 20% Biodiversity Net Gain and is encouraging the local authorities to adopt this policy. It is also developing an evidence base on viability to support this uplift as there will be resistance from developers.
7. The Members suggested that the AONB Design Guide could be supplemented by lighting guidance. A discussion took place on raising awareness of light pollution for Parish and Town Councils.
 - Jennifer Hollingum explained that there are some policies in Local Plans, Parish Plans and Neighbourhood Development Plans that support controls over lighting. There are organisations such as the International Dark Skies and the Institute of Lighting Professionals that can provide essential guidance on how to effectively reduce light pollution within local communities.
 - Jason Lavender explained that the Unit held a successful communication meeting for Parish Councils in 2019, and the Unit would be keen to run one again. The AONB Management Plan can also give leverage for local Parishes as

it has Dark Skies objectives in the Other Qualities section. He also referred to Ashford Borough Council which has had an adopted Dark Skies Supplementary Planning Document in place since 2014.

8. **Action: It was agreed that the Unit could hold another Parish communication event in the Summer with Dark Skies on the agenda.**

Update on Major Development in the AONB

9. Claire Tester referred to the draft response to the consultation on changes to NPPF circulated prior to the meeting.
- She explained that the Partnership's draft response strongly objects to the proposal to amend the paragraph relating to the tests for major development so that it only applies at the development management stage. It agreed that the current wording is ambiguous and should be clarified, but the major development tests must apply at both the plan-making stage and the development management stage.
 - The letter also took the opportunity to highlight the disconnect between messages coming from Ministers about how AONB designation should act as a constraint on housing numbers; and messages from the Planning Inspectorate to Local Authorities that their Local Plans should not be prepared on the assumption that housing numbers can be reduced if there is a large percentage of the area in an AONB.
10. Claire had also circulated a list of developments of 25 plus homes, that have been received as planning applications or proposed as allocations in submitted Local Plans in the past 5 years. This was to give Members an idea of the distribution of these proposals across the AONB. This information is to be mapped and will be placed on the AONB website as part of the wider AONB communications about development pressure.
11. Claire reported back on the Section 85 complaint by the Unit in respect of the decision on the Turnden application by Tunbridge Wells BC. Natural England has responded confirming that it believes that TWBC has complied with Section 85 due to the references made to the AONB within the committee report. Claire highlighted the weakness of this legislation.
12. Members agreed the response to the NPPF consultation.
13. Cllr Dixon suggested that there was a need for further discussion on major development within the AONB, especially as allocated through Local Plans, highlighting:
- How Local Plans can address the issue of housing need within the AONB and show a balanced approach.
 - If development is justified within the AONB, what sort of development was acceptable – is it better to have a small number of large sites in sustainable locations or a larger number of small sites in a more dispersed pattern?
 - He expressed concerns about the sustainability and acceptability of development in farmsteads and scattered settlements.

- He also raised issues around low-cost market housing versus social housing.
14. It was agreed by the Members that these subjects were better discussed in a separate meeting.
 15. **Actions: The Unit will organise a meeting on major development issues within AONB for the Members.**
 16. **Actions: Agreed to send the Partnership's response to the NPPF consultation.**

Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL)

17. Gerry Sherwin informed the Members about the Farmers in Protected Landscapes Scheme (FiPL). The briefing note on FiPL was circulated to the Members prior to the meeting.
18. In November 2020 Defra published the Path to Sustainable Farming and Agricultural Transition Plan 2021- 2024. This indicated how they are going to manage declining payments from the Basic Payments Scheme and introduces new schemes to support the transition. There will be 15 schemes operating over this period, including Countryside Stewardship changes, Test and Trails, the Sustainable Farming Scheme and FiPL.
19. There have been discussions with nominated representatives from some AONB partnerships and Defra on the FiPL scheme which are ongoing and confidential. All AONB lead officers have fed into the process including providing evidence of the realistic costs of running this type of programme. The AONB partnerships have been informed that FiPL will be set up as some form of grant scheme and that Defra may provide direction on the governance of the grants panel. They are now agreeing payment terms and more information will be available in the next couple of months on the detail of the programme.
20. Gerry informed the Members that the Unit is well placed to manage grant schemes due to its ongoing experience with the Sussex Lund and the Sustainable Development Fund, which allocated £250,000 funds per annum. However, the scope of FiPL may be wider reflecting LEADER style grants looking to support rural social and economic projects. It is likely that some of the funding will be available to spend on the administration of the scheme, but it will require:
 - The recruitment of new staff to manage the scheme – both because existing staff are already at capacity and because the type of grants may require skills the Unit doesn't currently have in-house; and
 - If the administration allowance is insufficient or delayed the Unit may have to use its reserves to support such recruitment costs to allow staff to be in place in time to run the FiPL scheme from Summer 2021 onwards.
21. It was agreed that as part of the risk register the Unit should look at how it might manage any appeals against decisions to refuse grants.

- 22. Actions: The Unit will develop a project plan and risk register for FiPL once full information is known and a meeting will be arranged for April/May 2021 to discuss the detail.**

Nature Recovery

23. Gerry Sherwin shared an excerpt from the Environment Bill regarding Nature Recovery strategies with the Members.
- The Bill sets out the contents of the strategies but is not clear who may be responsible for producing them. This is likely to be done at a County level.
 - The Members were informed that AONB Management Plan is the nature recovery plan for the AONB and already provides content on nature recovery and biodiversity, although this is part of a broader approach which also considers landscape character, heritage, soils and scenic quality. The Plan includes habitat maps but does not currently have a spatial strategy. Across the country organisations are looking at how they may create these strategies. Natural England has provided a handbook and a mapping methodology but is looking to local groups to trial the process. The Unit is involved in some of these conversations and is providing data to inform them.
 - Gerry Sherwin requested that, if the Members are aware that there are conversations on nature recovery happening within their authority, they should advise their local authority officers to contact the Unit. As an example, Gerry highlighted that Wealden DC and Rother DC are undertaking a spatial mapping exercise led by Sussex Wildlife Trust which the Unit is aware of through the Sussex Local Nature Partnership. The Unit could contribute data to this exercise without further costs to the local authorities.

Budget & Resources update

24. Gerry Sherwin took the Members through the other funding areas that the Unit is committed to in 2021 alongside FiPL:
- The Unit is currently committed to contracts that require the submission of 30 reports and claims for land management programmes this year. This means the Unit has no resources to support future grant applications such as the Green Challenge Fund which has recently opened again for applications.
 - The Sussex Lund 2021 application window closed on 8 March, and 53 applications have been received to date which will need to be assessed and recommendations made to the Panel.
 - Plantlife in partnership with the AONB Unit put in a bid for the last Green Challenge Fund round and was awarded £50,000 for a project known as 'Meadow Makers'. This will allow the Unit to recruit a trainee for 6 months. 48 applications for this post have been received and it is hoped that the post will be filled in April 2021.
 - Dean Morrison has also started with the team from January 2021 for the Sussex Flow (Cuckmere & Combe) project.
25. A discussion took place on approaching the County Councils for additional support with making grant applications and supporting the administration of grants. Cllr Balfour informed the Members that the Counties are in a similar position to the Unit

and are struggling to have the resources to be able to meet the tight grant deadlines. Gerry Sherwin confirmed that the Unit had discussed with East Sussex CC whether they could provide additional skills and expertise for FiPL, but they do not have these resources either.

26. Jason Lavender informed the Members that, thanks to the intervention of Cllr Bradbury, he has commented on the West Sussex CC Tree Strategy which was welcomed. Jason has also been working alongside Rother DC Environment Manager r on its environmental and climate change strategy. It was again requested that, if Members are aware of similar strategies within their own councils, they should ask officers to contact the Unit so it can give support where appropriate.

27. There was a discussion on Members' general concern that, although environment is on Councils' agendas, rural issues were not being considered more holistically.

JAC – 31` March 2021

28. The Members discussed several areas that could be included on the JAC agenda including those discussed at the Management Board meeting. Particular mention was made of:

- Nature recovery and FiPL;
- Resources and the limited capacity to bid for grants;
- Rural and what it means to the Members;
- Tree planting and rewilding (taking into consideration Ash-Die back).

A.O.B

29. It was confirmed that the election process for Management Board Members and Chairman and Vice-Chair positions will be held in November 2021. The Vice-Chairman Cllr Bradbury would provide cover for the period May-November 2021 when the JAC will be without a Chairman.

30. Cllr Tidy and Cllr Balfour are not standing for re-election in May 2021. They were both thanked for their invaluable contributions to the AONB over many years.

31. Cllr Dixon asked whether it would be a good time to invite a discussion with Government Ministers on subjects such as the Glover report or housing issues. Cllr Vine-Hall reported that he has had several meetings with local MPs Huw Merriman and Sally-Anne Hart and a paper was produced regarding the housing number issue. They are awaiting feedback from a future meeting with the Housing Minister.

32. Jason Lavender informed the Members that the Glover Review included a recommendation to change the AONB name to 'National Landscapes'. There is an enthusiasm from Defra and some AONB Partnerships to make this change and there is an on-going discussion concerning the creation of a National Landscape Service (also a Glover Review recommendation) but details remain unclear at this stage.

33. Cllr Tidy enquired about the Sussex and Kent CPRE proposal to increase the boundary of the AONB. It was confirmed that a formal application has been submitted to

Natural England (NE) by the CPRE. It is proposed to extend the current AONB boundary to match the High Weald National Character Area. NE has 19 on going applications and the current one for Surrey Hills AONB has been in the system for 15 years.

34. The next Management Board Meeting will be held in July 2021, date to be decided; the JAC meeting is to be held on 31 March 2021.

Agenda item: 8

High Weald Officer Steering Group



Notes of a meeting of the High Weald Officer Steering Group held on Wednesday 10 February 2021, at 10.00 am using Microsoft Teams

Samantha Nicholas
Clerk to the High Weald AONB
Joint Advisory Committee

PRESENT:

Jennifer Hollingum,	Mid Sussex DC (Chairman)
Diane Russell,	Rother DC (Vice-Chairman)
Rachael Osinuga	Ashford BC
Virginia Pullan,	East Sussex CC
Richard Mosinghi,	Crawley BC
Elizabeth Brigden	Crawley BC
Mark Daly	Horsham DC
Helen Shulver	Kent County Council
Helen French,	Sevenoaks DC
David Greenwood,	Surrey CC
Vivienne Riddle,	Tandridge DC
Jenny Knowles	Tonbridge & Malling BC
David Scully,	Tunbridge Wells BC
Natalie Bumpus,	Wealden DC
Kelly Sharp,	Wealden DC

High Weald Unit:

Samantha Nicholas,	Clerk to the JAC
Sally Marsh,	Co-Director (Job Share)
Jason Lavender,	Co-Director (Job Share)
Claire Tester,	Planning Advisor

Summary of Actions:

<u>Pt</u>	<u>Information</u>	<u>To be actioned by</u>
2.2	To circulate link to presentation on the AONB.	Claire Tester
4.8	To have a potential Dark Skies sub-group meeting when the CPRE data is available.	Samantha Nicholas
4.8	Pursue further guidance for communities and a technical proforma in partnership with the South Downs National Park Authority	Samantha Nicholas

5.4	The Chair invited interested officers to liaise with her to set up a sub-group meeting on major development, date to be decided	Jennifer Hollingum
6.2	Produce a summary on the Waverly Case to circulate and also circulate recent appeal decision letters	Claire Tester
10.5	Circulate the draft Tree Establishment Guide to the Group.	Gerry Sherwin

1. Apologies

1.1. Kerry Culbert, Murray Davidson, Carly Pettit, Bethan Hall, and Don Baker

2. Minutes of the meeting of 30 September 2020

2.1. The Minutes of 30 September 2020 were agreed to be an accurate account of the meeting. The following on-going actions were reviewed:

- The Group was reminded to circulate any case studies on new development where the Design Guide has been applied effectively.
- Actions on the Planning White Paper had been completed and the issue of Major Development was on the agenda.
- The Chair confirmed that Claire Tester had circulated the Youtube link for the presentation on the AONB, which she had found very useful. It was requested to be recirculated to the Group.

2.2 Action: Claire Tester to circulate link to presentation on the AONB.

3. Update on Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

3.1. The Chair informed the group that the BNG working group had met in September and was due to meet today but has been postponed. This is due to the delay in the Environment Bill's progress through Parliament and in publishing revised metrics and guidance. David Scully had circulated correspondence prior to the meeting between Tunbridge Wells BC and the University of Kent about the on-going research they are conducting.

3.2. David Scully brought the OSG up to date with the recent developments in Biodiversity Net Gain:

- Natural England was aiming to publish a revised Metric, supporting guidance and a new Metric for smaller schemes in December but this has been delayed and is now not expected until Spring 2021. It is therefore difficult to progress matters as this is required as a baseline for any High Weald Guide.
- Kent Nature Partnership is looking to produce guidance on the implementation of BNG. This was confirmed to be a framework only as each local planning authority (LPA) may have a different approach to how they

spend the subsequent finances, either on strategic wide projects or more locally.

- Tunbridge Wells BC will be working on its own supplementary guidance later in the year in conjunction with the Kent Nature Partnership.

3.3. Claire Tester updated the Group on:

- The Sussex Local Nature Partnership webinar on 19 March on Planning for Wildlife – Delivering Biodiversity Net Gain through the Planning System, details of which was circulated by email prior to the meeting. The link to the event will be circulated when available. This webinar is aimed at planning officers and will focus on how to prepare for BNG and explore local authority capacity to support BNG.
- The officers were also encouraged to participate in the Association of Local Government Ecologists Survey which again is looking at local authority capacity on biodiversity issues. The link to this survey is in the latest MHCLG Chief Planner’s Newsletter.

3.4. There followed a discussion on issues associated with BNG. It was confirmed that there is still an opportunity to produce High Weald guidance in relation to how BNG should be implemented in the AONB. It was agreed that there should be ongoing dialogue with the Kent and Sussex Nature Partnerships to ensure that any guidance produced is complementary.

3.5. The group shared concerns about the Defra Metric and was reminded that it does not cover everything and is only a proxy measure. Whilst it was hoped that the revisions to the Metric would address some concerns it was unlikely to address all of them. It was confirmed that the Unit will continue to support University of Kent research and this further research will inform the Defra working group.

3.6. Crawley BC continues to assess any planning applications proposing green infrastructure. These are being logged for future reference as part of the pre-BNG process.

4. Dark Skies Guidance

4.1. Samantha Nicholas took the Group through a Dark Skies presentation on the work being carried out by the Unit to produce data on the darkest night skies within the AONB.

4.2. Samantha informed the Group that the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Dark Skies launched its first policy consultation in December 2020. This consultation is challenging the existing legal framework for the parts of the planning process which regulate light pollution; overhauling the rules applicable to outdoor lighting installations; and introducing new initiatives for education and incentivise the reduction of light pollution and obtrusive light.

- 4.3. The Unit has been collecting qualitative light meter readings with the support of Parish Councils and local community groups. This data is being used to support Neighbourhood Development Plans, Parish Council Dark Skies Policies and as an evidence base for the AONB Management Plan. The Unit is also working in partnership with CPRE and the South Downs National Park Authority to update the satellite information on light pollution across the High Weald. This will incorporate the light meter readings gathered to date. The data will look at light pollution changes from 2016 to 2019. This data may also be used to create storyboard presentation material which visually shows changes in light pollution across the AONB.
- 4.4. Claire Tester highlighted that many LPAs are now imposing lighting conditions because of Dark Skies policies and that this is welcomed. However, the developers tend to submit very technical data to discharge these conditions that is not easy to assess. The group felt that training on this issue would be useful, but also that developers could be encouraged to submit information in a technical proforma which would be easier for officers to assess.
- 4.5. The Group confirmed that many of their Parishes would be interested in taking on light meter gathering and would be happy to put these through to the Unit.
- 4.6. A discussion took place on how to support local authorities using the Dark Skies evidence base as justification to remove Permitted Development Rights under certain conditions. There was support for producing specific Dark Skies guidance in the same format as the Responsible Planting Guide.
- 4.7. Tunbridge Wells BC has developed a Local Plan Dark Skies Policy which follows the latest guidance by the Institute of Lighting Professionals and the Bat Conservation Trust.

4.8. Actions:

- **The Unit will look to have a Dark Skies sub-group meeting when the CPRE data is available.**
- **The Unit will pursue further guidance for communities and a technical proforma in partnership with the South Downs National Park Authority.**
- **The Unit will look to set up a technical training event with other organisations such as the Institute of Lighting Professionals to support local authorities achieve dark sky friendly lighting.**

5. Update on Local Plans and major development within AONB

- 5.1. The Chair asked the OSG to update the Group on their Local Plan status and major development within the AONB. The following updates were provided:

- Crawley BC is in the middle of a Regulation 19 consultation and has received extensive feedback which officers are working through.
- Horsham DC Regulation 19 consultation has been delayed until March 2021. The Council has received a Planning Inspectorate health check. The AONB is mentioned 30 times within the Local Plan as well as the AONB Design Guide. There is an appeal at Crawley Road, Faygate for 473 homes. This is not in Local Plan and it is being challenged on the basis of the Council's lack of a 5-year housing land supply.
- Rother DC is in the early stages of the Local Plan Review. The new standard method for calculating housing need indicates a further increase in the housing number. Rother DC would welcome further discussion on how to assess whether proposals are major development in the AONB.
- Sevenoaks BC: following the Inspector's letter on the Local Plan the Council launched a Judicial Review of this decision but this was turned down. In response it is applying to the Court of Appeal and awaiting a response. It was also reported that the Kent Downs AONB Management Plan is being finalised.
- Tandridge DC: the Planning Inspectorate has given the Council two options on its Local Plan, to either withdrawal and commence on a new Local Plan or pause to do further work on various matters. The key issue is around junction 6 of M25 and high-level transport modelling is to be undertaken.
- Tonbridge & Malling BC: submitted the Local Plan in January 2019 and started examination in October 2020. The Inspector suspended this due to serious concerns on whether the duty to cooperate had been met. The local authority has refuted this conclusion, and a letter has been sent to Secretary of State asking him to intervene.
- Tunbridge Wells Borough Council is moving towards achieving a 5-year supply and have almost attained 4.8 years. The Local Plan Regulation 19 consultation is planned for March 2021. The Plan does include major development within the AONB. There are two sites within the AONB in the pre-submission plan which have a resolution to grant planning permission. The latest one at Turnden, Cranbrook is subject to a call-in request from Natural England and the response from the Secretary of State is awaited. It was noted that the Unit has lodged a complaint with Natural England on the grounds that Tunbridge Wells BC has not complied with the Section 85 Duty of Regard to the AONB in determining this application. This letter was circulated prior to the meeting.
- Wealden DC: the Direction of Travel consultation has been completed and officers are working through the 1750 responses. The report will be submitted to the committee in mid-March 2021. The District has a housing need figure of 16,000 homes which does not include any unmet need from other local authorities. The SHELAA sites have been published online. There are 3 current planning applications for larger developments within the AONB:

one for reserved matters for 21 dwellings on land east of Old Station Road, Wadhurst; a site at Skinners Farm, Wadhurst which is an enabling development, and land at West Street Mayfield for 10 dwellings.

- Mid Sussex DC: the Site Allocations DPD is now at examination. Within the DPD there are two employment allocations and 6 housing allocations in the AONB, but none of these have been assessed as major developments by the Council. The review of the District Plan has started with a call for sites and a review of sites already in the SHELAA.

5.2. Claire Tester apologised to the Group for not being able to set up the Major Development sub- group due to her high workload at present. It was suggested that if officers wish to proceed with the sub-group they could organise this themselves and she would be happy to participate. She also highlighted the significant issue for the High Weald around the high housing need numbers generated by the standard method. These housing need numbers are a starting point not a target and she is of the view that they do not justify putting major development within the AONB.

5.3. A discussion took place around housing numbers and impact of the AONB designation. It was observed that the language in the NPPF revision and the Planning White Paper is starting to set the scene for moving away from such high housing numbers within the protected areas.

5.4. **Action: The Chair invited interested officers to liaise with her to set up a sub-group meeting on major development, date to be decided.**

6. Planning appeals and court cases

6.1. The Chair asked OSG to update the group on recent planning appeals:

- An appeal at a farm in Horsted Keynes for an enlarged cattle facilities and slurry lagoons had been dismissed due to impact on the AONB. It was concluded to be major development due to the size of the development and landscape impact. The appellant argued it was necessary to meet regulations for controlling Tuberculosis, but could not demonstrate that the proposed bunding was required or that the lagoons could not be located in a less sensitive position so the appeal was dismissed. Claire Tester informed the Group that this appeal had been forwarded to another dairy farm in Wealden district near Tunbridge Wells that wanted to undertake similar development.
- The Court of Appeal judgement on the Waverly Case was discussed. It concluded that even if a proposal was not considered major development, but harm had been established to the AONB, then the 'Titled Balance' is disengaged.
- Hartley Gate, Cranbrook appeal for 27 houses has also been dismissed. Sally Marsh highlighted the part of the report where the Inspector acknowledged that he had duty of regard to the AONB under section 85 and this is a matter

of considerable importance and weight. She thanked Tunbridge Wells BC for the time and hard work they put in on this appeal, which included two days of cross-examination on landscape matters.

6.2. Action: Claire Tester will produce a summary on the Waverly Case to circulate and will also circulate the appeal decision letters.

7. Update on local authority training

7.1. Richard Mosinghi suggested that if the officers wanted to look at wider areas of learning such as for soil and landscape there were several good online learning websites such as: <https://www.futurelearn.com/search?q=soils>; and <https://www.gaiaeducation.org/>

7.2. Jason Lavender offered to run a more informal event once Covid restrictions are lifted for wider learning about Regenerative Agriculture and soil health on a farm he manages in a private capacity. This was welcomed by the Chair.

8. Consultation on changes to NPPF and national model design code

8.1. Diane Russell updated the Group on the changes to the NPPF and the proposed national model design code. The key changes were highlighted:

- Paragraph 11 (a): This clause is proposed to be amended to broaden the high-level objective for plans to include the importance of both infrastructure and climate change and effective use of land in urban areas.
- Paragraph 53: Clarifies the need to justify the use of Article 4 directions to remove national permitted development rights, which could include dark skies light pollution issues.
- Chapter 11: Making Effective Use Of Land has added in paragraph 124 reference to area-based character assessments, codes and masterplans which can be helpful tools in to ensure that land is used efficiently while also creating beautiful and sustainable places.
- Chapter 12: Achieving Well-Designed Places has the greatest amount of change and encourages local design guidance and supplementary planning documents which use visual tools such as design guides and codes. It would be positive to be able to use the AONB design guidance to meet these requirements. Paragraph 133 includes that if development is not well designed it should be refused, especially where it fails to reflect local design policies and government guidance on design.
- Chapter 15: Paragraph 175: A useful additional is that development within the setting of AONBs should be sensitively located and designed to avoid adverse impacts on the designated landscapes.

8.2. Claire Tester welcomed the consultation including a tracked changed NPPF and supported most of the changes. However, she highlighted the following:

- An amendment to paragraph 176 (was 172) which clarifies that the major development tests do not apply at Local Plan stage is of significant concern. Advice from NE is that it should be applied at the Local Plan stage as this is where alternative options for meeting needs can be identified, and legal advice given to the South Downs NPA said that it would be an error in law not to apply the tests at Local Plan stage because otherwise Local Plan allocations could be undeliverable. This proposed change to the NPPF will be resisted by the AONB family.
- The National Design Code is just guidance on how to produce design codes. This is useful for defined site or locations where the context is known so that requirements can be prescriptive. However, she does not think it would be possible to produce a Design Code for the whole AONB. The AONB Housing Design Guide could be adopted by local authorities to meet the requirements for LPAs to produce design guidance within three-years.

9. Items for Management Board (10 March 2021)

- 9.1. This should include the Consultation on changes to NPPF and the national model design code.

10. AOB

- 10.1. David Scully expressed TWBC's disappointment with the approach the Unit took with instigating the section 85 complaint in respect of the Turnden application and felt that there should have been some warning to officers before this action was taken. The Co-Directors emphasised that there was only a short time to act after the committee report had been published and the action was not a criticism of the work David undertakes with the AONB Unit. However, the Unit considers that the decision-making process for this particular planning application was not adequate and that the duty of regard to the AONB was not met. Natural England is considering the complaint. It was emphasised that the section 85 complaint relates to the process of decision-making not the merits of the decision. The latter is a matter for any call-in by the Secretary of State.
- 10.2. Claire Tester reiterated that the Unit is keen to work positively with the local authorities and this has generally been working well with Local Plans which is welcomed. However, some issues have arisen with individual planning applications for major development where the Unit often only has days to flag issues with a committee report. The Unit would welcome any suggestions from OSG to improve this communication process with Development Management officers to avoid a repeat of such problems.
- 10.3. It was agreed that further discussion and training on the Section 85 duty should be undertaken at a future OSG Meeting.

10.4. Jason Lavender has been working with Rother District Council's Environment Manager to develop a Climate Emergency Plan. They have been exploring ideas on alternative agri-environmental methods such as regenerative agriculture and moving away from purely tree planting. Jason was keen to speak with other local officers about these potential solutions especially as the AONB already has around 30% woodland cover and other habitats such as unimproved grassland can store carbon. Helen French confirmed that she is the officer with responsibility for preparing a Climate Emergency Plan for Sevenoaks BC. East Sussex CC showed an interest in participating in this type of discussion. East Sussex CC is preparing a Tree Strategy and is particularly concerned about Ash Die Back. However, Virginia Pullen shares concerns that tree planting is not the only or necessarily the best solution in the AONB.

10.5. Action: The Unit will circulate the draft Tree Establishment Guide to the Group.

11. Date for next Meeting

11.1. This will be held in September 2021, date to be decided

Agenda Item: 9

Report to: High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee

Date: 31 March 2021

Title: Farming in Protected Landscapes

By: AONB Business Manager

Purpose: To consider a new Government grant programme that will support delivery of AONB Management Plan objectives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Joint Advisory Committee is recommended to:

1. Welcome the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) Farming in Protected Landscapes grant programme.
 2. Request that East Sussex County Council, as the JAC's host authority, take relevant actions, including but not limited to, entering into contracts and other legal agreements, as necessary to implement the programme.
 3. Delegate authority to the Management Board to consider Defra's proposal when available, including the risks and their proposed management.
-

1. Background information

- 1.1. In the recent Agricultural Transition Plan (ATP) the Government announced a new Farming in Protected Landscapes programme (FIPL) for AONBs and National Parks.
- 1.2. The ATP states that the overall purpose of the scheme is to diversify the income streams of farmers and land managers in protected landscapes and lay the groundwork for Environmental Land Management (ELM).
- 1.3. The ATP also states that the scheme will provide support to farmers, through the protected landscapes bodies, for a broad range of activities "to help grow businesses, create green jobs, enhance biodiversity and invest in infrastructure to attract more diverse visitors to support local economies".
- 1.4. Further details on the programme are unavailable but the AONB Partnership needs to prepare for the programme on the assumption that funds will be available for the 2021/22 financial year and beyond.

Supporting Information

2. Policy framework

- 2.1. Since the UK left the EU new funding structures are being put in place to support farmers and land managers to enhance the rural environment. The centrally managed farm subsidy, based primarily on area payments, is being phased out. Future farm payments will provide 'public money for public goods'.
- 2.2. Public goods include carbon management and climate mitigation; public access to land; enhancement of biodiversity, heritage, and beauty; enhancement of the water environment; and provision of clean air.
- 2.3. There will also be farm payments to enable farm business diversification and green jobs.
- 2.4. The new funding arrangements will be provided under the banner of Environmental Land Management (ELM). It is anticipated that ELM will support works that conserve and enhance the High Weald AONB in line with AONB Management Plan objectives.
- 2.5. During the transition to ELM a number of new programme are being introduced for operation during the transition phase. These were announced in the Agricultural Transition Plan (ATP), published in November 2020. The Farming in Protected Landscapes grant programme (FIPL) is one of the new programmes. The relevant section of the Plan is attached as Appendix A.

3. Scheme details

- 3.1. No further information on FiPL has been published by Defra. However, national level discussion between Defra and representatives for the National Park Authorities and AONB Partnerships started towards the end of 2020 and are ongoing. It is hoped that the collaboration with Defra will ensure the programme will be locally deliverable and effective.
- 3.2. It is expected that FiPL will involve grant administration and that there will be new revenue funding for management of the programme. It is possible that the funds for the High Weald AONB scheme will total £1m over 3 years. The management arrangements are likely to be prescribed by Defra.
- 3.3. The ATP suggests the scope of FIPL may be broad, similar in some ways to the Rural Development Programme's LEADER scheme which ended in 2017. The scheme offered grants to local businesses, communities, farmers, foresters and land managers to help grow rural businesses and jobs.
- 3.4. It is unclear how the programme will operate alongside the many other new programmes that are being introduced as part of the transition.
- 3.5. FiPL is set to start in April 2021 and last for 3 years, until 31 March 2024.

4. Resource implications

- 4.1. The AONB Partnership has extensive experience of grant management. It is currently managing the Sussex Lund (£250,000 p.a.) and National Grid Landscape Enhancement Initiative (£464,000) grant schemes. In the past it has successfully managed the Weald Forest Ridge Landscape Partnership Scheme (£3.1 million) and the Sustainable Development Fund (£100,000 p.a.). The Sustainable Development Fund was also supported by Defra.
- 4.2. The AONB Partnership is therefore skilled in identifying and managing the risks associated with grant schemes.
- 4.3. The scale of the funding could be substantial, and a broad scope will require a broad range of support to enable delivery. A significant increase in the AONB team's capacity will be required to deliver the scheme alongside other contractual commitments.
- 4.4. The grants programme will need to be established very quickly once details are available. Development activities will include, but will not be limited to:
 - Establishing a suitable governance structure
 - Recruiting new staff to manage, administer and advise on the scheme
 - Recruiting specialist advisers to help land managers produce a range of plans (business, access, and land management) to enable strong grant applications
 - Publishing scheme criteria and application forms
 - Setting up a grant administration system
 - Setting up a monitoring and evaluation system.

5. Legal implications

- 5.1. The High Weald AONB Team will work closely with the relevant ESCC legal and finance teams to ensure that all the due diligence is taken in the management of the grant scheme and that the grant conditions and criteria are met.

6. Conclusions and reasons for recommendations

- 6.1. The new programme recognises that protected landscapes are unique and special, and that land managers and farmers based within them need additional help.
- 6.2. The FIPL scheme is a positive opportunity for West Sussex, East Sussex, Surrey, and Kent. It should assist with social, economic, and environmental recovery and help deliver the objectives of many local authority strategies and plans.
- 6.3. In particular, the FIPL scheme will help deliver the objectives of the statutory High Weald AONB Management Plan.
- 6.4. The High Weald AONB Partnership is experienced in delivering grant schemes and working with land managers. It is therefore in a good position to successfully manage the scheme.

6.5. The FIPL scheme is an early part of substantial changes to farm support in England. The delivery of a successful scheme in the High Weald could be a pre-cursor for more funding in future.

Contact details

Gerry Sherwin, AONB Business Manager g.sherwin@highweald.org

B.6 Farming in Protected Landscapes

We want: To support farmers and other land managers in Protected Landscapes, to help them diversify their income streams and lay the groundwork for our Environmental Land Management offer.

We will: Provide support to farmers, via National Park Authorities and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty bodies, to help grow businesses, create green jobs, enhance biodiversity and invest in infrastructure to attract more diverse visitors to support local economies.

Farmers in Protected Landscapes operate in challenging agricultural conditions and are often very reliant on Direct Payments. At the same time, they provide huge environmental, social and cultural benefits.

In addition to the other policies laid out here, we are proposing a specific and time limited package to help farmers adapt during the transition. This programme will support farmers and land managers so they can work with Protected Landscapes to deliver environmental outcomes, lay the groundwork for our Environmental Land Management offer, and contribute towards the delivery of recommendations in the Glover Review of National Landscapes.

Scheme description

The scheme will deliver funding through the Protected Landscapes⁶ bodies to support farmers, particularly upland farmers (75% of whom live and work in Protected Landscapes) to make improvements to the natural environment, cultural heritage and public access on their land.

Eligibility

Farmers and other land managers in Protected Landscapes will have the opportunity to work with their National Park or Area of Outstanding National Beauty. More information will be provided on this scheme in early 2021.

⁶ The 44 Protected Landscapes include 10 National Parks and 34 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Payments

The scheme will use existing delivery mechanisms through Areas of Outstanding National Beauty and National Park Authorities, who have existing infrastructure and relationships across Protected Landscapes.

The spend each year would support delivery against two complementary areas: (A) farm level projects and (B) wider infrastructure and projects on farmland.

Farmers and other land managers will benefit from:

(A) Farm level projects to diversify incomes, prepare for our Environmental Land Management offer and create more green jobs.

- Support for farmers for delivering environment/landscape outcomes. Examples might include peat restoration, planting woodland, hay meadow restoration, creation of heathland and scrub, moorland management, enhancement of wetlands, and dry-stone wall repairs
- Support to farmers on areas such as carbon capture, business planning, and skills development including apprenticeships

(B) Wider infrastructure investment and projects supporting farmers and rural economies

- Infrastructure, such as better access, clearer and simpler signage, dedicated cycling/electric bike access – to attract more diverse groups of visitors (to farm businesses, camping barns, etc.) as well as creating jobs (e.g. expansion of landscape rangers supporting farmers and visitors)
- Strengthened public engagement with landscapes to attract more, and more diverse, visitors, improving mental health outcomes and better disabled access; walking routes to better connect landscapes.

Timings

We will be providing more information about the scheme in early 2021.

To keep up to date on farming announcements, sign up to [Defra email alerts](#)

Agenda Item: 10

Committee: High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee

Date: 31 March 2021

Title of Report: Revenue Budget 2021/22

By: Treasurer to the Joint Advisory Committee

Purpose of Report: To approve the Revenue Budget 2021/22

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Joint Advisory Committee is recommended to:

1. approve the Revenue Budget for 2021/22;
2. thank Defra and partner authorities for maintaining their contributions.

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 This report sets out the budget for 2021/22 following a consultation approved by this committee in November 2020.
- 1.2 The budget supports the work plan for 2021/22 which sets out how the High Weald AONB Partnership will deliver its core functions and enable implementation of the High Weald AONB Management Plan 2019 to 2024.

2. FINANCIAL APPRAISAL

- 2.1 Appendix A summarises the forecast out-turn for 2020/21, the proposed budget for 2021/22 and the indicative budget for 2022/23. Appendix B summarises the project budgets.
- 2.2 The Department for Food, Environment and Rural Affairs (Defra) contribution for 2021/22 has been confirmed as a standstill figure of £277,500.
- 2.3 The allocation of £232,500 equivalent to 84% of the Defra single pot contribution to core activities, other income of £9,800, and £4,600 from the JAC reserves, will achieve a balanced budget for 2021/22.

3. BUDGET 2020/21

- 3.1 The Defra contribution has increased to £282,700 to reflect an additional one-off contribution of £5,200 for advocating ELM (Environmental Land Management).
- 3.2 The High Weald core budget is forecast to have a surplus of £22,600 in 2020/21. The surplus arises from savings due to a vacant post, reduced travel and meeting costs and increased income from hosting and managing a new partnership project. The forecast reserve at 31 March 2021 is £204,100.

BUDGET 2021/22

4. Core Budget – Expenditure

- 4.1 The budget for 2021/22 is presented in Appendix A. It is based on the 2020/21 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 budget for a core team of 5.1FTE staff which includes incremental progression and contributions to the pension fund.
 - (ii) Accommodation/office equipment costs: rent, rates, office equipment, office running costs and the website.
 - (iii) Partnership running costs: NAAONB membership fees, JAC and partnership meetings, annual review production and miscellaneous public relations costs.
 - (iv) Support services: East Sussex County Council's charges for IT, HR and Finance support and a lump sum contribution to the pension fund.

Core Budget – Income

Defra

- 4.2 The agreement with the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) typically provides a flexible 'single pot' contribution for core and projects from a dedicated protected landscape budget.
- 4.3 However, in 2020/21 the contribution was maintained, and increased in real terms, by an allocation of £17,512 from a dedicated biodiversity fund.
- 4.4 Defra have confirmed the funding settlement for 2021/22 as £277,500. Whether the contribution is being maintained through the allocation of ring-fenced funds from another Defra fund is currently unknown.

- 4.5 Of the 2020/21 Defra contribution of £282,700 (including the additional ELM funding) £232,500 was allocated to Core and £50,200 to Projects.
- 4.6 Defra's total contribution for 2021/22 is shown in appendix A. It shows the same allocation of the £277,500 contribution; £232,500 to Core and £45,000 to Projects.

Local Authority Contributions

- 4.7 The levels of support from each authority are shown in Appendix A.
- 4.8 All authorities have confirmed that their contribution to core costs will be maintained at 2020/21 levels.

Self-funding projects

- 4.9 JAC expenditure on self-funding projects is presented at Appendix B and is estimated to be £486,100 in 2021/22. Appendix B indicates contributions from local authority partners to projects, including High Weald Heroes.
- 4.10 There has been no direct communication from Defra about the Farming in Protected Landscapes Scheme and the budget for its operation has not been included.
- 4.11 A sum of £45,000 has been allocated to Projects from the Defra contribution.
- 4.12 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.
- 4.13 The Land Management Programme includes the following projects; Sussex Lund, National Grid Landscape Enhancement Initiative, Upper Rother and Dudwell Farm Cluster, Cuckmere and Coombe Slow the Flow, and Meadow Makers.
- 4.14 A significant proportion of self-funding project expenditure is grant awards.

5. FINANCIAL ISSUES 2022/23 AND BEYOND

- 5.1 Support from Defra beyond 2022 will depend on the government's spending reviews and the weight placed by government on the environment, green recovery and the Glover Review recommendations.
- 5.2 External contributions for the management of the Landscape Enhancement Programme continue to enable a balanced core budget.
- 5.3 The project budget is sufficient for delivering the Management Plan Evidence and Guidance Programme, a modest Community Outreach Programme including High

Weald Heroes (supported by an 0.6 FTE) and a substantial Landscape Enhancement Programme (supported by 2.6 FTE).

- 5.4 Inflationary pressures linked to salaries may be an issue beyond 2021/22.
- 5.5 It is likely that Defra and local authority contributions will not increase in real terms.
- 5.6 In a worst-case scenario of all staff being made redundant, 50% of the estimated reserves of £199,500 at 31 March 2022 will be required.
- 5.7 The JAC reserves are sufficient for balancing the budget in the short term.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 The 2021/22 core budget is a balanced budget which provides the JAC with the capacity to deliver its core functions.
- 6.2 The project budget reflects inclusion of two large-scale grant schemes, Sussex Lund and the National Grid's Landscape Enhancement Initiative.
- 6.3 On this basis the JAC is recommended to agree the budget.



Jill Fisher, Treasurer to the High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee

Appendix A

Statutory purpose of the High Weald AONB

The designation of the High Weald as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) places several statutory duties on local authorities under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000:

- **Section 82** affirms the primary purpose of AONBs to conserve and enhance natural beauty
- **Section 84** confirms the powers of local authorities to take all such action expedient to achieve the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty
- **Section 85** places a duty on all public bodies and statutory undertakers to *have regard* to the purpose of conserving and enhancing natural beauty. This duty is in addition to the power under section 84 (above)
- **Section 89** creates a statutory responsibility for local authorities to produce and review AONB management plans, where appropriate acting jointly. Management Plans formulate the local authorities policy for the management of the AONB and for the carrying out of their functions in relation to it.

These duties are principally discharged through the High Weald AONB JAC, acting jointly on behalf of the local authorities, although they apply to all council functions and activities where they affect the use of land, in the AONB.

Actual FORECAST OUTTURN 2020/2021, BUDGET 2021/22 AND INDICATIVE BUDGET 2022/23

Updated by JM

£'000	2020/21		Original Budget £'000	Inflation £'000	2021/22 Budget		Budget £'000	2022/23 Indicative Budget £'000
	Budget £'000	Forecast £'000			Pressures £'000	Other £'000		
Actual Core Budget								
Expenditure								
237.9 Staff costs	251.3	242.3	251.3	2.1	0.0	2.5	255.9	266.8
31.8 Accommodation/office equipment	31.5	28.4	31.5	0.0	0.0	2.8	34.3	35.0
8.8 Partnership running costs	11.5	5.2	11.5	0.0	0.0	(2.8)	8.7	8.9
#REF! Support services	31.7	31.7	31.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	31.7	32.3
#REF! Total Core Expenditure	326.0	307.6	326.0	2.1	0.0	2.5	330.6	343.0
Income								
232.5 Defra	(232.5)	(232.5)	(232.5)	0.0	0.0	0.0	(232.5)	(232.5)
22.4 East Sussex County Council	(22.4)	(22.4)	(22.4)	0.0	0.0	0.0	(22.4)	(22.4)
9.0 Kent County Council	(9.0)	(9.0)	(9.0)	0.0	0.0	0.0	(9.0)	(9.0)
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)
16.3 Other income	(9.8)	(14.0)	(9.8)	0.0	0.0	0.0	(9.8)	(9.8)
332.5 Total Core Income	(326.0)	(330.2)	(326.0)	0.0	0.0	0.0	(326.0)	(326.0)
#REF! Surplus/(deficit) transfer to/(from) reserves	0.0	22.6	0.0	(2.1)	0.0	(2.5)	(4.6)	(17.0)
#REF! Net Core Budget	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

Self Funding Projects

See Appendix C for detail

	2020/21		2021/22		2022/23	
338.7 JAC expenditure on self-funded projects	339.3	348.0	486.1		486.1	486.1
41.1 Defra contribution to self-funded projects	(45.0)	(50.2)	(45.0)		(45.0)	(45.0)
Local authorities contributions	(35.8)	(2.8)	(32.8)		(32.8)	(32.8)
Other contributions to self-funded projects	(258.5)	(295.0)	(408.3)		(408.3)	(408.3)
379.8 Net Self-Funded Project Budget	0.0	0.0	0.0		0.0	0.0

Total High Weald JAC

#REF! Total core and project expenditure	665.3	655.6	812.1	2.1	0.0	2.5	816.7	829.1
712.3 Total core and project income	(665.3)	(678.2)	(812.1)	0.0	0.0	0.0	(812.1)	(812.1)
#REF! Total High Weald JAC Budget	0.0	(22.6)	0.0	2.1	0.0	2.5	4.6	17.0

Defra Funding	2020/21 £000	2021/22 £000	2022/23 £000	Reserves	£000
Defra funding on core budget	(232.5)	(232.5)	(232.5)	Reserves at 1 April 2020	181.5
Defra funding on projects budget	(50.2)	(45.0)	(45.0)	Transfer to/(from) reserves 2020/21	22.6
Total Defra Funding	(282.7)	(277.5)	(277.5)	Transfer to/(from)reserves 2021/22	(4.6)
				Reserves at 31 March 2022	199.5

HIGH WEALD AONB JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

SELF FUNDING PROJECTS OUTTURN 2020/21 & INDICATIVE BUDGET 2021/22

Appendix B

	Budget 2020/21			Forecast 2020/21			Indicative Budget 2021/22		
	Exp £'000	Income £'000	Net £'000	Exp £'000	Income £'000	Net £'000	Exp £'000	Income £'000	Net £'000
1 Community Outreach									
JAC expenditure	9.7			0.4			9.7		
Defra		(8.6)			(0.4)			(8.6)	
Local authorities		(0.4)			0.0			(0.4)	
Other		(0.7)	0.0		0.0	0.0		(0.7)	0.0
High Weald Heroes									
JAC expenditure	25.6			25.6			26.6		
Defra		(12.4)			(24.3)			(13.3)	
Local authorities		(13.2)			(1.3)			(13.3)	
Other		0.0	0.0		0.0	0.0		0.0	0.0
2 Management Plan Evidence and Guidance									
JAC expenditure	12.9			4.8			12.0		
Defra		(12.9)			(4.8)			(12.0)	
Other		0.0	0.0		0.0	0.0		0.0	0.0
3 Landscape Enhancement									
JAC expenditure	285.1			317.2			431.8		
Defra		(11.1)			(15.5)			(11.1)	
Defra (ELMS advocacy)		0.0			(5.2)			0.0	
Environment Agency		(4.5)			(31.5)			(34.0)	
Water Catchment Partnership (KWT)		(3.8)			(3.5)			(4.0)	
Local authorities		(16.2)			(1.5)			(13.1)	
Other		0.0			(9.6)			(90.1)	
Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund		(30.8)			(21.6)			(30.8)	
National Grid		(93.7)			(73.8)			(93.7)	
Sussex Lund (Charities Aid Foundation)		(125.0)	0.0		(155.0)	0.0		(155.0)	0.0
4 Project Development									
JAC expenditure	6.0			0.0			6.0		
Defra		0.0			0.0			0.0	
Natural England		0.0			0.0			0.0	
Local authorities		(6.0)	0.0		0.0	0.0		(6.0)	0.0
JAC expenditure (to Appendix A)	339.3			348.0			486.1		
Expenditure funded by Defra (to Appendix A)		(45.0)			(50.2)			(45.0)	
Expenditure funded by LAs (to Appendix A)		(35.8)			(2.8)			(32.8)	
Expenditure funded by Other (to Appendix A)		(258.5)			(295.0)			(408.3)	
TOTAL JAC expenditure/income	339.3	(339.3)	0.0	348.0	(348.0)	0.0	486.1	(486.1)	0.0

Report Item: 11

Committee: High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee

Date: 31st March 2021

Title of Report: Risk Management

By: AONB Director

RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are recommended to:

1. Note the report;
 2. Request that the Management Board continue to review significant risks as required and develop options for their management and;
 3. Request the AONB Unit staff routinely review work practices, arrangements, and work programmes to mitigate the risks as far as possible.
-

1.0 Background

- 1.1 The High Weald JAC is a strong and long-established 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. COVID-19 notwithstanding, the most significant underlying risks to the work of the JAC remain the constraints on both the financial and personnel resources of the AONB Unit.
- 1.2 In common with many organisations, the unforeseen arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic last year has had, and will continue to have, consequences for the High Weald JAC although the exact nature of these is hard to predict at this stage.

2.0 Key risks 2021/22 and beyond

- 2.1 For the time being the most significant and on-going risk is to people's health and the priority remains ensuring the staff and those we work with are kept safe and the opportunities for passing on the virus and its variants are kept to an absolute minimum.
- 2.2 Our business planning and working arrangements have been disrupted and it's looking increasingly likely that this will continue well into this year and possibly for longer. Inevitably this has had an impact on our work programme and our small team's working arrangements, yet the AONB Unit staff have adapted and continued to maintain an effective service, which we expect to continue for the foreseeable future.

- 2.3 The impact of COVID-19 on the government’s priorities will be considerable. The demands placed on the Treasury and other government departments have been immense and will have consequences not only to the funding and support provided by government for the work of AONB partnerships but also to future government policies and priorities for the sector.
- 2.4 In April 2020 the government’s four-year commitment to protect the funding in real terms for AONB partnerships came to an end. There is a risk the government may not re-new a stable and predictable or an increased funding settlement for AONB partnerships and the government’s intentions are unclear at the moment. This uncertainty along with the implications for resources because of COVID-19 will mean local authority contributions towards the core business of the High Weald JAC will remain under pressure.
- 2.5 It’s expected the new government scheme Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) will be launched in April 2021. So far, little information has been provided on the details of FiPL or how it will be administered and funded or the government’s expectations of AONB partnerships running this new scheme. However, FiPL is likely to place increased and new demands on our resources and rely on the AONB Unit staff to ensure the scheme is effective and tailored to suit the locality.
- 2.6 The immediate risk associated with FiPL will be the need to establish this new and untested scheme quickly with the limited resources the AONB Unit has available. This will include the setting up a suitable governance structure and a grant administration system, the recruitment of specialist staff to implement the scheme’s objectives and ensure farmers and land managers submit strong grant applications, and defining a suitable monitoring and evaluation programme. A significant increase in the capacity of the AONB team will be required to deliver FiPL alongside other existing and future commitments.
- 2.7 The key risks to the Joint Advisory Committee are set out in appendix A.

3.0 Risk mitigation

3.1 Mitigation of the risks caused by COVID-19

- 3.2 We continue to monitor the situation closely and have put in place a range of appropriate measures to ensure the AONB Unit staff and those we work with are as safe as possible. Measures are in place to keep our key functions running and to manage the team, and to allow partners, residents, and others to continue to work with us. The office at Flimwell has been re-opened for limited use but the staff continue to work primarily from home. Most meetings and all events are conducted on-line, and school visits remain suspended. Site, farm, and woodland advisory visits have resumed under strict controls.

4.0 Mitigation of non-COVID-19 risks

The High Weald AONB Unit’s business strategy 2019 – 2024 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. It will also be adapted to accommodate the Glover review once the government has decided which recommendations it wants to implement.

- 4.1 The current situation is fast-changing, and it is difficult to predict the likely medium and longer-term risks the High Weald AONB partnership faces but the potential of further cuts to our funding cannot be ignored. Our experience following the significant funding cuts in the

years since the banking crisis reminds us the JAC will need to continue to demonstrate the value and worth of the work we do for one of England's finest landscapes, its residents, and visitors and in the face of competing demands.

5.0 Conclusion

- 5.1 Risk management systems are in place and conform to the appropriate East Sussex County Council policy.
- 5.2 COVID-19 presents a range of immediate and longer-term risks for the JAC and these are difficult to predict. The AONB Unit will continue to follow official guidance, reviewing significant risks as required and developing options for their management whilst looking ahead to ensure we are in a strong and resilient position the moment this crisis ends.
- 5.3 It's likely 2021/22 will continue to see constraints on both the financial and personnel resources to the core work of the AONB Unit and this remains the most significant risk to the JAC.
- 5.4 The measures in the business strategy for 2019 – 2024 will ensure the JAC remains 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.

Contact: Jason Lavender AONB Co-Director
j.lavender@highweald.org

Risk Log

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

Likelihood	5					
	4					
	3					
	2					
	1					
		1	2	3	4	5
		Consequence				

Control Rating	
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
		Format: EVENT leading to CONSEQUENCE resulting in EFFECT ON PROJECT OBJECTIVES											
	1	Infection by COVID-19 and subsequent illness.	AONB staff and those we work with falling ill as a result of COVID-19.	AONB Director	4	4	Red	Follow government and ESCC guidance and also set up and maintain a variety of measures to ensure the AONB Unit staff and those we work with are as safe as possible.	AONB Director	2	4	3	Red
	2	Reduction or loss of national and local government political and financial support to AONB partnerships owing to the range and scale of demands placed on government as a result of the COVID-19 crisis and subsequent change in policies and priorities.	Adverse affect to the AONB core work remit and much reduced capacity and time to raise other funds to support core work and raise funds for project work.	AONB Director	4	5	Red	Continued and concerted engagement with national and local government and government agencies and ongoing liaison with the NAAONB. 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	3	4	4	Red
	3	COVID-19 restrictions limit the ability of those receiving grants from the JAC to start or progress and complete their projects within the agreed timescales.	Restrictions placed on people's movements and activities, labour and material shortages.	AONB Director	4	2	Amber	Consult with the grant recipients and third party funders, review and change timescales, offer technical advice and moral support.	AONB Director	2	3	2	Amber

4	Reduced activity/service owing to declining budgets. 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 continue 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. Alternative sources of core income sought. Options to reduce expenditure without adversely affecting service explored. Planned change in scope of JAC's core work programme.	AONB Director	2	4	4	Red
5	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. 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 identify 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 and their objectives. Fundraising expertise within the Unit developed and maintained. Alternative fundraising options explored.	AONB Director	2	3	4	Red
6	Loss of grant aid owing 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
7	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	2	2	3	Amber
8	Role and work implemented and coordinated by the AONB Partnership is not valued by government. National Elections and/or Cabinet re-shuffles resulting in the loss of supportive MPs and Ministers.	Loss or severe reduction of national government funding and commitment to AONB Partnerships.	AONB Director	3	5	Red	Continued engagement with DEFRA and Natural England and ongoing liaison with and reporting on NAAONB/ SEEPL work programmes. Active engagement with DEFRA and 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



The countryside charity

Kent

Tony Juniper CBE
Chair, Natural England
County Hall
Spetchley Road
Worcester
WR5 2NP

4th January 2021

Dear Tony,

Request for a review of the boundary of the High Weald AONB

We are writing to you on behalf of CPRE Kent and CPRE Sussex to request that Natural England conduct a review of the boundary of the High Weald AONB. The Prime Minister's commitment to increase the UK's protected areas to 30% of the UK's total land area and more generally to protect and restore our natural environment indicates that such a review would be timely. We would suggest that such a review should focus, in particular, on whether it is desirable that the boundary of the High Weald AONB should be extended to include those non-urban parts of the High Weald National Character Area that are currently outside the designation. Only 78% of that NCA is currently within the AONB and the remainder is unprotected, while sharing the landscape characteristics which justify the designation of the High Weald AONB.

CPRE, The Countryside Charity, believes in countryside and green spaces that are accessible to all, rich in nature and playing a crucial role in responding to the climate emergency. We believe it is crucial to connect people with the countryside and to provide green spaces accessible to all, in the interests of the health and wellbeing of us all. CPRE wishes to see the implementation of the recommendations of the Glover Review, in particular those designed to give AONBs better funding and a greater say over development in their designated areas.

CPRE Kent and CPRE Sussex are the branches within the CPRE network whose mission is to protect the countryside in the counties of Kent, East Sussex and West Sussex, which include almost all of the High Weald AONB. A small area of the High Weald AONB and NCA is in Surrey and our colleagues at CPRE Surrey support this request. The High Weald NCA is characterised by a varied and intimate landscape, one of the best-preserved medieval landscapes in Northern Europe, a dense network of public footpaths and bridleways, providing access to its countryside and its accessibility by public and private transport for a large population in nearby towns and cities. The AONB harbours gills with rare plant populations not found anywhere else in eastern/central England.

A recent report by CPRE, *An Independent Review of Housing In England's Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty 2012-2017*, set out the threats to AONBs throughout England posed by housing and other major development. Sadly, the High Weald AONB was shown to

CPRE Kent - The Countryside Charity

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be under the greatest housing development pressure of all those studied, with the exception of the Cotswolds AONB. The pressure to develop in the High Weald NCA surrounding the AONB are intense and we believe that the beauty and character of the unprotected 22% of the NCA is at serious risk, in the absence of protection through its incorporation within the High Weald AONB.

We will consult with all the local planning authorities, county councils and parish councils whose area fall wholly or partly within the High Weald NCA, seeking their support for a review of the AONB boundary. We will also seek the support of national and local environmental organisations.

We anticipate that Natural England will have received a number of proposals for the designation or review of protected areas throughout England, but we hope that the combination of the intrinsic beauty and unique character of the High Weald NCA, the threats to which it is subject and its accessibility to large centres of population, will incline you to give priority to a review of the boundaries of the High Weald AONB.

Yours sincerely,

John

John Wotton
Chair, CPRE Kent



Dan Osborn
Chair, CPRE Sussex



The countryside charity

Kent

Cllr Mrs Sylvia Tidy,
Chair, Joint Advisory Committee
High Weald AONB
Woodland Enterprise Centre
Hastings Road, Flimwell
East Sussex, TN5 7PR

5th January 2021

Dear Cllr Tidy,

Campaign to Seek a Review of the Boundary of the high Weald AONB

CPRE Kent and CPRE Sussex have submitted a request to Natural England to conduct a review of the boundary of the High Weald AONB, with a view to including within the AONB those non-urban parts of the High Weald National Character Area (NCA) which are currently excluded. The High Weald NCA is, as you are well aware, characterised by a varied and intimate landscape, one of the best-preserved medieval landscapes in Northern Europe, a dense network of public footpaths and bridleways, providing access to its countryside and its accessibility by public and private transport for a large population in nearby towns and cities. Only 78% of the High Weald NCA is currently within the AONB and the remainder is unprotected, while sharing the landscape characteristics which justify the designation of the High Weald AONB.

A recent report by CPRE, *An Independent Review of Housing In England's Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty 2012-2017*, set out the threats to AONBs throughout England posed by housing and other major development. The High Weald AONB was shown to be under the greatest housing development pressure of all those studied, except for the Cotswolds AONB. The pressure to develop in the High Weald NCA surrounding the AONB are intense; indeed, the pressure on the area just outside the boundary of the current AONB is growing simply because of its adjacency to the HWAONB. We therefore believe that the beauty and character of the unprotected 22% of the NCA is at serious risk, in the absence of protection through its incorporation within the High Weald AONB.

The Prime Minister's commitment to increase the UK's protected areas to 30% of the UK's total land area and more generally to protect and restore our natural environment indicates that a boundary review would be timely. We anticipate that Natural England will have received several proposals for the designation or review of protected areas throughout England, but we hope that the combination of the intrinsic beauty and unique character of the High Weald NCA, the threats to which it is subject and its accessibility to large centres of population, will incline them to give priority to a review of the boundaries of the High Weald AONB.

We hope very much that the Joint Advisory Committee of the High Weald AONB will lend its support to our request. If the JAC were to do so and to communicate its support to Natural

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England, that would add great force to our request for a boundary review. We would be delighted to arrange a meeting with you to explain our objectives and the reasons behind them, at any convenient time.

Yours sincerely,

John Wotton

John Wotton
Chair, CPRE Kent

Cc Dan Osborn, Chair, CPRE Sussex
Jason Lavender, Co-Director, High Weald AONB
Sally Marsh, Co-Director, High Weald AONB

Dr Tony Juniper CBE
Tony.Juniper@naturalengland.org.uk

12 March 2021

Our Ref: ICH2021039

By email only: jpwotton@gmail.com



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Nobel House
17 Smith Square
London
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www.naturalengland.org.uk

Dear John

Request for a review of the boundary of the High Weald AONB

Thank you for your letter of 4th January and please accept my apology for the delay in responding.

Natural England is currently awaiting Government resourcing decisions which are expected by the spring 2021. Following this we'll be better placed to fully assess and plan our future landscape designation programme. For example, we are keen to work closely with the emerging Nature Recovery Network (NRN) partnership to help inform future designation priorities. The NRN seeks to encompass biodiversity, landscape and recreation priorities, and thereby identify broadly based priority places where new designations might, potentially, provide best alignment with public policy priorities.

In the meantime, Natural England is reviewing the processes we use for how new National Parks and AONBs are designated and boundary variations undertaken. Where we do take forward new designations and variations, we want to do this in a more efficient way, working with partners and in ways which better engage local communities and stakeholders.

As you have acknowledged, however, we are already considering a significant number of proposals for new landscape designations and as a consequence, we are very unlikely to be in a position to consider newer proposals before these have been reviewed and therefore we are not looking for any further proposals at this time. We are however exploring complementary new approaches for the 21st Century which have the potential to add value to, and support, the existing national landscape designation family.

With regard to the Glover Landscapes Review, we are currently in discussion with Government and other stakeholders regarding Government's response, and how changes might be implemented. We want to ensure that future landscape designations add value to the existing national landscape family and play a key part in tackling the joint challenges of climate, nature and wellbeing, as well as the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty.

I am sorry if this does not provide you with the response that you were hoping for with respect to a boundary variation. However, we look forward to continuing to work with CPRE and partners involved with the High Weald AONB, to support this important landscape and its setting to deliver more for people and nature.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tony Juniper".

Tony Juniper CBE
Chair, Natural England