

# High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee



## Agenda: High Weald JAC Meeting

Wednesday 22 March 2023 10.30am

at East Grinstead Council Chambers, East Court, College Lane,  
East Grinstead, West Sussex, RH19 3LT

1. Natural Flood Management  
A presentation from Dean Morrison, Project Officer: Sussex Flow (Cuckmere & Combe)
2. Apologies
3. 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.
4. 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 him prior notification of such matters unless urgency prevents it.
5. Minutes of the JAC meeting  
To consider the minutes of the last meeting of the JAC held on 23 November 2022 (page 3)
6. Minutes of the Management Board Meeting  
To note the matters arising from the Management Board meeting held on 7 March 2023 (page 10). Appendix Budget Consultation responses.
7. Minutes of the Officer Steering Group  
To note the minutes of the last meeting of the OSG held on 28 February (page 16)
8. High Weald Management Plan 2024-2029 update  
A consider and approve a report by the AONB Director on the Management Plan 2024-2029 timetable changes and statement of significance. (page 23).
9. Revenue Budget for 2022/23  
To consider and approve a report by the Treasurer on the Revenue Budget 2023/24 (page 26). Appendix A Core Budget, Appendix B Project budget monitoring forms, and Appendix C, 5-year plan.
10. High Weald AONB Partnership Grant Programmes  
To consider a report by the AONB Business Manager on grant programmes supporting delivery of AONB Management Plan objectives. (page 31)
11. Service Level Agreement 2024-2029  
To consider a report by the AONB Co-Director on process for reviewing the current Service Level Agreement. (page 37). Appendix-Service Level Agreement template.

12. Risk Management

To consider a report by the AONB Co-Director on risk management (page 39); Appendix A: High Weald JAC - Key Risks

13. Any other business

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

Samantha Nicholas  
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# High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee

## Minutes of Meeting



23 November 2022, Uckfield Civic Centre Ashdown Room

Samantha Nicholas

Clerk to the High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee

Woodland Enterprise Centre, Flimwell, East Sussex TN5 7PR

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Members present:

|                        |  |
|------------------------|--|
| Cllr P Bradbury        | West Sussex County Council/Mid Sussex District Council<br>(Chairman) |
| Cllr Mrs E Kirby-Green | East Sussex County Council   |
| Cllr M Dickins         | Sevenoaks Borough Council  |
| Cllr Mrs N Warne       | Tunbridge Wells Borough Council                                      |
| Cllr L Lockwood        | Tandridge Borough Council  |
| Cllr J Vine-Hall       | Rother District Council  |
| Mrs S Tidy             | Farming Cooptee  |
| Ms J Hull              | Forestry Commission  |
| Ms L Newland           | Natural England  |

Officers:

|                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
| Mr J Lavender   | AONB Co-Director  |
| Mrs S Marsh     | AONB Co-Director  |
| Ms G Sherwin    | AONB Business Manager                                       |
| Dr S Brotherton | AONB Research Advisor                                       |
| Ms S Williamson | AONB Deer Management Advisor                                |
| Mr A Fowler     | Finance Manager, East Sussex County Council                 |
| Ms H Goodman    | Planning Officer, Sevenoaks Borough Council                 |
| Mr D Scully     | Landscape Planning Officer, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council |

### 1. High Weald Deer Management

- 1.1. Presentation from Sandy Williamson, High Weald Deer Management Coordinator. Jamie Cordery, Forestry Commission sent his apologies - bad weather and traffic prevented him from attending.
- 1.2. Sandy outlined her role coordinating and supporting landowners' and farmers' efforts managing deer across the High Weald and the impact of deer on woodland ecology and farmland. This has included establishing and running a pilot project

(funded by the AONB team's Farming in Protected Landscape scheme) in two separate areas of the AONB to increase culling of fallow does. Collaborative management and monitoring over a 4,000ha area is underpinned by a per carcass payment, training events, and an annual drone survey (the largest survey of its type ever undertaken in Europe).

1.3. Members were interested to know whether the concentration on two areas would lead to increased deer pressure on adjacent areas and how the public may perceive the project. Sandy explained that the trial should help answer these questions and mentioned she has taken on a MA student to write articles to help raise awareness and understanding of deer management.

1.4. Jane Hull (Forestry Commission) was pleased to see this trial going ahead and was delighted to be working with the High Weald team on the issue of deer management.

## **2. Apologies**

2..1 Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Carey, Cllr Roark, Cllr Newton, Cllr Pickering, S Nicholas, M Davidson, Lucy Charman (CLA) Mrs J Davison, Cllr Davis, Cllr Irving, Jamie Cordery.

## **3. Members Interests**

3..1 No declarations of interest were raised by the Members.

## **4. Urgent Matters**

4..1 No urgent matters were raised.

## **5. JAC Management Board Members:**

5..1 Owing to the changes within the local authority Members, it was noted that the following changes have been made to the Management Board Members.

- Cllr Mrs E Kirby-Green, ESCC – elected to Vice-Chairman
- Cllr Mrs A Newton, Wealden DC – has replaced Cllr P Dixon
- Cllr M Dickins, Sevenoaks BC has joined the Management Board

## **6. Minutes of the Joint Advisory Committee meeting**

6..1 **RESOLVED** to note the minutes of the JAC meeting held on 30 March 2022.

6..2 Noted that the name in section 9.4 should read Jane and not Ruth.

## **7. Minutes of the Management Board meeting**

7..1 **RESOLVED** to note the minutes of the Management Board meeting held on 25 October 2022

**8. Minutes of the Officer Steering Group (OSG)**

8..1 **RESOLVED** to note the minutes of the OSG meeting held on 29 September 2022.

**9. High Weald Management Plan 2024-2029**

9..1 Sally Marsh outlined the AONB Management Plan review process and its associated timetable and reminded Members of each local authority's duties regarding the High Weald Management Plan and its production. The Members were taken through the new draft AONB Management Plan layout and the likely dates for the local authority and public consultations.

9..2 Members divided into three groups to begin the development of a new vision for the AONB landscape and the AONB Management Plan. Ideas and thoughts from these groups were collated and reported back to all that were present, and these will be used to inform the current review of the Plan.

9..3 The new 20-year vision and will be available in draft form for the next JAC Meeting in March 2023.

**10. Revenue Budget for 2022/23**

10..1 The Committee considered a report from Jason Lavender on High Weald JAC direction and resources. For details see High Weald AONB Partnership's Direction and Resourcing report, JAC meeting 23 November 2022 - page 30 heading 4 should read 2023 and not 2025. Members noted:

- the total local authority contributions to the High AONB Partnership in 2022/23 are £83,700, the same as 20 years ago. Had these contributions remained in line with inflation, the local authority contributions would be £140,080 in 2022/23.
- five local authorities have reduced their contributions during this 20 year period – Crawley BC, Hastings BC, Ashford BC, Tonbridge and Malling BC, Kent County Council
- the JAC Members asked the Management Board to review the Partnership's budget. The Management Board subsequently recommended a one-off uplift in local authority contributions to start 2023/24 and an annual inflationary increase in contributions from 2024/25. This is in addition to the contributions based on the funding formula
- the Management Board strongly felt that the contributions to the Partnership need to reflect the value and cost savings of the AONB team producing a

statutory AONB Management Plan on behalf of 15 local authorities; recognise the considerable external funds secured by the AONB team and directed into local authority areas; acknowledge the increasing demand from all stakeholders (local authority officers, residents, private and public bodies, and government agencies) for the AONB team's services; and be meaningful

- a flat rate increase to local authority contributions (£5,000 for county councils and £2,500 for district/borough council) was proposed by the Management Board. This level of increase was considered necessary to deliver services and allow a balanced budget over five years
- the Chair of the JAC wrote to all local authorities in June 2022 with this proposal, providing an opportunity for local authorities to consider the proposal before local authority budget setting periods. A full briefing was also sent to each JAC and OSG representative on the AONB Partnership
- that at the time of today's JAC meeting ten authorities have responded to this initial consultation: six have agreed to the flat rate proposal; four advised they would consider an increase based on the percentage of their area in the AONB. Most recognised the need for an inflationary increase (proposing the level of increase should be reviewed annually). One authority stated it would consider leaving the Partnership should the proposal be implemented. The remaining four authorities have either not decided or are yet to respond.

10..2 Cllr Warne (Tunbridge Wells BC) asked how this proposal fits in with the current Service Level Agreement. Jason Lavender explained that this issue had been addressed in the report in paragraph 2.3 i.e. although local authority contributions would normally be reviewed prior to the agreement of the next Service Level Agreement, this early review has been prompted by:

- the five-year budget forecast showing an increasing budget deficit, which has been exacerbated by the recently announced 2022/23 pay award.
- the recent and unexpected increase in DEFRA's contribution to the JAC Partnership in 2022/23 of £40,667 p.a.
- the need to invest in the core team to sustain a core service, as well realise the external funding and investment opportunities that deliver AONB Management Plan objectives.

10..3 Cllr Bradbury (JAC Chair) added that while the AONB team would have preferred to review the contributions as part of the SLA process, the additional and unexpected DEFRA funding, while welcome, is conditional on local authority contributions

matching it. Cllr Bradbury said the proposed increase is a small amount to support the range of work the partnership undertakes on behalf of the local authorities and given the significant funds the AONB team attracts to the constituent districts, boroughs, and counties.

- 10..4 Cllr Bradbury (JAC Chair) asked the Members of the JAC to vote on whether they approved the proposal outlined in the paper for an increase in local authority contributions in 2023/24 and an annual inflationary increase in contributions from 2024/25.
- 10..5 The JAC voted to approve the proposal. Five Members voted for the proposal and one Member abstained.
- 10..6 The Committee then considered the report on the draft Revenue Budget for 2023/24. Andy Fowler (Finance Manager, East Sussex County Council) asked the Members to consider the draft Revenue Budget 2023/24 and he outlined the report. Mr Fowler explained the draft revenue budget had been prepared to reflect and include the proposal detailed in the previous paper. For details, see the Draft Revenue Budget 2023/24 report, JAC meeting 23 November 2022.
- 10..7 Cllr Bradbury (JAC Chair) asked the Members of the JAC to vote on whether they approved the draft Revenue Budget for 2023/24 and to request the AONB team to begin the budget consultation with the local authorities and DEFRA.
- 10..8 The JAC voted unanimously to approve the draft Revenue Budget for 2023/24 and requested the AONB team to begin the budget consultation with the local authorities and DEFRA.
- 10..9 **RESOVED to:**
- **approve the Management Board’s proposal for an increase in local authority contributions in 2023/24 and an annual inflationary increase in contributions from 2024/25**
  - **approve the draft revenue budget for 2023/24 and the commencement of budget consultation with the local authorities and DEFRA**
  - **thank the local authorities for their on-going support for the work of the AONB Partnership**

## **11. Risk Management**

- 11..1 The Committee considered a report by Jason Lavender on risk management and the measures the AONB team have put in place to address the likely risks to the business of the AONB Partnership. 2022-23 and beyond will continue to be characterised by the challenges outlined in the report. Of particular concern is the: need for government to allocate an adequate and stable core budget funding settlement; on-

going management and success of the external and self-funded projects using funds raised by the AONB team; new and greater demands and expectations placed on the already under-resourced AONB core team; and the need to address the issue of staff succession and the retention of knowledge within the AONB team. For details, see the Risk Management report, JAC meeting 23 November 2022

- **AGREED that the Management Board continues to work with the AONB Unit to consider the risks and identify measures and options to manage and mitigate the effect of these risks.**

## **12. A.O.B.**

- 12..1 Members present had a discussion on the need for all JAC Members to have a greater awareness of the valuable and important work the AONB Partnership undertakes. Members noted that only six local authority Members out of a total of 15 were present at today's meeting.
- 12..2 **AGREED that the JAC Chair will write to each local authority to highlight the value of the work of the AONB Partnership and the need for continued financial contributions to support this work and meet the local authorities' statutory responsibilities.**
- 12..3 Jason Lavender informed the Members that Tottingworth abattoir will close in the New Year, and this will be a severe blow to the 900 or so farmers using Tottingworth. It could also have implications for the conservation and enhancement of the High Weald landscape. Jason lavender will be writing to all the local MPs to raise their awareness of this issue and the associated problems it will create. In addition, the AONB team will be supporting local farmers where it can on this issue but will not be directly involved unfortunately given the team's limited resources.
- 12..4 Jason Lavender informed the Members of staffing changes:
- The AONB team has recently recruited Diane Russell to the post of Senior Landscape and Planning Advisor. Diane will start in January next year and brings a depth and range of experience. While working for Rother District Council Diane was the driving force behind the writing and publication of the High Weald Design Guide and has been an advocate for the High Weald landscape for many years
  - Ross Wingfield, Land Management Project Officer resigned recently to take up a new post at The Real Wild Estates Company. It is hoped this vacant post will be filled by Easter.

- 12..5 Cllr Kirby-Green recommended that each JAC Member circulate within their own local authority the High Weald team's Biennial Review as it is a 'really brilliant piece of work.'
- 12..6 The next High Weald JAC Meeting will be held on Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2023 at East Grinstead cabinet chambers.

Agenda item: 6

## **HIGH WEALD JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE – Management Board Minutes –Tuesday 7 March 10.30 am**

This was held as a Microsoft Teams Meeting due to poor weather conditions.



Samantha Nicholas  
Clerk to the High Weald AONB  
Joint Advisory Committee

Present: Members:

|                        |  |
|------------------------|--|
| Cllr P Bradbury        | West Sussex County Council/Mid Sussex District Council |
| Cllr J Vine-Hall       | Rother District Council                                |
| Cllr Mrs E Kirby-Green | East Sussex County Council                             |
| Mrs S Tidy             | NFU Co-optee   |

Also Present:

|                   |                           |
|-------------------|---------------------------|
| Jason Lavender    | AONB Director (job share) |
| Sally Marsh       | AONB Director (job-share) |
| Gerry Sherwin     | AONB Business Manager     |
| Samantha Nicholas | AONB Clerk to JAC         |

### **Actions**

**Paragraph 10**                    **It was agreed by the Members that it should be recommended that the JAC delegates the responsibility for reviewing the SLA to the Management Board. A sub-group would be set up to report to the Management Board.**

**Paragraph 17**                    **it was agreed for the JAC to delegate to Management Board the final sign-off of the consultation draft of the AONB Management Plan (for public consultation July/ August 2023) in July.  
To delay final JAC approval of the MP from November 2023 to March 2024.  
To recommend the Statement of Significance for sign off at the JAC Meeting to be held on 22 March 2023.**

### **Apologies**

1. Apologies were received from: Diane Russell, Cllr Dickins, and Cllr Carey. Cllr A Newton gave apologies during the meeting; due to a dog attack on their flock she was

unable to stay in the meeting.

### Members' Interests

2. There were no members' interests that required noting.

### Minutes of the meeting from 25 October 2022

3. The minutes for 25 October 2022 were agreed to be an accurate record.

### Local authority budget review update

4. A summary of responses to the budget consultation had been circulated to the Members prior to the meeting. There was an understanding that the consultation had not been a smooth process, but there had been many positive responses from Local Authorities. £115,000 of the total budget £131,000 requested has been approved which in the current climate is encouraging.
5. Jason Lavender highlighted that this was partially because the flat rate approach had been rejected by some of the smaller local authorities. In summary, 9 authorities have increased their contributions as requested, 3 authorities have increased their contribution by an alternative amount, 3 authorities, Tunbridge Wells BC, Crawley BC and Ashford BC are unable to increase their contribution but will review as part of the process of agreeing the Service Level Agreement 2024-2029.
6. A discussion took place on how the Partnership reflects the reserves in the budget report. Currently the reserve is shown as one amount. It was suggested by members that the HR and redundancy element be set out separately from other reserve purposes.
7. Gerry Sherwin informed Members that this would be reflected in the JAC budget paper. Reserves were needed for several purposes, for example to enable recruitment. The past planning advisor, Claire Tester was employed on 4 days a week. However, to secure our current planning advisor the Unit needed to advertise a full-time position.
8. A discussion took place around the costs of producing a statutory management plan and the renewal of the Service Level Agreement (SLA). Sally Marsh confirmed that the Unit can show figures on management plan costs, and this could be discussed as part of the Service Level Agreement 2024-2029.
9. The Chairman recommended the JAC delegate the responsibility to the Management Board for reviewing the SLA and for setting up a working group to prepare the next SLA. The working group would report to the Management Board.
10. **ACTION: It was agreed by the Members that it should be recommended that the JAC delegates the responsibility for reviewing the SLA to the Management Board. A sub-group would be set up to report to the Management Board.**

## OSG Meeting

11. Jennifer Hollingum updated the Members on feedback from the OSG Meeting held on Microsoft Teams on 28 February 2023, it was highlighted that:

- There was good attendance from officers due to it being an online which helps to secure positive attendance. However, it was requested that the next Management Plan meeting should be held in person.
- Officers are very keen to be part of the Management Plan process and have been adding in comments to all the documents which we have been managing through Teams portal. This has also allowed wider range of officers to participate within the local authorities.
- Project updates from Jason Lavender were well received, as it is important that the officers are made aware of the wider remit that the team provides, especially as majority of officers in OSG are in planning positions.
- The Group discussed future training options and welcomed a Dark Skies and Local Authority training with Dan Oakley from South Downs National on 21 March 2023. It was confirmed that this could be recorded so more officers could access this this presentation.

## Management Plan 2024 update

12. Sally Marsh asked the Members to consider the postponing of the Management Plan by 3 months, highlighting:

- The High Weald is one of the few AONBs not to delay the MP process by a year due the number of local authorities that need to participate in the process.
- The Management Plan would normally go to final sign off the November JAC meeting before the March deadline to allow plenty of time for the 15 local authorities to take the plan through their individual processes to adopt.
- The Plan would then be sent to the Secretary of State and signed up at the end of April 2024.

13. Sally explained that due to the following reasons it will not be possible to do this:

- Natural England have been aligning AONB and National Park management plans together for the first time and preparing joint guidance for both national parks and AONB.
- In 2020, the Government committed to protect at least 30% of land and sea for nature by 2030 (its 30x30 target). Part of this process is to set targets for nature and Rt Hon Thérèse Coffey MP would like to see AONB's national parks meet those targets. These targets will require a monitoring process. These targets will be reflected in the Management Plan indicators of success and actions.
- There are two pieces of work running alongside each other. The management plan guidance and the monitoring and targeting guidance, both of those are reporting at the end of this March. Sally sits on both steering groups and understands where the process is heading and is confident that the Plan can meet these requirements.

However, the team will require more time to build these targets into the Plan and to take this to the OSG.

14. Sally recommended to the Members that:

- These changes would mean that the consultation Management Plan will not be able to be signed off on 22 March at the JAC Meeting. A report will be taken to the JAC to recommend that this sign-off process would be delegated to the Management Board, as it was in the process for the previous Management Plan 2019, at the beginning of July. The final Management Plan would be signed off in March 2024.
- Following this sign-off there would have to be a period where the local authorities would be required to legally adopt the Plan, but this would still sit within the within the technical specification.

15. A discussion took place around potentially moving the JAC from March to February 2024 to give them the officers to sign this off internally. However, it was felt that this may not give enough time for production of the management plan and for LAs to achieve sign off.

16. Sally informed the Management Board that the other recommendation was to sign off the Statement of Significance again at JAC Meeting to be held on 22 March.

17. The Chairman pointed out that there was a couple of technical terms such as human scale and oceanic climate which were not very accessible language, and these could be placed in the glossary. It was agreed by the Members to take the Statement of Significance to the JAC for recommendation.

**18. ACTION: It was agreed**

- 1) For the JAC to delegate to Management Board the final sign-off of the consultation draft of the AONB Management Plan (for public consultation July/ August 2023).**
- 2) To delay final JAC approval of the MP from November 2023 to March 2024**
- 3) The Statement of Significance is to be recommended for sign off at the JAC Meeting to be held on 22 March 2023.**

#### JAC Agenda items 22 March 2023– additional items

22. The following additional items were agreed for the JAC Meeting:

- Flood Management presentation from Dean Morrison
- Report on grant programmes including Farming in Protected Landscapes, National Grid and Sussex Lund

#### Project update

23. Gerry Sherwin updated the Group on the Farming in Protected Landscape (FIPL) grant fund. Defra has announced that they are extending the programme and it is now operating until March 2025. This will be beneficial for projects that require delivery over a 2-year period and for attracting additional projects. Defra have

increase funding available to the High Weald under the programme to 1.2 million in 2023/24 and 1.6 in 2024/25.

24. Gerry confirmed that £464,000 had been committed to work in 2022/23. The number of enquiries has been greater than most of the other AONBs. The likely spend for 2023/2024 was £600,000 - £700,000, with a similar amount in 2024/25.
25. Gerry advised that it would be difficult to commit all the grant funding for a variety of reasons including constraints created by the programme rules and the high level of small projects, a reflection of the area's small holdings. Such proposals take as much time to develop and support as larger projects. There is also the added pressure of not having a full team. The Unit are currently recruiting to the Land Management Project officer position.
26. Gerry highlighted that one of the issues around not being able to spend the full grant is Defra's cap on management and administrative spend. The Unit have funding for 1.6 extra staff for FIPL advice and administration, but more people are needed if more grant is to be awarded. Defra have proposed an increase in the management and administrative costs - but only for the final year. Increased PR will be scheduled for the Summer to increase awareness of the additional funding available.
27. Cllr Bradbury agreed to contact Trudy Harrison MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for Environment) to highlight High Weald AONB unique challenges within the successful FIPL programme.

#### Any Other Business

28. Samantha Nicholas took the Members through a presentation on the success of the first 'Dark Skies Festival' held between 18- 26 February. This was funded through Sussex Lund:
  - As part of the Dark Skies Festival Seven events were held across the Parishes of Battle, Burwash, Crowhurst, Wadhurst Ticehurst. The areas are in the heart of the darkest areas within the AONB. The events were facilitated by Samantha and were managed in partnership with 'Wild About Groups' in these areas as well as the East Sussex, Sussex and Wadhurst Astronomical Societies, National Trust, Batemans, and local businesses, with over 60 volunteers.
  - Over 360 people attended the events reaching to over 500 people who indicated their interest in the events through online publicity.
  - The events ranged from Dark Skies walks, family fun with planetarium and light workshops, and presentations from guest speakers such as Bob Mizon, International Dark Skies and Caroline Moore, renowned moth specialist.
  - East Sussex, Sussex and Wadhurst Astronomy Society were pivotal in supporting each event with hands on telescopes and presentations when the weather was not so kind.
29. The Members thanked Samantha for her work on the project and acknowledge the need to increase awareness of light pollution which is becoming a significant harm across the AONB.

30. The JAC Meeting is to be held on 22 March 2023 at East Grinstead East Mason.

## LOCAL AUTHORITY BUDGET CONSULTATION

### Core Contributions 2023-24

| <u>Organisation Name</u>            | <u>Requested</u> | <u>Letter Sent</u> | <u>Agreed</u>   | <u>Response Received</u> | <u>Notes</u>  |
|-------------------------------------|------------------|--------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|---|
| East Sussex County Council          | £27,400          | N/A                | £27,400         | N/A                      | Included in budget setting  |
| Kent County Council                 | £14,000          | 20/01/2023         | £14,000         |                          | 02/03/2023 - Sorry for the delay, I have been on leave. Seeking an additional contribution for 23/24.   |
| West Sussex County Council          | £14,300          | 20/01/2023         | £14,300         | 30/09/2023               | Advised 30/9/22 that the proposed £5k increase for 2023/24, (plus relevant index thereafter) had been approved and the relevant budget head amended.  |
| Surrey County Council               | £7,900           | 20/01/2023         | £2,987          | 24/02/2023               | I've consulted with Jason and Gerry at the High Weald and Carolyn McKenzie, SCC Director of Environment re the SCC contribution to the High Weald AONB. We are able to provide an increase of 3% on our current contribution (£2900) for 2023-24 which is in line with the partner increase across the Surrey Hills AONB. We can review any future year increases as part of the annual budget setting. We value the excellent work of the High Weald AONB, and thank the team for their great work.  |
| Wealden District Council            | £9,700           | 20/01/2023         | £9,700          | 27/02/2023               | Wealden District Council already agreed in principle to this approach for 2023/2024 in its letter dated 6th July 2022, and sent via email to the AONB Unit. We note that the Service Level Agreement (SLA) is due for review in March 2024. Therefore, we consider that any future uplift to funding beyond 2023/2024 should be considered as part of a comprehensive review of the SLA where the matter of contributions can be revisited alongside the work programme as part of this formal process.   |
| Rother District Council             | £9,700           | 20/01/2023         | £9,700          | 23/02/2023               | I respond to your letter, dated 20 January 2023, and confirm, on behalf of Rother District Council, that we agree to the proposed budgetary contribution for 2023/24.   |
| Mid Sussex District Council         | £8,100           | 20/01/2023         | £8,100          | 31/01/2023               | Thank you for your e-mail. There is £8,100 allocated in the provisional MSDC 2023/24 budget (subject to Council approval in March 2023) for Mid Sussex District Council's contribution towards the High Weald AONB Partnership. I will update you following the Council meeting in March to approve the budget.   |
| Tunbridge Wells Borough Council     | £9,200           | 20/01/2023         | £6,700          | 03/02/2023               | Thank you for your letter and supporting information on the consultation for the High Weald JAC budget. After careful and detailed consideration by Cabinet I am instructed to formally respond to the consultation and inform you that whilst Tunbridge Wells Borough Council remain a strong supporter of the AONB Unit we do not support the proposed budget for 2023/24. The reasons for this are set out some detail in the attached letter. Our Member representative to the JAC Cllr Warne will contact the Directors and provide more detail of our discussions and confirm our continued commitment under the existing SLA |
| Horsham District Council            | £7,200           | 20/01/2023         | £5,000          | 24/02/2023               | Small increase of £300 which takes our contribution to £5,000. As outlined any future increases will need to be considered through the SLA.   |
| Sevenoaks District Council          | £6,100           | 20/01/2023         | £6,100          | 24/02/2023               | I note that the request is for an uplift of £2.5k for the financial year 23/24 over and above our current contribution of £3.6k pa, and that for the following four financial years there will be inflationary increases to our contribution. I can confirm that Sevenoaks District Council will support the proposed budgetary contributions for our authority. However, please note that whilst we recognise and support the work of the AONB unit, we may not be able to support further such increases in the future.   |
| Ashford District Council            | £3,300           | 20/01/2023         | £800            | 24/02/2023               | This request falls outside the framework of the agreed Service Level Agreement (SLA) that Ashford Borough Council has with the High Weald AONB Unit. Whilst it is appreciated that the budget in the SLA is indicative and that financial situations may change, the council feels that the budget proposal is a significant deviation from the SLA and a matter that should be addressed in a new agreement.   |
| Hastings Borough Council            | £4,000           | 20/01/2023         | £4,000          | 22/02/2023               | This comes out of Planning Policy's budget, not Murray's. But yes I can confirm HBC will be meeting the revised contribution.   |
| Tandridge District Council          | £4,700           | 25/01/2023         | £4,700          |                          |   |
| Crawley Borough Council             | £2,800           | 20/01/2023         | £300            | 23/02/2023               | £300 per annum for 2023/24. CBC will postpone any consideration of changes to the council's contribution until after the current SLA has been reviewed.   |
| Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council | £2,800           | 20/01/2023         | £1,451          | 23/02/2023               | Proportionate contribution of £1,451  |
|                                     | <u>£131,200</u>  |                    | <u>£115,238</u> |                          |   |

# High Weald Officer Steering Group



Notes of a meeting of the High Weald Officer Steering Group held on Tuesday 28 February, at 10.00 am on Microsoft Teams

Samantha Nicholas  
Clerk to the High Weald AONB  
Joint Advisory Committee

## PRESENT:

|                    |                          |
|--------------------|--------------------------|
| Jennifer Hollingum | Mid Sussex DC (Chairman) |
| Jeff Pyrah         | Rother DC                |
| Alan Sime          | Ashford BC               |
| Sophie Gilbert     | Crawley BC               |
| Virginia Pullen    | East Sussex CC           |
| Mark Daly          | Horsham DC               |
| Vivienne Riddle    | Sevenoaks DC             |
| Julian Ling        | Tonbridge & Malling BC   |
| David Scully       | Tunbridge Wells BC       |
| Natalie Bumpus     | Wealden DC               |
| Lucie Bolton       | Rother DC                |
| Isabel Shaw        | Kent CC                  |
| Kerry Culbert      | Hastings BC              |

## High Weald Unit:

|                   |                                 |
|-------------------|---------------------------------|
| Jason Lavender    | AONB Joint Director             |
| Sarah Brotherton  | AONB Landscape Research Advisor |
| Diane Russell     | AONB Planning & Design Advisor  |
| Samantha Nicholas | Clerk to the JAC                |

## Summary of Actions:

| <u>Pt</u> | <u>Information</u>  | <u>To be actioned by</u> |
|-----------|---|--------------------------|
| 4.6       | Management Plan consultation document sign off process to be discussed at the Management Board meeting on 7 March, and recommendations would be taken to the JAC on 22 March 2023 | Unit                     |
| 4.8       | Management Plan document to remain on the OSG portal until 10 March 2023  | Unit                     |
| 7.3       | To circulate the link to the Dark Skies and Local Authority webinar   | Unit                     |
| 9.4       | To set up an event in June for officers to look at regenerative agriculture as requested by the OSG, potentially combined with OSG meeting re Management Plan Actions.            | Unit                     |

## **1. Apologies**

- 1.1. Apologies were received from Sally Marsh and David Greenwood
- 1.2. Jennifer Hollingum has been on sick leave and only recently returned to work. The meeting was therefore chaired by Diane Russell.

## **2. Minutes of the meeting of 29 September 2022**

- 2.1 The Minutes of 29 September 2022 were agreed to be an accurate account of the meeting.

## **3. OSG Vice-Chair – position vacant**

- 3.1 The position of Vice-Chair is vacant due to Diane Russell joining the AONB team. Mark Daly has been asked to consider the position of Vice-chair. This opportunity was also offered to the wider group if they might be interested in stepping into the role.

## **4 Management Plan 2024- 2029 update**

- 4.1 Sarah Brotherton informed the Group on how they can access the updated version of the Management Plan on the Teams portal. Current documents on this site are the latest version of the Management Plan, Management Plan timetable, and a Malvern Hills “views” document as a point of interest for the Group, as we may wish to emulate a similar study.
- 4.2 Sarah then updated the Group on the changes in the Management Plan timetable. The timetable has been pushed back by 3 months due to Natural England’s Management Plan guidance which is due at the end of March. Sally Marsh has been sitting on the National AONB consultation panel with NE. The outcome of the changes will have an impact on the actions and indicators of success within the Plan. The Unit will need time to digest and produce in draft outstanding sections for the Management Plan from this information before it can be presented to the OSG. This means the consultation document will not be agreed at the JAC Meeting on 22 March 2023.
- 4.3 Sarah also highlighted additional changes to the draft Management Plan:
  - In the winter, the OSG were presented a draft priorities section. This is the new part of the plan, dedicated to covering nature, recovery, climate, and soil. This section’s name has now been amended to ‘drivers for change’, the ‘Planning & Development’ section now sits within this section, and the ‘People & Access’ section has been reintroduced to this section.
  - To ensure this section ties in with the pre-existing body of the management plan, an introduction to ‘Drivers for Change’ has been inserted on page 18. The

Objectives have been tabulated, to provide a quick reference list, and to illustrate how these relate to the 'drivers for change'.

- 4.4 The public consultation will be moved to August/September 2023 and there will be an option of an additional OSG Meeting in December 2023.
- 4.5 A discussion took place around the changes to the timetable and whether it was appropriate for consultation document to be delegated to the Management Board in July. An alternative approach maybe to a full JAC meeting in July if appropriate.
- 4.6 **ACTION: It was agreed that this would be discussed at the Management Board meeting on 7 March, and recommendations would be taken to the JAC on 22 March 2023 on the best method to enable the Management Plan to be signed off.**
- 4.7 Officers reported back that they had not had time to properly feedback on the updated document and gain feedback from their authorities.
- 4.8 **ACTION: It was agreed that the document would remain on the portal until 10 March 2023 to enable this process.**
- 4.9 David Scully had circulated initial comments on the draft MP on the morning of the meeting and gave an overview of these comments to the meeting, including comments regarding relationship to the NPPF, concerns that some of the language was too technical, and that the phrase 'net zero carbon landscape' had not had enough explanation to be supported. It was observed that the positive stories of landscape management such as regenerative agriculture and deer management could be woven into the narrative.
- 4.10 Sarah observed that some of these positive projects might be reflected in the 'Actions' as they are developed.
- 4.11 A discussion took place on whether the AONB was under unusual pressure from planning. The research paper An Independent Review of Housing in England's Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty 2012-2017 NAAONB and CPRE, clearly indicated that there is very high housing pressure within the High Weald AONB in comparison with other AONBs. This is reflected in page 3 of the AONB Design Guide.
- 4.12 The group discussed that it would be useful to obtain current data from each of the various LPAs on housing permissions in the AONB over recent years.
- 4.13 David Scully also commented that the pressure from housing arises from it being a more desirable place to build on because it's a very attractive place to live, the cost of land is artificially high, and housing is not affordable.

4.14 Jason Lavender reinforced this by informing the Group that the Planning applications have increased immeasurably, with more major development applications being put forward as well as developments of 600 houses approved at Pease Pottage.

## **5. Planning matters affecting the High Weald AONB**

5.1 Diane led a discussion on officer's views on the LPA initial responses to the current government consultation on the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill and on any major developments currently being considered within the AONB.

5.2 Jeff Pyrah informed the Group that they are looking at Regulation 18 stage in the Local Plan process. Rother DC are acknowledging that they are unable to meet their housing numbers due to the extent of AONB protected landscape. The approach Rother DC is taking is to look at as many sites as possible, to assess capacity and work what can be achieved. He welcomed the softening of the NPPF regarding meeting housing numbers but noted there was still uncertainty as to how to demonstrate the adverse effects, and it would be helpful to have clearer criteria in the NPPF. They have also been using South Downs draft comments to the NPPF consultation which are very helpful as a benchmark.

5.2 David Scully advised that Tunbridge Wells are still mid examination on their Local Plan, confirmed that the Inspector has written to TWBC and was satisfied with the overall strategy, but not the new Garden Village and Green Belt. The Turnden Public Enquiry decision has still not been announced. TWBC are working with Kent Nature Partnership and their own SPD to ensure that UK Habs classification rather than just Phase 1 grassland surveys are reflected in the Biodiversity Net Gain.

5.3 Mark Daly responded that Horsham DC has been successful in defending planning within the AONB. He was concerned about the terms of Ugliness and Beauty; how do you define this and should this be reflected through key characteristics of the landscape.

## **6. AONB Projects and staffing update**

6.1 Jason Lavender informed the group of the following projects which the Unit are managing:

- Deer Management Project which is led by Sandy Williamson has been introduced to coordinate the better management of deer across the AONB. The increase in deer numbers is having a wide-ranging impact on woodland and grassland habitat. This project is being supported by the Woodland Trust and a grant from Farming in Protected Landscapes. The grant involves two project areas one in Ashdown Forest and one in Bayham Abbey Lamberhurst. As part of this project, we have financially incentivised stalkers per carcass shot. We have also conducted one of the largest drone surveys in Europe to look at the deer numbers on the ground. This has highlighted that there are around 30 deer per km<sup>2</sup> where the habitat would normally sustain 10 deer by km<sup>2</sup>. The grant is also providing training events to help support landowners and deer stalkers.

- The successful Walking Festival is being run from 9 September this year for a week. This has been managed in partnership with the Ramblers. Emma White, AONB Communication officer is looking to increase the diversification of walkers through trails and rails walks and would welcome any support from the local authorities on leading walks.
- Access project awarded £140,000 to projects within the AONB. There will be grants available in year 3 of the funding 2024/2025 and the Unit welcome projects to develop now from local authorities. The projects that were funded, include:
  - Disabled toilets for Ashdown Forest
  - Replacing styles with accessible gates across the AONB working with Kent and ESCC PROW team
  - Resurfacing work at Buchan Country Park
  - Kent High Weald Project – accessible paths around Cinderhill
- Farming in Protected Landscapes supports a wide range of Farming initiatives to improved biodiversity on their land. The Defra initiative is being extended by another year to finish in 2026. To date £450,000 has been awarded, and 61 projects will be allocated grant funding, to improve farming systems, training, and support for farmers. Pasture for Life has set up a mentoring scheme to support farmers that wish to move to regenerative agriculture from traditional methods of farming. A further £600,000 will be spent on schemes across the AONB. The Unit are currently working with Country Trust to have education events at local farms to build better connections with the farming community.
- High Weald Hero programme has been running for nearly 20 years. This programme reaches over 100 primary schools to run outdoor and indoor workshops to engage children with local habitats and historic workshops. Recently our education officer, Rachel Bennington have been working with Historic England to run a series of workshops on cultural history of the AONB.
- Sussex Lund grant programme which supports grants for habitat restoration within and around the AONB, has been focussing on local community, green to grey projects and local celebrations such as Dark Skies Festivals. £112,000 was allocated in 2022 and we look to open applications, in Spring 2023.
- Wild About Dark Skies Festival ran from 18-26 February 2023. Wild About Groups from Burwash, Battle, Crowhurst, Ticehurst and Wadhurst, East Sussex and Wadhurst Astronomy Society and National Trust, Batemans were involved in running these events. This project was facilitated by Samantha Nicholas, AONB Team support officer. Seven events were run all focussed on the importance of reducing light pollution within the AONB. This was the first cross Parish landscape event held within the AONB. The Unit are looking to develop a Festival over a three-year period, and we would welcome other groups or communities to join the festival.

- AONB Website is being upgraded by Emma White. This will involve refreshing our guidance and introducing an event portal and interactive map.

6.2 Jason also updated the Group on staffing changes within the Unit, as follows:

- Jason welcomed Diane Russell to the AONB team as Senior Planning Advisor. Diane has vast experience in planning and had played a large role into the development of the AONB Design Guide.
- Ross Wingfield, Land Management Advisor moved before Christmas to work with a specialist in regenerative agriculture and re-wilding. The Unit are currently starting the recruitment process for a new advisor.
- Fiona McGuire has joined the FiPL team to support the administration of the grant programme.
- Pete Matthews has been contracted as QGIS officer to help with the production of maps for the Management Plan and to support other projects.

## **7. Training for Local Authority officers and Members**

- 7.1 Samantha Nicholas informed the Group that a webinar has been set up for Dark Skies and Local Authorities with a presentation from Dan Oakley, on Tuesday 21 March at 3.30pm. The link will be circulated to the group and were requested to send Samantha contact details for those who are interested in joining the webinar.
- 7.2 The Unit offered the local authorities the opportunity to deliver Management Plan training sessions at each of the local authorities for officers and Members if required, after the Plan is Published.
- 7.3 **ACTION: to circulate the link to the Dark Skies and Local Authority webinar**

## **8. Additional Items for the Management Board to be held on 25 October 2022**

- 8.1 The Management Board will largely focus on budget consultation and management plan update.
- 8.2 David Scully requested that the Unit circulates the local authority budget consultation decisions to the OSG Members. It was confirmed that this information was not available at present, this will be discussed further at the Management Board to be held on 7 March 2023.

## **9. A.O.B**

- 9.1 A discussion took place on the potential to meet up in person at the next Management Plan meeting.
- 9.2 David Scully highlighted that the Group need to look at revisiting the Service Level Agreement to align with the new Management Plan timetable.

**9.3 ACTION: it was agreed that the Unit would look to put on an in-person event in June. This may involve a site visit to a regenerative agriculture farm.**

9.4 The JAC Meeting will be held on 22 March 2023 at East Grinstead East Mason cabinet room.

Agenda Item: 8

**Committee:** High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee  
**Date:** 22 March 2023  
**Title of Report:** AONB Management Plan 2024 Review: update  
**By:** AONB Director

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are recommended to:

1. Agree the revised Plan timetable as set out in Appendix 1.
  2. Delegate to Management Board the responsibility to approve the final Consultation draft in a timely fashion to allow public consultation to proceed according to the agreed timetable.
  3. Approve the Management Plan draft Statement of Significance for public consultation subject to agreement on minor text changes in Appendix 2.
  4. Delegate to the Management Board responsibility to arbitrate on any outstanding matters arising from further partner discussions of the Actions, Indicators of Success, and any other issues.
- 

### 1. Background

1.1 The AONB Management Plan review was initiated in March 2022 by the JAC with a scope and timetable setting out key decision points through to publication in spring 2024 as required by CROW Act 2000. A further JAC meeting on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2022 approved an updated timetable and content structure, and ran a visioning session to collect members thoughts towards creating the JAC vision for the next Management Plan.

### 2. Progress to date

- 2.1 Natural England are releasing new guidance for Management Plans for Protected Landscapes at the end of March 2023, and that guidance will inform completion of the current draft Plan. It is therefore intended that the draft Plan will be ready for public consultation approval by the Management Board in July 2023. However, this means delaying the public consultation until mid-August 2023, i.e. by three months from that set out in the previously agreed programme (see revised timetable in appendix 1)
- 2.2 Management Board at their meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> March 2023 considered and agreed this revised timetable to be taken to the JAC on 22<sup>nd</sup> March with recommendation to sign-off.
- 2.3 The Management Board, also at their meeting of 7<sup>th</sup> March, agreed a recommendation be taken to the JAC that, in view of the timing changes created by the need for the Plan to meet the requirements of the forthcoming Natural England guidance, the final sign-off of the consultation draft of the AONB Management Plan would be delegated to the Management Board (as was the process for the previous Management Plan 2019) at their meeting in July 2023, and to delay final JAC approval of the final Management Plan from November 2023 to March 2024.
- 2.4 The Statement of Significance (attached at appendix 2) was also presented to the Management Board on 7<sup>th</sup> March and agreed to be taken to the JAC on 22<sup>nd</sup> March with recommendation to sign-off.
- 2.5 The Management Plan is currently in draft form (attached for noting at appendix 3) with all sections and content subject to further editing prior to production of the consultation draft.

This draft also currently omits two areas, 'Actions' and 'Indicators of Success', since these areas will be heavily informed by the forthcoming Natural England guidance, and will be added in following receipt of that guidance.

- 2.6 As can be seen from the contents page of the current draft, the content/structure of the Plan has developed since the version considered by the JAC in November 2022, in particular:
- The new section of the Plan previously referred to as 'Priorities' has been revised to 'Drivers of Change' and covers five topics: Soil health, Nature Recovery, Climate Crisis, People and Access, and Land Use, Planning and Development.
  - 'Perceptual & Aesthetic Qualities' has been re-sited as a component of natural beauty (reflecting the current Management Plan).
  - The following sections of the Plan have been either entirely or partially moved to appendices to improve the flow of the Plan and to ensure the document maintains a desirable length under 100 pages (as per anticipated requirement in forthcoming Natural England Guidance):
    - AONB designation, policy and legal framework
    - Documents prepared in support of this plan
    - Brief history of the High Weald
- The consultation draft will also include an additional appendix for Species for Nature Recovery.
- 3.4 Work is ongoing on the required supporting documents that run concurrent with the plan, including:
- Strategic Environmental Assessment
  - Habitats Regulations Assessment
  - Equality Impact Assessment Screening Report
  - Engagement and Consultation Report
- 3.5 Drafting of the revised Plan text was initiated in December 2021 with the first draft of the new sections circulated to OSG members in June 2022. An edited version of the new sections in context with the rest of the draft plan was circulated on 29<sup>th</sup> September to the OSG. Pre-existing sections were edited and made available to the OSG through the autumn and winter of 2022/23 for comment and feedback. Following extensive OSG and AONB Unit feedback through the winter, ongoing work in reviewing the Plan, in particular the 'Land Use and Planning' section, was discussed with the OSG at an extra meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> January. The Plan was then pulled back together and distributed as a full draft document to the OSG on 14<sup>th</sup> February, for discussion at the OSG meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> February 2023, noting that Indicators of Success and Actions were not included in this draft. It is this version that is provided now to the JAC (appendix 3). Changes to the timetable were also presented to the OSG at this meeting.
- 3.7 Following the OSG meeting on the 28<sup>th</sup> February, OSG members were given until 10<sup>th</sup> March to submit comments and feedback on the draft Plan. Detailed comments have been received from 5 local authorities, the majority of which relate to editorial matters and terminology. The Unit is currently working through these comments, and are considering where it would be appropriate to make text/layout amendments to address these. However, there are some matters raised which it is considered pertinent to make the JAC aware of, along with the Unit's proposed response to these:
- Comments regarding the terminology in the 'our principles' section on p8.
    - Unit response: this section will be reconsidered in language and location in the document, for clarity.
  - Comments regarding the inclusion and wording of "*Increase in greenfield development pressure for housing, threatening the character of the AONB and damaging soils and biodiversity*" as one of the Top 5 issues affecting the Settlement character component (p27).

- Unit response: This was agreed and included as a Top 5 issue in the current Management Plan 2019-2024, and development pressure continues to be a key issue, so this will continue to be included.
  - Comments regarding the ‘Direction of Travel’ in the Settlement chapter, specifically the use of the term ‘small-scale’ developments.
    - Unit response: This is addressed in the Land Use, Planning & Development section, which sets out the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) position.
  - Comments regarding the inclusion of ‘Planning Principles’ and concerns that these read as policies which are the remit of LPAs.
    - Unit response: The inclusion of planning principles is expected to be part of the forthcoming Natural England Guidance on Management Plans. Care has been taken in the drafting of these principles, in response to previous OSG comments received in the autumn/winter consultation. The principles sit as focussed guidance providing tailored advice to the High Weald context, to add value to help LPAs fulfil the NPPF paragraphs relating to the AONB. The Unit is satisfied that these planning principles are consistent with the National Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) relating to Management Plans for AONBs (paragraph: 040 Reference ID: 8-040-20190721). For clarity, the detailed wording of some aspects will be reconsidered for the consultation draft.
- 3.8 The OSG will be further consulted on the ‘Actions’ and ‘Indicators of Success’ sections, once these have been drafted by the Unit following receipt and consideration of the forthcoming Natural England guidance, and a further OSG meeting will be held in June to discuss and refine these prior to the completion of the consultation draft and its presentation to Management Board in July.
- 4 Conclusions
- 4.1 The Unit thanks the OSG officers for their engagement with the process over a number of months, and for their valuable comments and contributions. The majority of the draft Plan has been agreed by officers, subject to considering the ‘Actions’ and ‘Indicators of Success’ which are yet to be drafted, while outstanding areas are addressed in para 3.7 of this report. Other changes to be made to the current draft are relatively minor in nature.
- 4.2 The amended timetable allows the Unit to ensure the forthcoming Natural England guidance on Management Plans for protected landscapes to be reflected in the consultation draft, in particular regarding the scope of the ‘Actions’ and ‘Indicators of Success’ sections, and allows for these sections to be consulted on with the OSG in June.
- 4.3 Partners will have the opportunity to make further comments on the full Plan at public consultation stage, and any further comments made will be considered at that time.
- 4.4 Members are asked to approve the following recommendations:
1. Agree the revised Plan timetable as set out in Appendix 1.
  2. Delegate to Management Board the responsibility to approve the final Consultation draft in a timely fashion to allow public consultation to proceed according to the agreed timetable.
  3. Approve the Management Plan draft Statement of Significance for public consultation subject to agreement on minor text changes in Appendix 2.
  4. Delegate to the Management Board responsibility to arbitrate on any outstanding matters arising from further partner discussions of the Actions, Indicators of Success, and any other issues.

Sally Marsh, AONB Co-Director (s.marsh@highweald.org)

# High Weald AONB Management Plan 2024-2029: Review Timetable

|                                     |  |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Feb 2022</b>                     | Scoping review   |
| <b>Mar 2022</b>                     | Scope of review approved by MB & JAC   |
| <b>Apr 2022</b>                     | Statutory consultees alerted   |
| <b>Spring 2022</b>                  | Early engagement with OSG and Parishes   |
| <b>May/June 2022</b>                | Draft SEA completed  |
| <b>July 2022</b>                    | OSG early draft informal consultation  |
| <b>Sept 2022</b>                    | OSG endorsement of structure and program of work   |
| <b>Oct 2022</b>                     | Progress reported to MB  |
| <b>Autumn 2022-<br/>winter 2023</b> | HWU continued editing & updating of existing MP text, drafting of proposed actions/ targets with frequent informal consultations with OSG (formal and dates TBA)   |
| <b>Nov 2022</b>                     | MP visioning workshop with JAC and approval of structure and forward programme   |
| <b>Jan 2023</b>                     | Informal OSG meeting regarding settlement and planning section content   |
| <b>Feb 2023</b>                     | OSG meeting with revised text version of partial MP content and revision to timetable  |
| <b>March 2023</b>                   | <p>To seek agreement from Management Board for two JAC recommendations:</p> <p>For the JAC to delegate to MB the final sign-off of the consultation draft of the AONB Management Plan (for public consultation August/September 2023)</p> <p>To delay final JAC approval of the MP from November 2023 to March 2024.</p> |

|                                |   |
|--------------------------------|---|
| <b>March 2023</b>              | JAC approve Statement of Significance and revised timetable, and sign off MB to approve consultation draft in July                      |
| <b>March 2023 (end of)</b>     | Release of NE guidance document for AONBs Management Plans  |
| <b>April – May 2023</b>        | HWU work on Indicators of Success and Actions   |
| <b>June 2023</b>               | Additional OSG meeting for consultation on Actions and Indicators of Success  |
| <b>Early July 2023</b>         | Final Consultation Draft plan to MB for approval  |
| <b>July 2023</b>               | Approval of draft MP for consultation by MB<br>If required, all JAC Members invited to attend   |
| <b>Mid Aug – Sept end 2023</b> | Formal public consultation of Management Plan and supporting documents (SEA etc.)   |
| <b>Oct-Nov 2023</b>            | HWU review of consultation responses and preparation of final text with recommended amendments and modifications following consultation |
| <b>Nov 2023</b>                | Report to JAC and MB on consultation process and other Management Plan progress   |
| <b>Dec 2023</b>                | OSG if needed to discuss consultation responses   |
| <b>Jan 2024</b>                | Formal OSG meeting to discuss any outstanding consultation response issues  |
| <b>Feb 2024</b>                | MB recommend final Plan to JAC for approval   |
| <b>Mar 2024</b>                | JAC agree the Plan and recommend to partners for approval   |
| <b>Mar-May 2024</b>            | Local Authority committee processes to adopt Plan   |
| <b>May 2024</b>                | Plan sent to Secretary of State   |

|                             |   |
|-----------------------------|---|
|                             |   |
| <b>May onwards<br/>2024</b> | Dissemination and communication of revised Plan |

## High Weald AONB Statement of Significance

The High Weald is one of the best-preserved Medieval landscapes in north-west Europe. Despite its large size (1,500km sq.) and proximity to London, its landscape has remained relatively unchanged since the 14th century, surviving major historical events and accommodating significant social and technological changes. Its landscape is essentially rural and human-scale, with a high proportion of natural surfaces and the story of its past visible throughout.

The extensive survival of woodland and traditional mixed farming supports an exceptionally well-connected green and blue infrastructure with food production intertwined with a high proportion of semi-natural habitat in a structurally diverse, permeable and complex mosaic supporting a rich diversity of wildlife. A dense network of paths and public rights of way allow people to experience this landscape and its myriad aesthetic qualities, while the landscape setting of dispersed historic settlements underpins the distinct and picturesque landscape, with the rolling pasture, hedgerows and small ancient woodlands of the countryside interspersed with the rich clay-tiled roofscapes of historic buildings.

Eight components of character combine to create a distinct and recognisable area whose natural beauty exceeds the sum of its parts. These comprise both primarily physical components of character that represent the manifestations of generations of cultural imprint on the natural inheritance of the area, along with cultural heritage and perceptual and aesthetic qualities that contribute to the outstanding natural beauty for which the High Weald is nationally valued. Each character component is of equal and stand-alone importance in its own right, (i.e., they are non-rankable) and to 'conserve and enhance' the natural beauty of the AONB means not to harm *any* of these components of character.

### The Natural Beauty of the High Weald comprises:

1. **Natural systems (geology, soils, water, air and climate)** – a deeply incised, ridged and faulted landform of clays and sandstone with highly variable, relatively undisturbed soils and numerous headwaters (gill streams) functioning under an oceanic climate.
2. **Settlement** – dispersed historic settlement including high densities of isolated farmsteads and late Medieval villages founded on trade and non-agricultural rural industries.
3. **Routeways** – a dense network of historic routeways (now roads, tracks and paths).
4. **Woodland** – an abundance of ancient woodland mostly in small holdings, highly interconnected with hedges and shaws.
5. **Fieldsapes and Heath** – small, irregular and productive fields, bounded by hedgerows and woods, and typically used for livestock grazing; with distinctive zones of lowland heaths, and inned river valleys (reclaimed marshland).
6. **Dark night skies** – intrinsically dark at night with our own galaxy (the milky way) visible.
7. **Land-based economy and rural living** - with roots extending deep into history.
8. **Aesthetic and perceptual qualities** arising from the interaction of people with the landscape, including the notion of a quintessential English pastoral landscape, intimacy of scale, a sense of history and timelessness; rurality and tranquillity; glimpsed long views; freedom to explore and make connections with the natural world, and a rich legacy of features and ideas left by writers, poets and gardeners inspired by the landscape.

Each factor has its own unique set of landscape and socio-ecological characteristics which are described in the following chapters.



# The High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty: A nationally protected landscape

## AONB Management Plan

A 20-year strategy for the conservation and enhancement of the High Weald's natural beauty

This edition: 2024-2029

Adopted XXXX

**A statutory plan adopted by 15 local authority partners setting out their policies for the management of the area and providing an agreed public policy vision for the High Weald 2024-2044**

## The High Weald

### AONB Management Plan 2024 - 2029

Published by the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee under the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000, on behalf of:

- East Sussex County Council
- Kent County Council
- Surrey County Council
- West Sussex County Council
- Ashford Borough Council
- Crawley Borough Council
- Hastings Borough Council
- Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council
- Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
- Horsham District Council
- Mid Sussex District Council
- Rother District Council
- Sevenoaks District Council
- Tandridge District Council
- Wealden District Council

This edition published 2024 \* Fourth edition published 2019 \* Third edition published 2014 • Second edition published 2009 • First edition published 2004

High Weald Joint Advisory Committee

[contact details]

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[A4 iconic image from page 3 of the 2019 plan]

The High Weald is an outstandingly beautiful landscape cherished by people and celebrated for its scenery, tranquillity, and wildlife. Its ridges and valleys are clothed with an intricate mosaic of small fields interspersed with farmsteads and surrounded by hedges and abundant woods, all arranged around a network of historic routeways. One of the best surviving Medieval landscapes in North West Europe, the High Weald has remained a unique and recognisable area for at least the last 700 years. Covering 1500 km<sup>2</sup> and close to London, this extensive area offers millions of people opportunity to experience the beauty of nature within a working countryside. It was designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in 1983.

*'A landscape not yet bulldozed for speed'*

AS I walked out one midsummer morning, Laurie Lee, 1969

**Foreword**  
[Defra minister]

## High Weald AONB Partnership

The High Weald AONB Partnership is constituted as a Joint Advisory Committee involving the 15 local authorities that cover the AONB and representatives of local communities and other stakeholders. Its role is to champion the AONB, prepare a joint management plan and coordinate delivery of the Plan's objectives. The Partnership was set up in 1989 as an advisory body and does not own or manage land in the AONB.

### Message from the Chairman

[tba]

Members of the High Weald AONB Partnership: Action in Rural Sussex, Ashford Borough Council, Country Land and Business Association, Crawley Borough Council, East Sussex County Council, Forestry Commission, Hastings Borough Council, Horsham District Council, Kent County Council, Mid Sussex District Council, Natural England, The Ramblers, Rother District Council, Sevenoaks District Council, Surrey County Council, Tandridge District Council, Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, Wealden District Council, West Sussex County Council.

## Our commitment

Our partners will:

- Continue to work together to recover nature and achieve a net zero greenhouse gas emissions future for the High Weald which is landscape led and in line with national policies and local ambitions.

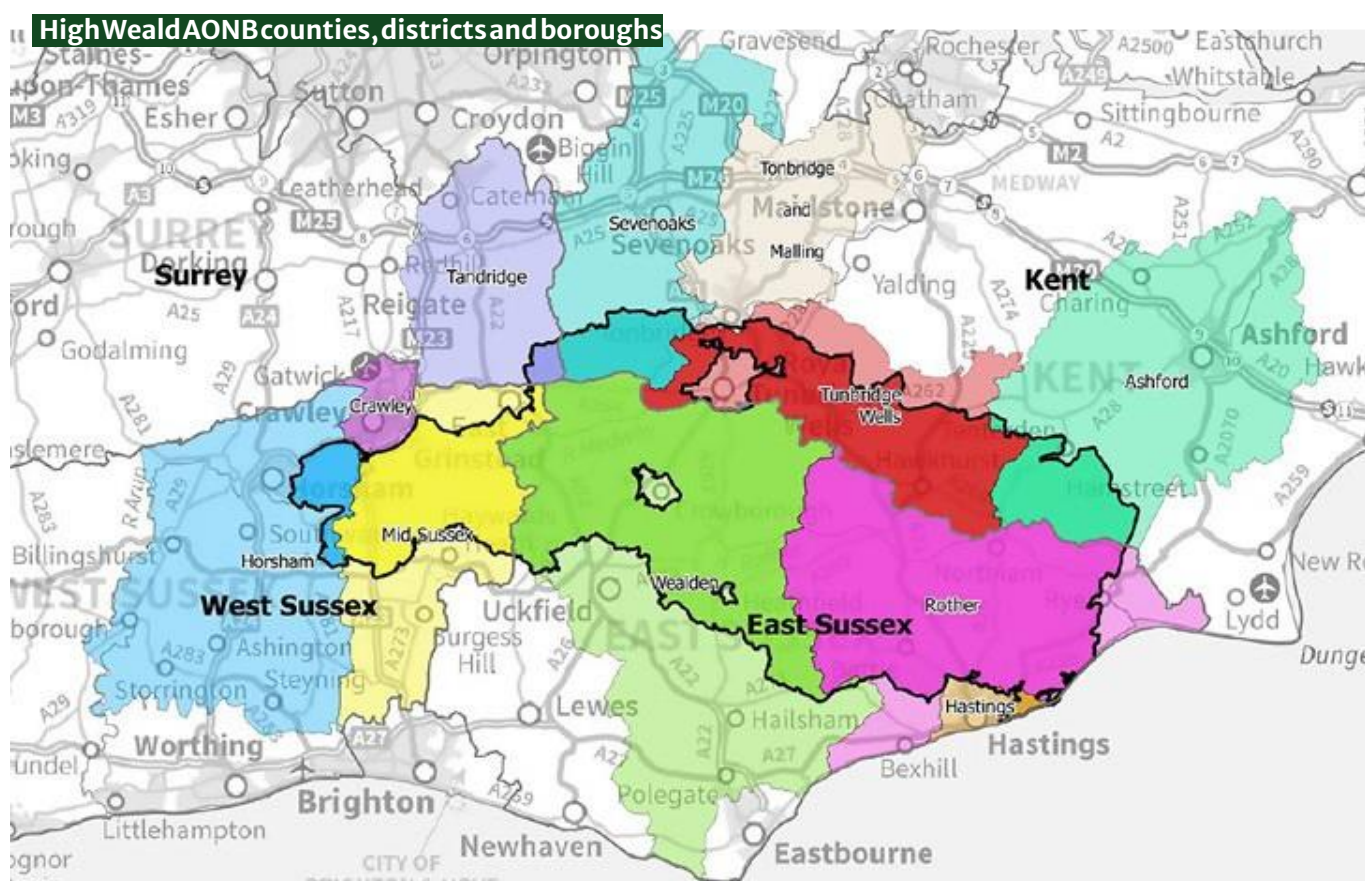
Continue to work together towards sound and consistent planning policies across the AONB. Use the Plan to assess the impact of policies and other activities on AONB purpose to fulfil their duty under Section 85 of the CROW Act 2000

- Use the Plan to focus support for land management and rural development on activities that conserve and enhance the AONB, including actions to protect sites of local, national and international conservation importance.

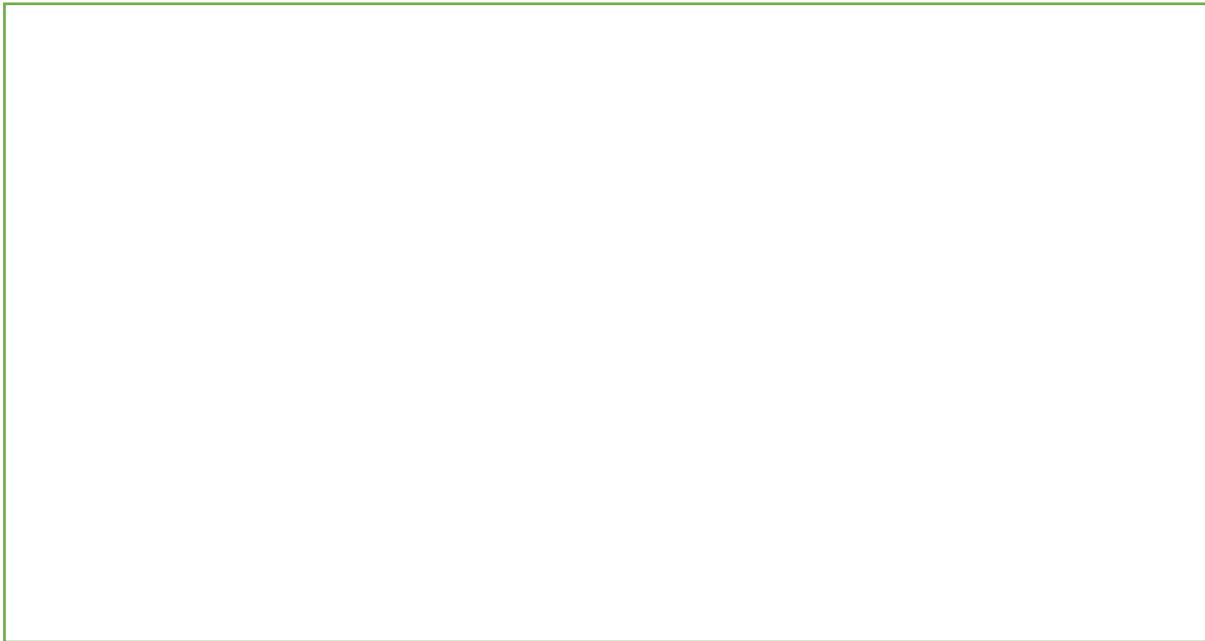
- Use the Plan to identify detrimental effects of proposed development on the AONB, helping ensure development is 'landscape-led' and contributes to conserving and enhancing natural beauty

- Use the Plan to assess how activities in the 'setting' of the High Weald affect land in the AONB.

Support best practice in governance of the Partnership in relation to equity, diversity and inclusion; and in giving a voice to young people and future generations in its decision-making.



## JAC 20-year Vision



### **Our principles (underpinning our vision):**

#### **Consider the wellbeing and legacy of future generations in all actions**

The High Weald AONB is for everyone, including future generations - those who do not yet have a voice. The JAC takes on the responsibility to ensure actions taken today leave the High Weald AONB as a functioning landscape for future generations, whether they will work or live here, spend leisure and recreation time here or rely on the High Weald to provide food, hold a place for nature and mitigate against climate change.

#### **Address intergenerational communication to combat Shifting Baseline Syndrome**

The generational loss of historic understanding, knowledge, and experience of environmental conditions and the acceptance of more recent ecological conditions, erodes sustainable baselines for nature recovery. In practice this means that environmental targets set today would have been considered poor yesterday, whilst what is considered a poor baseline today may sadly be considered a good target in the future if shifting baseline syndrome persists. Recognising that the human-led biodiversity crisis has shifted people's perception of outstanding natural beauty, this Plan focuses on restoring biodiversity and natural systems to their pre-industrialised farming (1949) baseline.

#### **Science-based targets as standard**

The JAC expects to see science at the forefront of decision making, including monitoring and measuring of targets supporting action on climate, nature recovery and soil.

#### **Setting ambitious yet achievable net-zero emissions targets**

The JAC supports and is working towards the Governments goal of reaching net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, through a diverse range of actions and activities across the partners, stakeholders and collaboration with a diverse range of organisations.

#### **The whole of the High Weald has the potential to contribute to nature recovery**

There are no areas or habitats in the High Weald which should be deemed less valuable to supporting nature recovery. The High Weald AONB supports protection and recovery of all species, from the small invertebrates to reintroductions of charismatic fauna such as beavers.

## What is an AONB?

An Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is an area of countryside designated by the Government to protect its landscape character and the wildlife, natural systems and cultural factors on which it depends in order that people, now and in the future, can enjoy its natural beauty. AONBs are protected by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW Act), which sets out the legal purpose of AONB designation as being to “**conserve and enhance natural beauty**”.<sup>1</sup>

There are 34 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) in England, a further four AONBs wholly in Wales and eight in Northern Ireland. The 46 AONBs in England, Wales and Northern Ireland cover approximately 18 per cent of the land surface.

Together with National Parks, AONBs represent our finest landscapes; unique and irreplaceable national assets, each with such distinctive character, biodiversity and natural beauty that they are recognised internationally as part of the global family of protected areas to be managed in the interest of everyone. The distinctive character and outstanding natural beauty of AONBs make them some of the most special and loved places in the UK.

AONBs are living, working landscapes that contribute some £16bn every year to the national economy. Land in AONBs is mostly owned and managed privately with limited ownership by third sector or public bodies. The commitment of all these communities is critical to the designation’s success.

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<sup>1</sup> (Add reference to CROW act)

## About our Plan

### What is the purpose of the Plan?

AONB Management Plans are evidence based, locally owned and democratically accountable strategies for looking after these beautiful places in the interests of both people and nature. They are formulated to coordinate policy, investment and action in these nationally important landscapes to achieve the legal purpose of ‘conserving and enhancing natural beauty’ (ref) for the benefit of current and future generations, and to set out how peoples’ enjoyment of the area’s special qualities can be fostered.

### Who prepares the Plan and what is its status?

AONB Management Plans are statutory documents. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 requires local authorities with land in an AONB to prepare and publish an up-to-date plan which

*‘formulates their policy for the management of the area and for the carrying out of their functions in relation to it’.<sup>2</sup>*

Where AONBs cross administrative boundaries, local authorities are required to act jointly to prepare the plan (ref). In the High Weald this requirement is delivered through the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee (JAC), a partnership which includes 15 local authorities covering the area together with community, environment and land-based sector representatives. Following a formal consultation process, the High Weald JAC recommends the joint Plan to individual local authorities who then each adopt the Plan as their policy. The Plan is reviewed every five years.

### Who is the Plan for and how should it be used?

The Plan is relevant to everyone. It guides local authority plan-making and decision-taking, and also has a wider role, setting a 20-year vision for everyone who lives or works in the High Weald, or visits it, to work towards. The Plan defines the Natural Beauty of the High Weald AONB, sets objectives for each component of natural beauty and sets out specific time-bound actions recommended to guide the activities of partners and stakeholders.

Where people engage with local authority services, the Plan can help them tailor their actions to comply with local authority policy. Government, statutory undertakers and other public bodies (such as NHS England, Forestry Commission and Natural England) or person holding public office can use the Plan to guide their approach to the AONB, to help ensure they are fulfilling their Section 85 duty to ‘have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty’ of the High Weald AONB (ref).

The Plan may also be applied to the area’s ‘setting’, especially where the setting falls within the High Weald National Character Area (ref).

### How was the Plan prepared?

Plan preparation follows a formal process requiring preparation of a Strategic Environmental Assessment and other appropriate assessments to comply with UK law. Public comment and engagement were sought throughout Plan preparation, and a formal consultation process undertaken in July 2023.

A full list of documents prepared in support of this Plan can be found on page X and on [www.highweald.org](http://www.highweald.org).

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<sup>2</sup> Add reference

### **Which local authority functions are covered by the AONB Management Plan?**

Any local authority function that may have an influence upon the natural beauty of the AONB. These include:

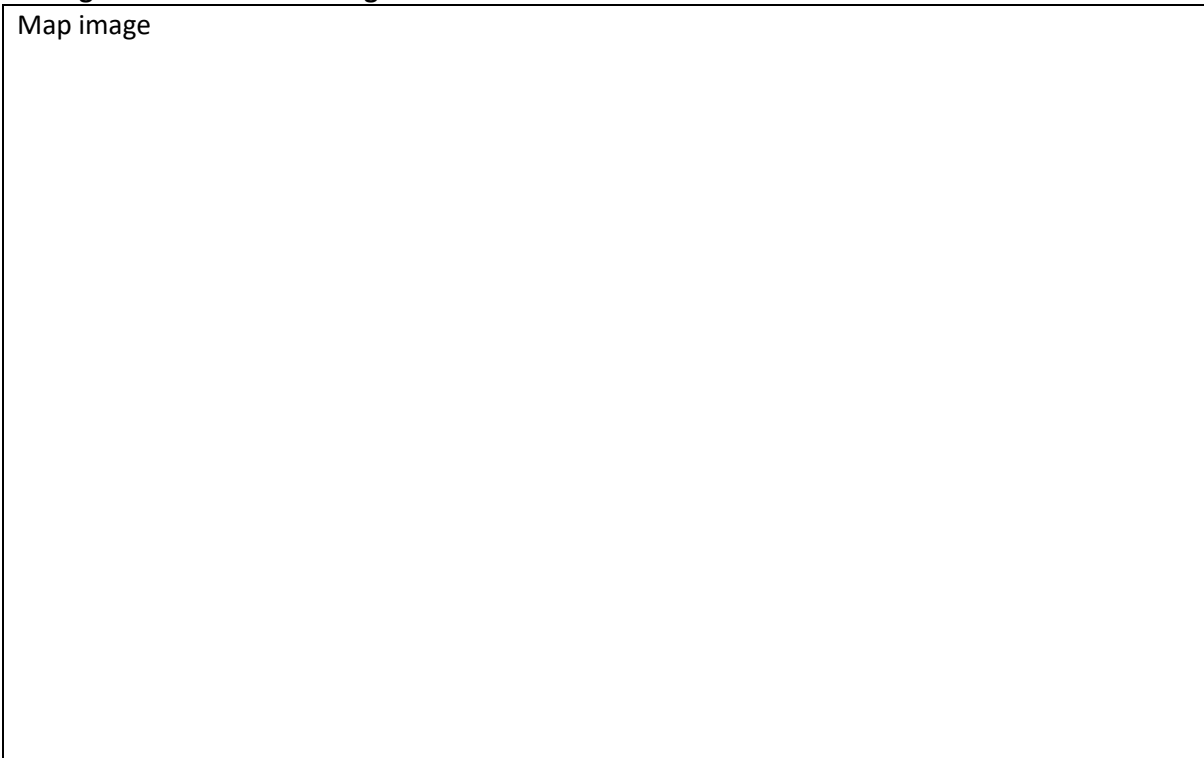
- Planning and development, including neighbourhood planning
- Scheduled ancient monuments, listed buildings and conservation areas
- Building regulations and energy efficiency
- Waste, environment protection, pesticides and pollution
- Libraries and museums
- Animal health and welfare, biodiversity, flooding and marine areas
- Rights of way and coastal access
- Food and food safety
- Public health, mental health, social care and young people
- Highways, traffic management, public transport and parking
- Education

A full list can be found at [add hyperlink](#)

## About the High Weald

### The High Weald in facts and figures

Map image



**The High Weald AONB** was designated in 1983

**One of 46 AONBs** in England, Wales and Northern Ireland

**One of 34 AONBs** in England covering 15% of the land

**Land cover – 1,461km<sup>2</sup>** (4th largest AONB)

**127,000** people live in the AONB (density 87 people per sq. km.)

**70,000 live in towns** excluded from the designation but wholly surrounded by it

**Over 1 million people** live within 5km of the AONB boundary

**The AONB covers 4 counties**, 11 districts and 11 parliamentary constituencies

**100 parishes** wholly or partly in the AONB

**The JAC partnership** has represented the interests of the High Weald since 1989

**3500** historic farmsteads

**17 market towns** and larger villages

| Local authority     | % of AONB in local authority | % of local authority in AONB |
|---------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| East Sussex         | 60.19                        | 50.99                        |
| Hastings            | 0.37                         | 17.63                        |
| Rother              | 29.29                        | 82.60                        |
| Wealden             | 30.53                        | 53.36                        |
| West Sussex         | 13.68                        | 9.87                         |
| Crawley             | 0.03                         | 1.05                         |
| Horsham             | 2.46                         | 6.77                         |
| Mid Sussex          | 11.19                        | 48.96                        |
| Kent                | 25.41                        | 10.21                        |
| Ashford             | 5.69                         | 14.34                        |
| Sevenoaks           | 4.05                         | 16.00                        |
| Tonbridge & Malling | 0.07                         | 0.39                         |
| Tunbridge Wells     | 15.61                        | 68.88                        |
| Surrey              | 0.70                         | 0.61                         |
| Tandridge           | 0.70                         | 4.11                         |

AONB boundaries were drawn so as to include land of outstanding scientific value to ensure:

*‘the preservation of large tracts of country too large for strict preservation as National Nature Reserves, but yet of great value either physiographically or geologically or as containing complex communities of plant and animal life’*

**The Report of the National Parks Committee 1947**

## The High Weald's Landscape

Image



**The High Weald occupies the ridged and faulted sandstone core of an area known from Saxon times as the Weald. It is an area of ancient countryside and one of the best surviving Medieval landscapes in Northern Europe.**

The mosaic of small mixed farms and woodlands is now considered to represent a quintessentially English landscape, yet for many years, until the advent of turnpikes, it was better known for the terrible state of its roads.

At first glance the High Weald appears to be a densely wooded landscape, but closer examination reveals a detailed agricultural tapestry of fields, small woodlands and farmsteads. Everything in the High Weald landscape is human scale. Wildflower meadows, alive with bees and grasshoppers, are now a rare delight but the Medieval pattern of small fields with sinuous edges surrounded by thick wooded hedges, remain. Extensive views punctuated by church spires can be glimpsed along the ridge-top roads. Around almost every corner a harmonious group of traditional farm buildings comes into view with their distinctive steep, clay tile and hipped roofs.

The High Weald is crossed by one of the most famous routeways in English history, the one that took King Harold's army from victory at Stamford Bridge to defeat at Hasting in 1066. Today, its rich detail is still best explored through the myriad of interconnecting paths and tracks. Here you can walk in the footsteps of our Medieval and Anglo-Saxon ancestors who used this dense network of routeways to move between the wooded Weald and settlements on its fringes where farming was easier. These tracks remain a visible legacy of the value communities placed on the resources of the forest.

Woodland still covers nearly a third of the area in an intricate network of farm woods, wooded shaws, pits and gills, and larger wooded estates. Medieval forests and deer parks were extensive, with significant remnants surviving in Ashdown Forest, Waterdown (Broadwater) Forest and St Leonard's Forest. Most of the woodland is ancient, managed in the past as coppice and swept with magnificent carpets of bluebells and wood anemones in the spring. Of the mature oaks for which the Weald was once famous, few remain. The drier sandy soils favour pine and birch within a patchwork of lowland heath.

More ancient woodland survives in the High Weald than anywhere else in the country due to the small size of Wealden holdings, the importance of crafts to supplement the income from agriculture on poor soils and the high economic value of timber for ships, buildings and to fuel the iron, glass and cloth industries. Woods were enclosed and managed as coppice with standards, producing underwood and construction timber. Large, widely – spaced trees in hedgerows and

parklands produced the crooked boughs required for shipbuilding. In the 17th and 18th centuries when hop growing expanded so did the extent of chestnut coppice for hop poles.

*97% of people find the High Weald's scenery, tranquillity and proximity to nature appealing*

### High Weald Public Survey, 2018

Indications of the area's busy industrial past are everywhere, from the large houses built by wealthy ironmasters and clothmakers, to the charcoal hearths, pits and ponds of the iron industry scattered through ancient woodlands.

The small scale and historical patterning of the landscape, intermingling woodland, wetland and open habitats, with many interconnected linear features supporting semi-natural vegetation makes for a rich and accessible landscape for wildlife. Sandstone exposed as outcrops or along the wooded gills is a nationally rare habitat and supports a rich community of ferns, bryophytes and lichens. The High Weald meets the sea at Hastings cliffs, an area of undeveloped coastline consisting of actively eroding soft cliffs of sands and clays. The numerous gill streams of the High Weald give rise to the headwaters and upper reaches of rivers, with those to the east important in the past as trade routes for timber, iron and wool out to the coastal ports on Romney Marsh.

The High Weald is well known nationally for its wealth of historic houses and gardens including Sheffield Park and Ashburnham Place, both of whose landscaped gardens were designed by Lancelot 'Capability' Brown; the ruined 13th century Bayham Abbey, with grounds landscaped by Repton; the follies at Brightling created by 18th century eccentric 'Mad Jack' Fuller; Bodiam Castle, moated and dating from the 14th century, Standen, the Arts & Crafts house designed by Philip Webb; the Jacobean house Batemans, home to Rudyard Kipling; Great Dixter, restored by Lutyens with an internationally-renowned garden created by Christopher Lloyd; and Great Maytham, home to Frances Hodgson Burnett, whose walled garden provided the inspiration for her classic children's book *The Secret Garden*.

Such accents stand out against a backdrop of a rich tapestry of vernacular architecture composed of materials distinct to the High Weald and which contribute to the unique sense of place, cultural identity and local distinctiveness of both the area as a whole, and its individual settlements.

Wilder elements reminiscent of the former forest survive amid this beautiful small-scale landscape, shaped by man, inspiring many notable people. These include the architect Norman Shaw, painter William Holman Hunt and William Robinson, who pioneered the creation of the English natural garden, as well as writers Rudyard Kipling and A.A. Milne, who set his much-loved stories about Winnie the Pooh on Ashdown Forest.

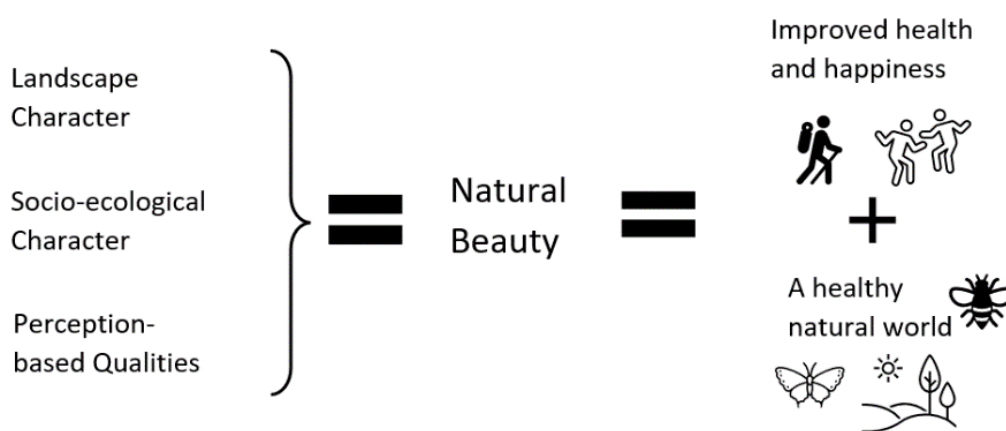
The High Weald forms the central core of a geological landform of sedimentary rocks, the Wealden anticline, which underpins the South East. The unique geology of the Weald is shared with only three places in Europe – the northern part of the Isle of Wight and parts of the Boulonnais and Pays de Bray in France. The Purbeck beds, which lie along the Battle ridge, form the oldest sediments, having been laid down in shallow lagoons at the end of the Jurassic period (142 million years ago). Iron-rich clays and sandstones followed as the landscape changed to one of flood plains and rivers. The area gradually sank below the sea and around 75 million years ago the great uplift began, followed by compression which folded and faulted the strata. Subsequent weathering has cut through the strata, exposing the layers as sandstone ridges and clay valleys. The amazing variability of soils produced has shaped the Weald's economic and therefore social history.

With rising temperatures at the beginning of the post-glacial period, and the continuing land link to Europe, arboreal species were able to expand with birch, hazel and pine being followed by oak, elm, alder, ash and lime. There is some evidence for small-scale, sporadic and temporary clearance by Mesolithic hunter-gatherers. From c6000 BC, when Britain became separated from Europe, people had already begun to change the landscape, this is evidenced by the scatter of flints used for hunting and the use of fire to make clearings to entice prey. Periodic woodland clearance continued with Bronze Age barrows and Iron Age hill forts indicating active communities in Ashdown Forest, but it was the Medieval practice of transhumance – the seasonal movement of people and animals between the settlements on the borders of the Weald and its interior – coupled with exploitation of the valuable resources of the forest, that transformed the Weald into the settled landscape we see today.

## Natural beauty and the legislative purpose of AONBs

The legal purpose of AONB designation is to **conserve and enhance natural beauty** (CRoW 2000), (updated from *'preserve and enhance natural beauty'* used in the NP&AC Act 1949).

At the time it was recognised that in England and Wales, nature was predominantly experienced in a cultural landscape that reflected centuries of human interaction with the natural world. This cultural landscape had a rich socio-ecological character with biological and genetic diversity closely tied to centuries of non-mechanised land management, and unique settlement patterns, building forms and material palettes reflecting people's responses to physical geography. Intertwined with this landscape and socio-ecological character were valued perception-based qualities such as quietude together with distinctive cultural associations (ref). The architects of the 1949 Act summed up the combination of character and qualities as 'natural beauty'. Access to natural beauty was seen as a right for everyone now and in the future, and a necessary precursor of health and happiness for all (ref).



'Natural beauty' has been the basis for the designation of both AONBs and National Parks since the 1949 Act. Whilst the term has never been exhaustively defined in legislation, over the years, qualification and amendment to the legislation has made it clear that natural beauty includes considerations such as wildlife, geological features and cultural heritage but is not restricted by them (ref). Government guidance relating to AONBs provides a useful non-technical definition:

**“natural beauty” is not just the look of the landscape, but includes landform and geology, plants and animals, landscape features, and the rich history of human settlement over the centuries” (ref).**

This includes scenic quality, tranquillity, and cultural heritage including the built environment that makes the area unique.

The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 clarified that land used for agriculture, woodlands, parkland or with physiographical features is not prevented from being treated as an area of 'natural beauty'.

For the purposes of this Plan, the High Weald's natural beauty is defined by the Statement of Significance on page 17 and expanded in the character components sections of this plan.

## High Weald AONB Statement of Significance

The High Weald is one of the best-preserved Medieval landscapes in north-west Europe. Despite its large size (1,500km sq.) and proximity to London, its landscape has remained relatively unchanged since the 14th century, surviving major historical events and accommodating significant social and technological changes. Its landscape is essentially rural and human-scale, with a high proportion of natural surfaces and the story of its past visible throughout.

The extensive survival of woodland and traditional mixed farming supports an exceptionally well-connected green and blue infrastructure with food production intertwined with a high proportion of semi-natural habitat in a structurally diverse, permeable and complex mosaic supporting a rich diversity of wildlife. A dense network of paths and public rights of way allow people to experience this landscape and its myriad aesthetic qualities, while the landscape setting of dispersed historic settlements underpins the distinct and picturesque landscape, with the rolling pasture, hedgerows and small ancient woodlands of the countryside interspersed with the rich clay-tiled roofscapes of historic buildings.

Eight components of character combine to create a distinct and recognisable area whose natural beauty exceeds the sum of its parts. These comprise both primarily physical components of character that represent the manifestations of generations of cultural imprint on the natural inheritance of the area, along with cultural heritage and perceptual and aesthetic qualities that contribute to the outstanding natural beauty for which the High Weald is nationally valued. Each character component is of equal and stand-alone importance in its own right, (i.e., they are non-rankable) and to 'conserve and enhance' the natural beauty of the AONB means not to harm *any* of these components of character.

### The Natural Beauty of the High Weald comprises:

1. **Natural systems (geology, soils, water, air and climate)** – a deeply incised, ridged and faulted landform of clays and sandstone with highly variable, relatively undisturbed soils and numerous headwaters (gill streams) functioning under an oceanic climate.
2. **Settlement** – dispersed historic settlement including high densities of isolated farmsteads and late Medieval villages founded on trade and non-agricultural rural industries.
3. **Routeways** – a dense network of historic routeways (now roads, tracks and paths).
4. **Woodland** – an abundance of ancient woodland mostly in small holdings, highly interconnected with hedges and shaws.
5. **Fieldsapes and Heath** – small, irregular and productive fields, bounded by hedgerows and woods, and typically used for livestock grazing; with distinctive zones of lowland heaths, and inned river valleys (reclaimed marshland).
6. **Dark night skies** – intrinsically dark at night with our own galaxy (the milky way) visible.
7. **Land-based economy and rural living** - with roots extending deep into history.
8. **Aesthetic and perceptual qualities** arising from the interaction of people with the landscape, including the notion of a quintessential English pastoral landscape, intimacy of scale, a sense of history and timelessness; rurality and tranquillity; glimpsed long views; freedom to explore and make connections with the natural world, and a rich legacy of features and ideas left by writers, poets and gardeners inspired by the landscape.

Each factor has its own unique set of landscape and socio-ecological characteristics which are described in the following chapters.

## Drivers for change 2024-2029

### Introduction

Over the next 20 years the High Weald AONB is facing a number of key drivers for change which have the capacity to impact significantly on its core character, and which need to be addressed in this plan period.

Addressing the top threats - **loss of soil health, the biodiversity crisis and climate emergency** - are priorities for the High Weald AONB over the next five years since we are in a position to mitigate many of these threats if real-world action is taken now. Whilst these priorities are likely to be long term, the science and understanding of the complexities of, and solutions for these priorities may change more rapidly.

Key drivers are outlined below:

#### Loss of soil and degradation of soil health

Soil is an essential resource. Soil loss and degradation affects the AONBs ability to produce healthy food. Soil provides a huge array of benefits from carbon sequestration and nutrient cycling to water supply and flood mitigation across the High Weald. Sediment loss undermines the health of river systems and poor soil biology affects the health and biodiversity of above ground ecosystems that depend upon it.

#### Biodiversity crisis

In 2020 the UK Government committed to the UN target of protecting 30% of the UK's land for nature by 2030. The catastrophic loss of plant and animal species directly and indirectly affects many services we rely on deliver a functioning and resilient landscape. While the High Weald retains rich assemblages of species (particularly associated with its patchwork historic countryside), habitat loss, pollution, pesticide use and inappropriate management of habitats, such as woodlands and species rich grasslands, have cumulatively harmed species diversity and abundance.

#### Climate Emergency

This global issue threatens almost every aspect of the planet and our lives from economics to biodiversity, human health and wellbeing to infrastructure and food production. The High Weald is already seeing economic changes in land use, rises in tree diseases and increasing flooding. The longer we leave robustly tackling the climate emergency the more it will cost society and nature. The UK has committed to a legally binding net zero target by 2050 with interim targets to reduce emission by 78% by 2035. At the Climate Change Conference (COP26) the UK government committed to achieving a 68% in UK carbon emissions by 2030.

#### People and Access

There is not equitable access to the countryside, this include not just being able to spend time in nature but also access to living and working in the countryside, particularly future generations. Those missing out do not get to access the range of health and wellbeing benefits associated green spaces as well as on green social prescribing opportunities. Disengagement with the natural world because of lack of access and resources impedes our ability to robustly tackle issues affecting the natural world as a society.

#### Planning & Development

The High Weald is one of the most developed AONBs in England, and the scale of housebuilding in the AONB is currently at an unprecedented level; the High Weald is experiencing the highest level of housing growth of any AONB in England. Pressure from ever increasing numbers of new developments is eroding the core settlement pattern of the High Weald and its rural landscape with its intrinsic sense of naturalness. While delivering appropriate new housing development within the AONB is necessary and desirable in creating a thriving and successful place, it is also a responsibility and privilege to make long-lasting interventions in such a special and protected landscape, including with regard to challenges presented by climate change.

These key drivers are interconnected. The climate crisis is in part driving the biodiversity crisis. But loss of biodiversity is exacerbating climate change. Extreme weather events erode soil, and soil erosion releases carbon dioxide back into the atmosphere, and so it goes on.

To change course on climate and nature recovery will need action at multiple levels and through new collaborative partnerships. Changes in national regulation and enforcement will be necessary. Locally, creative solutions will need to be found to reconcile competing national priorities at a High Weald level while preserving its distinctive character. Actions by all stakeholders in the High Weald should follow the following hierarchy:

- Avoid harm to wildlife, climate and natural systems
- Restore and regenerate nature and natural systems
- Transform our relationship with nature at multiple levels such that nature and beauty are protected for their non-instrumental value as well as their usefulness to people.<sup>3</sup>

Improving equality, inclusivity and diversity of access for people to enjoy nature, participate in the countryside and sustain a decent living there requires transformational policies at a national level. Local solutions will require new collaborative partnerships, knowledge exchange and skill sharing between urban and rural areas.

Meanwhile, meeting the climate, biodiversity and inequality challenges of the next 20 years will require transformational change in the way that development is planned for and delivered in the High Weald AONB. As landscapes nationally designated for their outstanding natural beauty, AONBs should be leaders in sustainable planning and design.

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<sup>3</sup> (Based on the mitigation hierarchy used by Environmental Impact Assessment and the action framework proposed by the Global Commons Alliance)

## Natural Beauty: Character Components

The following sections of the Plan describe each of the components of natural beauty in more detail, including Key Characteristics, and Top 5 issues, and sets out Objectives along with actions recommended to guide the activities of partners and stakeholders. The schedule below lists the various Objectives and explains which of the Drivers for Change each are particularly associated with.

| Component characteristic objectives  | Drivers for Change |                 |                |                 |          |
|--|--------------------|-----------------|----------------|-----------------|----------|
|  | Soil               | Nature recovery | Climate crisis | People & access | Planning |
| <b>Natural Systems</b>   |                    |                 |                |                 |          |
| <b>Objective G1</b><br>To restore the natural function of rivers, water courses and water bodies.  | ✓                  | ✓               | ✓              |                 |          |
| <b>Objective G2</b><br>To protect, sandstone outcrops, and other important landform and geological features.   | ✓                  | ✓               | ✓              |                 | ✓        |
| <b>Objective G3</b><br>To pursue net zero across the High Weald without compromising its characteristic landscape beauty.  |                    | ✓               | ✓              |                 | ✓        |
| <b>Objective G4</b><br>To restore soil health across the High Weald.   | ✓                  | ✓               | ✓              |                 |          |
| <b>Settlement</b>  |                    |                 |                |                 |          |
| <b>Objective S1</b><br>To protect the historic pattern and character of settlement.  |                    |                 |                |                 | ✓        |
| <b>Objective S2</b><br>To enhance the architectural quality of the High Weald and ensure development reflects the character of the High Weald in its siting, scale, layout and design. |                    |                 |                |                 | ✓        |
| <b>Objective S3</b><br>To conserve the distinct built heritage of the High Weald   |                    |                 |                |                 | ✓        |
| <b>Routeways</b>   |                    |                 |                |                 |          |
| <b>Objective R1</b><br>To maintain the historic pattern and features of routeways.   |                    | ✓               |                | ✓               | ✓        |
| <b>Objective R2</b><br>To enhance the ecological function of routeways.  | ✓                  | ✓               | ✓              | ✓               | ✓        |

| Component characteristic objectives   | Drivers for Change |                 |                |                 |          |
|---|--------------------|-----------------|----------------|-----------------|----------|
|   | Soil               | Nature recovery | Climate crisis | People & access | Planning |
| <b>Woodland</b>   |                    |                 |                |                 |          |
| <b>Objective W1</b><br>To maintain and restore the existing extent and pattern of woodland cover and particularly ancient woodland.   | ✓                  | ✓               | ✓              | ✓               | ✓        |
| <b>Objective W2</b><br>To restore the ecological quality and functioning of woodland at a landscape scale.  |                    |                 |                |                 |          |
| <b>Objective W3</b><br>To protect the archaeology and historic assets of AONB woodlands.  | ✓                  | ✓               | ✓              | ✓               |          |
| <b>Objective W4</b><br>To increase the output of sustainably produced high-quality timber and underwood for local markets.  |                    |                 | ✓              | ✓               | ✓        |
| <b>Fieldsapes and Heath</b>   |                    |                 |                |                 |          |
| <b>Objective FH1</b><br>To secure agriculturally productive use for the fields of the High Weald, especially for local markets, as part of sustainable land management.   | ✓                  |                 | ✓              |                 |          |
| <b>Objective FH2</b><br>To maintain the pattern of small irregularly shaped fields bounded by hedgerows and woodlands.  | ✓                  | ✓               | ✓              | ✓               | ✓        |
| <b>Objective FH3</b><br>To enhance the ecological function of field and heath as part of the complex mosaic of High Weald habitats.   | ✓                  | ✓               | ✓              | ✓               |          |
| <b>Objective FH4</b><br>To protect the individual archaeological features as well as historic assets and patterns of field and heath.   |                    |                 |                | ✓               | ✓        |
| <b>Character Component - Land-based economy &amp; Rural Living</b>  |                    |                 |                |                 |          |
| <b>Objective LBE1</b><br>To improve returns from, and thereby increase entry and retention in, farming, forestry, horticulture and other land management activities that conserve and enhance natural beauty.   |                    | ✓               | ✓              | ✓               | ✓        |
| <b>Objective LBE2</b><br>To reconnect settlements, residents and their supporting economic activity with the surrounding countryside.   |                    | ✓               |                | ✓               | ✓        |
| <b>Objective LBE3</b><br>To improve amenities, infrastructure (including the provision of appropriate affordable housing), and skills development for rural communities and related sectors that contribute positively to conserving and enhancing natural beauty |                    |                 |                | ✓               |          |

| Component characteristic objectives   | Drivers for Change |                 |                |                 |          |
|---|--------------------|-----------------|----------------|-----------------|----------|
|   | Soil               | Nature recovery | Climate crisis | People & access | Planning |
| <b>Dark skies</b>   |                    |                 |                |                 |          |
| <p><b>Objective DS1</b><br/>To preserve the dark skies of the High Weald AONB by minimising light pollution obtrusive external lighting and internal light spill from domestic, commercial and public premises in both existing and new developments within the High Weald. Encourage more areas and communities to reach these standards.</p> <p><b>Objective DS2</b><br/>To protect wildlife and habitats for wildlife from light pollution across the High Weald.</p> <p><b>Objective DS3</b><br/>To promote celebrations of dark skies within the High Weald</p>  |                    | ✓               | ✓              | ✓               | ✓        |
| <b>Cultural Heritage: Perceptual and Aesthetic qualities</b>  |                    |                 |                |                 |          |
| <p><b>Objective PQ1</b><br/>To increase opportunities for learning about and celebrating the High Weald's character and aesthetic qualities and to promote and facilitate contributions by communities and individuals to the conservation and enhancement of the High Weald</p> <p><b>Objective PQ2</b><br/>To protect the unspoilt rural landscape with its intrinsic sense of naturalness, valued views and the extent of green space which foster experiences of rurality and tranquillity.</p> <p><b>Objective PQ3</b><br/>To foster and promote equitable access and informal enjoyment of the High Weald landscape and the integrated management of its resources for the enjoyment of natural beauty by all</p> |                    |                 |                | ✓               |          |
|   |                    |                 |                | ✓               | ✓        |
|   | ✓                  |                 |                | ✓               |          |

## Character Component: Natural systems (Geology, Soils, Water, Air and Climate)

The High Weald AONB is characterised by a deeply incised, ridged and faulted landform of clays and sandstone creating soils which are highly variable over short distances. The ridges tend east-west, and from them spring numerous gill streams that form the headwaters of rivers. Wide river valleys dominate the eastern part of the AONB. The landform and water systems are subject to, and influence, a local variant of the British sub oceanic climate.

### Key Characteristics

- Impressive coastal cliffs of interbedded sandstones and clays (Hastings Cliffs to Pett)
- Beach SSSI and Hastings Cliffs Special Area of Conservation); natural, dynamic, evolving, and rich in Lower Cretaceous fossils.
- A principal ridge (Forest Ridge) running east- west from Horsham to Cranbrook with an attached ridge (Battle Ridge) extending to the sea at Fairlight.
- A pattern of faults and folds that distinguishes the High Weald from the rest of the South and East of England, with a high concentration of springs associated with fault lines.
- Numerous small streams descending the main ridges in narrow steep-sided valleys (gills), historically often dammed to power industry with many ‘pond bays’ and ‘hammer ponds’ surviving.
- Distinctive outcrops of sandstone in the form of crags (popular with climbers) and inland sea cliffs, gill stream bed and banks, old quarries, and along road edges associated with the survival of rare cryptogam communities (ferns, lichens, liverworts and mosses).
- A high density of pits, quarries and ponds resulting from a long history of stone quarrying, surface mining and marl extraction.
- Locally-distinctive geological materials – sandstone, clay bricks and tiles, and Horsham stone – contributing to high quality vernacular architecture.
- Carbon-rich soils, often undisturbed, that are distinguished by their variability over short distances – characterised as slowly permeable, seasonally wet, slightly acidic clayey soils, with pockets of sandy acidic soils.
- Heavily channelised and intensively managed river valleys in the eastern High Weald (Rother, Brede and Tillingham) originating the Medieval period, with natural floodplain wetlands rare.
- A high density of ponds, five times higher than the national average with a wide range of pond types supporting significant species such as great crested newts and emerald dragonflies.
- An oceanic climate featuring cool temperatures relative to the latitude, a narrow annual temperature range with few extremes, and rain throughout the year.

### Top 5 Issues

1. Climate crisis the impact of rising temperatures and extreme weather events such as flooding, drought, inundation, tidal surges and storms.
2. Pressure on sensitive geological features from invasive species and recreation.
3. Soil erosion and the need for soil conservation.
4. Pollution – diffuse pollution: nutrient, pesticide and fine sediment run-off into ponds, streams and rivers. Air pollution: vehicle emissions, wood burning and industry.
5. Invasive species in rivers, water bodies, wetlands and bankside vegetation.

### Natural Capital and cultural – fact and figures

- 7.6km of eroding sea cliffs designated an SSSI in recognition of the considerable biological, palaeontological, and geological interest.
- A unique Lower Cretaceous mammal fauna at Fairlight, one of a handful of localities in the world to have yielded early Cretaceous mammal remains.
- 671 inland sandstone outcrops.
- >315sq km of undisturbed soils.
- 18.6 million tonnes of carbon stored in High Weald soils (to 150cm depth)
- Crowborough Beacon, the highest point at 242m above sea level.
- Headwaters of seven river catchments – Medway (Beult, Eden and Teise), Rother (Brede and Tillingham), Thames (Mole), Arun, Adur, Ouse and Cuckmere.
- 253km of main river channel supporting nationally rare species such as otter and water vole; and coarse and salmonid fisheries.
- 4,613km of water courses in total, including tributaries and streams.
- 13,401 ponds (9/sq. km compared with a national average of 1.8/sq. km) with an estimated 1600 supporting Great Crested Newts.
- 769 springs.
- Five reservoirs including Bewl Water, the largest body of inland water in the South East.
- 20 sq. km of wetlands including reedbeds, lowland fens, coastal and floodplain grazing marsh, purple moor grass and rush pastures. Home to a rich array of birds including reed warbler and marsh harrier.
- Reserves of onshore hydrocarbons.
- A European hotspot for gills.

### Evidence and further reading

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- Rother and Romney Catchment Plan: Research Synthesis (2015). High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
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- Unconventional hydrocarbon resources in the Weald Basin (2014). High Weald Joint Advisory Committee

### Objective G1

**To restore the natural function of rivers, water courses and water bodies.**

#### Rationale

In order to enhance the role of rivers, water courses and water bodies in increasing biodiversity, improving water quality, protecting people and communities from flooding and promoting enjoyment of the wetland environment.

**Objective G2****To protect sandstone outcrops, and other important landform and geological features****Rationale**

In order to conserve landform and geology on which the High Weald's character depends, and maintain nationally important geological exposures, allowing for erosion where appropriate, conserving the fern, moss and liverwort communities they support and protecting their value as significant sites of prehistoric archaeology in the AONB.

**Objective G3****To pursue net zero across the High Weald without compromising its characteristic landscape beauty.****Rationale**

In order to reduce locally arising greenhouse gas emissions and allow the High Weald to play its role in mitigating climate change.

**Objective G4****To restore soil health across the High Weald****Rationale**

In order to increase carbon sequestration and storage potential of soils, as well as water holding capacity to reduce flooding following high rainfall. Improve the soil ecosystem which supports wider biodiversity and habitats across the High Weald. Healthy soil has higher nutrients for plants, which reduces the need for artificial fertilizer use in the long-term.

**Direction of travel 2029**

Restoring the health of natural systems will need to be the focus of land-use policy to prevent climate and ecological collapse. Monitoring of pollutants and operations damaging to water, air and soil will need to be improved, enforcement strengthened, and government support targeted at good practice. In line with the. To help conserve the High Weald's landscape and socio-ecological character, the area will need to become a net-zero landscape.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> i.e., it will need to set and pursue an ambitious 1.5°C aligned science-based target for all emission sources including Scope 1 and 2 emissions and Scope 3 emissions (from food and materials). (Source carbontrust.com)

## Character Component: Settlement

The High Weald AONB is characterised by dispersed historic settlements of farmsteads and hamlets, and late Medieval villages and market towns founded on trade and non-agricultural rural industries. The landscape setting of these settlements underpins the distinct and picturesque landscape, with the rolling pasture and small ancient woodlands of the countryside interspersed with the rich clay-tiled roofscapes of historic buildings.

### Key Characteristics

- High density of historic farmsteads surrounded by their own fields, with a long continuity of settlement in the same place; their position strongly influenced by topography and routeways.
- No significant nucleation prior to the 13th century (apart from Battle), with villages and towns mostly of Medieval origin located at historic focal points or along ridge top roads (typically open areas used for meeting places and trade), with markets charters granted in the 13th century, and 14th century.
- Absence of large-scale settlement extensions after AONB designation in 1983.
- Hamlets occurring around the junction of routeways or small commons (which became greens or forstals), or as clusters of cottages serving a particular industry.
- Pockets of small wayside cottages (peasant settlement enclosing roadside commons or later worker cottages) interspaced with fields.
- A frequency of deer parks and later 18th century estates.
- Distinctive settlement types and pattern in the eastern High Weald relating to history of the Rother estuary and river trade.
- Frequent and connected greenspaces within villages.
- Separation between settlements formed by fields associated with individual historic farmsteads, and historic field systems abutting and containing historic settlement.
- 'Greenness' of settlements, with substantial soft landscaping; grass verges, lush hedgerows edging front curtilages, and full tree canopies breaking up the built form
- Frequent – den and – fold place names echoing the area's history of pasturing cattle and pigs.
- Farmsteads typically arranged around routeways, with loose courtyard plan-types common and dispersed plan-types particularly characteristic. Tend to be relatively modest, typically comprising a farmhouse and a barn, often aisled to at least one side with small-scale ancillary structures, mostly for cattle, which face into their own, generally small, yards.
- High numbers of pre-1750 timber-framed farm buildings with typologies representing locally-distinctive historic agricultural practices, including oast houses and other structures associated with the hop industry (hop-pickers' huts); where a complete range exists, these are rare and particularly significant.
- High concentrations of historic buildings in all settlement types, many listed, whose form and appearance reflects historic and socio-cultural functions (such as the prevalence of craft industries), with locally distinctive typologies, including Medieval Wealden Hall houses (found either as rural farmhouses, or incorporated into the fabric of villages and towns, and often much disguised through later alterations), and features such as catslide roofs.
- Villages and hamlets typically unlit contributing to intrinsically dark skies landscapes.
- A limited palette of local materials: clay as tiles and brick, timber as weatherboard and framing, and some localised instances of stone.

*'Places and buildings... tend to be enriching elements in the sum of scenic beauty'*

Report on National Parks 1945

## Top 5 Issues:

1. Increase in greenfield development pressure for housing, threatening the character of the AONB and damaging soils and biodiversity.
2. Generic layout and design of new housing developments failing to reinforce AONB character or meet net zero design standards.
3. Erosion of AONB character through the cumulative effects of suburbanisation, including the residential fragmentation of farmsteads; the extension of residential curtilage boundaries, additional annexes and outbuildings, inappropriate boundary treatments and large intrusive replacement buildings.
4. Declining housing affordability, including lack of social housing and key worker housing suitable for land-based workers.
5. Infill development eroding the greenness and open space of villages, threatening the character of settlement and reducing green connectivity and opportunities for community enjoyment.

## Natural and culture capital – facts and figures

- 17 market towns and villages with populations >2,000, the largest being Battle with a population >6,000.
- 11% households classified as isolated farms (compared with an average of 8% across all protected landscapes).
- 98.3% households in areas classified as rural.
- >3,500 historic farmsteads.
- 5,274 listed buildings.
- 57 Medieval parish churches.
- 50 registered parks and gardens.
- 64 village conservation areas.
- 91 scheduled ancient monuments.

*‘[development should be] fully sympathetic to, and in scale with, the land use and local building style’*

Lord Strang, Chairman of the National Parks Commission, speaking about designated landscapes in 1959

### Objective S1

**To protect the historic pattern and character of settlement.**

#### Rationale

To protect the distinctive character and landscape settings of towns, villages, hamlets and farmsteads, remove despoiling influences, and maintain the hinterlands and other relationships (including separation) between settlements that contribute to local identity.

### Objective S2

**To enhance the architectural quality of the High Weald and ensure new development reflects the character of the High Weald in its siting, scale, layout and design.**

#### Rationale

To enhance the beauty and quality of buildings in the High Weald, and ensure new development reflects intrinsic High Weald character and place-making, embedded with a true sense of place, along with re-establishing the use of local materials as a means of protecting the environment and adding to local distinctiveness.

**Objective S3****To conserve the distinct built heritage of the High Weald****Rationale**

To protect and preserve the character and setting of historic traditional buildings and built features distinct to the High Weald area, including the historic public realm

**Direction of travel 2029**

Preserving the dispersed historic settlement pattern, which arose before the advent of the private car, will require positive planning and innovative sustainable transport strategies. New housing development will be small-scale in keeping with the character of the area. Its location and design will be based on meeting local needs (including affordability and housing mix) through high quality and landscape-led place-making and design principles that reflect intrinsic High Weald character, embedded with a true sense of place, without stifling innovation and creativity in their use of local materials and net zero technologies. The energy performance of existing housing stock will be upgraded, whilst still preserving the special character and local distinctiveness of the historic built environment and heritage assets.

**Actions****I. The Partnership will...**

- a. Develop technical appendices to support the High Weald Housing Design Guide, including for matters such as sustainable and net zero design, soft landscaping, and the public realm
- b. Develop and deliver capacity-building programmes for LPAs and other partners to improve design scrutiny in planning decision-making.
- c. Seek to coordinate LPA net zero policies affecting settlement in the AONB, ensuring they are landscape-led where applied to the AONB

**II. Public bodies should ...**

- a) Promote use of the High Weald Housing Design Guide and historic landscape characterisation to guide settlement planning and to help avoid generic approaches to layout and design of new development
- b) Ensure all new housing and development meet net zero aligned carbon buildings standards.
- c) Pursue landscape-led positive planning approaches to settlement planning and housing delivery in the AONB, with focus on net zero development
- d) Ensure there is reference to the HW AONB Management Plan and to the HW AONB Housing Design Guide in local plans and other public documents, and ensure its use as material consideration in planning decisions; planning policy, site allocations and development management.
- e) Seek to prioritise the delivery of new housing primarily through small-scale development consistent with AONB character, and through a mix of housing sizes that responds to local needs and key worker housing
- f) Identify and protect areas of separation between settlements and green/blue infrastructure connections across settlements
- g) Require new development to minimise soil damage and the introduction of impermeable hard standings
- h) Seek to minimise erosion of AONB character through suburbanisation in rural areas, including pressure for large/landscape-intrusive replacement dwellings, extensions to residential curtilages, annexes, and smaller interventions such as new accesses, boundary treatments etc., which have a cumulative effect.

- i) Ensure the design and maintenance of highways and the public realm, including street furniture, has regard to local distinctive character and avoids suburbanisation or generic approaches
- j) Protect and preserve the character and setting of historic traditional buildings and features distinct to the High Weald area, including medieval hall houses, catslide roofs, oast houses and other traditional agricultural buildings, and structures such as cattle sheds and hoppers' huts
- k) Increase local listing and support a listed building review to tackle the under-listing of historic farm buildings
- l) Seek to retain capacity for farming within farmsteads
- m) Support occupancy conditions and social housing schemes tailored to the needs of land-based workers.
- n) Enforce conditions requiring curtilage boundaries to be predominantly living and green with the remainder as local untreated timber.

**III. Others can assist conservation and enhancement of High Weald settlement by ...**

- a) Adopt a local and renewable materials first procurement policy, and support activities which celebrate and promote local products and services
- b) Make space for wildlife to thrive around buildings, gardens and urban spaces, and encourage public realm planting and gardens that maximise space for nature by planting productive native species of local provenance, and allow areas to naturally 'rewild' using native trees, living green boundaries, ponds and pollinator-friendly plants.
- c) Avoid operations which sterilise soil or cover it with impermeable materials or plastic grass.
- d) Adopting best practice in permeable surfacing of access roads (not designated as highways)

## Character Component: Routeways

The High Weald AONB is characterised by historic routeways (now roads, tracks and paths), the oldest being in the form of ridge-top roads and a dense system of radiating droveways. These are often narrow, deeply sunken and edged with trees, hedges, wildflower-rich verges and boundary banks. These locally distinctive lanes and rights of way are valuable green infrastructure, and display quietness and rurality in their visual and perceptual character.

### Key Characteristics

- A dense radiating network with a variety of origins including:
  - Droveways, used for moving livestock, radiating out to pre-historic sites on the edge of the Weald
  - Ridgeways on high ground and often running east-west, closely associated with pre-historic sites and Medieval trading settlements
  - Roman roads cutting across these patterns and strongly associated with iron-working sites.
- Typically present by the 14th century, with many extending back into pre-history and pre-dating settlements.
- Sunken routeways ('holloways') found on sloping land as a result of long use and erosion combined with water run-off.
- 'Braiding' common resulting from people, animals and vehicles finding alternative routes through impassable areas.
- Earth banks, lynchets and ditches typically indicating the former width of the routeway or to separate users from farmland or woodland.
- Wide flowery grass verges common, indicating the historic width of routeways and their function as linear common grazing.
- Small-scale variations in habitat associated with a complex mixture of substrates, aspects and moisture levels supporting a rich biodiversity, especially invertebrates.
- Frequent sandstone exposures, adding diverse assemblages of specialist plants and animals.
- Linear nature facilitating foraging and dispersal, and contributing significantly to the ecological interconnectedness of the High Weald.
- Veteran trees and ancient roadside coppice (often showing evidence of laying) frequent, providing niches for lichens and deadwood-dependent beetles.
- Many lost, stopped or diverted routeways evidenced by holloways, earth banks and depressions in the ground.
- Associated heritage public realm features – pre-1964 fingerposts, 'black and white' road signs, roadside milestones
- Archaeology and cultural associations in the eastern High Weald from trade and the practice of exporting heavy goods (e.g., timber and iron) by floating them at high tide on waterways navigable until the late 13th century.

## Top 5 Issues

1. Diversions of public rights of way from the historic route.
2. Damage from the erection of fences; fly tipping, development and ploughing.
3. Insensitive management of veteran trees and roadside coppice including practice of ‘chip and smother’; and inappropriate management of flowery grassland on verges.
4. Insensitive highway engineering including passing bays, deep visibility splays to entrances, and suburban signage and lighting.
5. Damage to narrow roads and BOATs (Byways Open to all Traffic) by motor vehicles and wide agricultural machinery, particularly in wet conditions.

## Natural Culture and Capita – facts and figures

- 2,570km of public rights of way.
- More than 75% of public rights of way are historic (i.e., present on Ordnance Survey maps from at least 1860).
- 1,873km roads.
- More than 80% of roads are historic (i.e., in existence since at least 1800).
- The High Weald is crossed by one the most famous routeways in English history – the one that took King Harold’s army from victory at Stamford Bridge to defeat at Hastings in 1066.
- Two main Roman roads (London-Lewes and London- Hassocks/Brighton).
- Droveways dating to the Anglo-Saxon period and earlier for moving livestock (pigs and cattle).
- More than 4400km highly interconnected green infrastructure bounded by flower-rich verges, hedges and woods.

## Evidence and further reading

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### Objective R1

To maintain the historic pattern and features of routeways.

### Rationale

To maintain a routeway network that has a symbiotic relationship with settlement location, hinterlands and identity, and is a rare UK survival of an essentially medieval landscape; and to protect the individual archaeological features of historic routeways.

### Objective R2

To enhance the ecological function of routeways.

### Rationale

To protect, and improve the condition of, the complex mix of small-scale habitats along routeways, including verges, for wildlife and nature recovery, and maintain routeway boundaries as part of a highly interconnected habitat mosaic.

### **Direction of travel 2029**

Paths walked for hundreds of years will need protection from unnecessary diversions, alterations or suburbanisation, while the ecological importance of associated routeway features such as verges, hedges, ditch and bank systems and roadside coppice to connect and restore nature will need to be recognised, protected, and appropriately managed. A new hierarchy of routes may be needed to meet the net zero challenge with priority given to functional routes for pedestrians, cyclists and public transport connecting homes, schools, businesses and services while improving public access to the countryside.

## Character Component: Woodland

The High Weald AONB is characterised by the great extent of ancient woods, gills, and shaws, the product of traditional long-term management. The nationally important assemblage of ancient woodland in the High Weald has immense wildlife, landscape and historical value, while the wider cumulative visual character of trees and hedgerows dividing small irregular fields is fundamental to the 'green-ness' of the landscape.

### Key Characteristics:

- Highly interconnected and structurally varied mosaic of many small woods, larger forests and numerous linear gill woodlands, shaws, wooded routeways and outgrown hedges, and isolated trees.
- High proportion of woodland is categorised as ancient woodland (46 %), typically broadleaved coppice with a rich ground flora, with many more woodlands equivalent in conservation interest. A further fifth of woodland is protected 'plantations on ancient woodlands' (PAWS), much of which is under restoration.
- Many irregularly shaped small woodlands interlinked with shaws, isolated trees, thick hedges and wooded sunken lanes, forming an intimate part of the farmed landscape.
- A few very large woods lying mostly along the high sandy ridges, such as Dallington and Bedgebury; and remnants of the area's medieval forests at Worth Forest and Ashdown Forest.
- High density of gill woodlands (deeply incised ravines with particularly humid and relatively stable microclimates) – the oldest and least disturbed woodland in the South East supporting a community of plants, vascular and non-vascular, not found together anywhere else in Europe, and important for rare plant species such as small-leaved lime, hay-scented buckler fern, Tunbridge filmy-fern, and rare invertebrates including beetles and molluscs.
- Frequent patches of wet woodland associated with surface water in the form of steep sided streams, springs, wet flushes and water-filled extraction pits, important for regionally-distinctive species such as smooth-stalked sedge.
- Large numbers of isolated trees (often remnants from lost woodlands or hedges), such as in-field trees that provide additional connectivity to the wider landscape, as well as shelter and food source to a wide range of species.
- A stronghold for characteristic species such as dormice, and remnant populations of rare species such as pearl-bordered fritillary butterfly.
- Considerable variability in woodland types and tree forms over short distances reflecting the variety of soils, micro-climates, and drainage conditions (Principle National Vegetation Classification communities are W10 and W8 with some W15 and W16 on sandier ridges).
- Wood-pasture and parkland, mostly originating from once extensive historic deer parks supporting veteran/ancient trees and their associated wildlife.
- Nationally significant resource of epiphytic (plants that grow on other plants rather than the soil) and dead-wood dependent species supported by a wealth of veteran trees.
- A traditionally strong commercial woodland industry focused on coppice and locally grown hardwoods.
- A culture of small-scale management by people using hand tools to produce a wide variety of products mostly for local use.
- Visible evidence of historic use and exploitation (including coppice stools, stubs, pollards, boundary bank and ditch systems, routes and tracks; remains of Roman and Medieval iron-working such as slag heaps and ponds, and large earthworks relating to the harnessing of waterpower to fuel furnaces, forges and mills).
- Trees used for boundary markers (including outgrown old laid hedges; stubs and pollards), many of which are accessible on public rights of way.

## Top 5 Issues

1. Predicted increase in tree diseases, partly through imported stock or soil, and continued damage from invasive species including rhododendron, grey squirrel and deer damage from over-population of deer across the High Weald
2. Low value bulk markets for timber improving and procurement practices and lack of investment restricting market growth for higher value locally-sourced wood products.
3. Lack of management where needed, particularly cessation of traditional coppicing affecting ground flora and species associated with coppicing such as fritillaries.
4. Impact of increasing mechanisation and machinery size on soils, small-scale woodlands variability and archaeology.
5. Impact of development close to ancient woodland resulting in increased noise and disturbance, and pressure to fell other trees and hedgerows as part of development, (including post-development) with a cumulative reduction in tree cover and impact on ecology.

## Natural and cultural capital – facts and figures

- 28% woodland cover (nearly 3x English average).
- 83% broadleaved woodland the majority as coppice.
- Highest coverage of ancient woodland in any protected landscape (3/4 all woodland or 19% land cover) covering 273sq km of undisturbed woodland soil.
- >2,800 parcels of ancient woodland under 2 ha.
- Nationally significant: 8% of England's ancient woodland resource.
- <22% ancient woodland classified as Plantations on Ancient Woodlands (PAWS).
- 191sq km gill woodland in > 1,200 sites supporting internationally rare cryptogams.
- 56sq km UK BAP priority habitat: wood pasture and parkland.
- In excess of 7.5m tonnes of carbon stored in woodlands and their soils with an additional > 0.75m tonnes sequestered every year.
- 3sq km traditional orchards containing 34 apple varieties.
- Active commercial coppice industry with intergenerational woodland workers.

## Evidence and further reading

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Weald and Downs Ancient Woodland Survey (2007-2012). High Weald District Reports for Ashford, Hastings, Mid Sussex, Rother, Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Malling, Tunbridge Well, Wealden, West Sussex.

**Objective W1**

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

**Rationale**

To ensure irreplaceable habitats and biodiversity loss are repaired for the benefit of future generations., To maintain a key component of the cultural landscape, and to preserve the high levels of carbon storage in woodland soils and biomass.

**Objective W2**

To restore the ecological quality and functioning of woodland at a landscape scale.

**Rationale**

To increase the viability of the woodland habitat for wildlife, by identifying and extending the area of appropriately managed woodland (including restoring plantations on ancient woodland) to link and enhance isolated habitats and species populations, providing greater connectivity between woodlands and other important wildlife areas, and helping to facilitate species' response to climate change.

**Objective W3**

To protect the archaeology and historic assets of AONB woodlands.

**Rationale**

To protect the historic environment of the AONB woodlands.

**Objective W4**

To increase the output of sustainably produced high-quality timber and underwood for local markets.

**Rationale**

To achieve the most effective management that will deliver the other objectives for woodland, to contribute to sustainable domestic timber production, and to support a working countryside.

**Direction of travel 2029**

With the beauty and biodiversity of woodlands in the High Weald already under threat from a combination of pests and diseases, disturbance by people and pets, a warming unpredictable climate and invasive species, protection will need to focus on fostering wilder woodlands and buffering through natural regeneration to allow nature to thrive. Tackling invasive species will be a priority. Non-intervention approaches will become more common unless traditional coppice regimes are being maintained or woodlands are being managed for high quality timber. In these cases, management will be predominantly small-scale with industrialised mechanical harvesting avoided to protect archaeology and soils. Local timber and underwood will once again be essential materials for buildings, fencing and other uses.

## Character Component: Fieldscapes and Heath

The High Weald AONB is characterised by small, irregularly shaped and productive fields often bounded by (and forming a mosaic with) hedgerows, shaws and small woodlands and in-field trees, and typically used for livestock grazing, and small-scale horticulture; within which can be found distinctive zones of lowland heath and inned /reclaimed river valleys. Predominately undisturbed and highly productive Grade 3 good agricultural grazing land, reflecting the typical and historic agricultural practices of the area, and as such is intrinsically valuable to the landscape character.

### Key Characteristics

- A generally irregular field pattern with individual fields relatively small (<3 hectares).
- Landscape dominated by historic farmsteads surrounded by their own fields resulting from Medieval farming in severalty i.e., land held by individuals rather than in common.
- Strong influence exerted by topography with many field systems aligned to or 'hanging' from (at right angles to) linear features such as watercourses or ridge-top roads.
- Predominantly pastoral mixed farming with an absence of industrial scale livestock farming, and undisturbed soils.
- Fields mostly permanent pasture used for grazing livestock with some small-scale horticulture and cropping.
- Medieval landscape character dominant, with a high proportion of field systems created by assarting (woodland clearance) with sinuous mixed woody boundaries and shaws, and thick hedges common.
- Unmanaged fields quickly succeed back towards woodland, because of abundant tree seeds from the pattern of small woodlands bounding many fields.
- Boundary ditch and bank features typical, along woodland edges or topped with hedges and veteran trees.
- Nationally important fragments of unimproved neutral grassland (such as NVC MG5 and variants), often small and isolated, supporting an incredibly rich variety of plants, animals, waxcaps and other fungi.
- High proportion of good quality species rich grassland acting as a buffer for, and link to, fragments of unimproved grassland, including a high proportion of good quality semi-improved grasslands.
- Traditional orchards and hop gardens scattered across the landscape forming part of the visual landscape and also providing dead and decaying wood for invertebrates, and a mosaic of other habitats.
- Ashdown Forest (an extensive area of common land and one of the largest continuous blocks of lowland heath, semi-natural woodland and valley bog in the South East) supporting internationally important populations of nightjar and Dartford warbler.
- Distinctive areas of wooded heath and lowland heath scattered along the sandy ridges supporting a complex mosaic of plant communities, rare species such as marsh clubmoss, and more than half of UK's dragonfly species.
- Fragmented heath is found along woodland ridges and old hedge banks throughout the High Weald.

## Top 5 Issues:

1. Loss of agricultural skills and knowledge and fragmentation of farm holdings, which leads to a reduction in productive livestock grazing, farm infrastructure and degradation of pasture and soils.
2. Increasing costs of managing associated habitats such as hedgerows, exacerbated by reduction in agri-environmental funding for some operations.
3. Loss of green fields to development and infrastructure, or conversion to other land uses such as conventional vineyards and inappropriate woodland creation schemes.
4. Difficulties of access to small, isolated sites and lack of grazing infrastructure including fencing and livestock.
5. Loss of species rich grasslands and associated biodiversity across the High Weald through loss to development and infrastructure which also creates fragmentation and lost connectivity, along with the loss of semi-improved grasslands which act as a restoration bank for species-rich grasslands.

## Natural and cultural capital – facts and figures

- >1,500 farm holdings (2nd highest number of holdings in an AONB) with >750 livestock holdings.
- 65% land is registered with the Rural Payments Agency with 17,000 parcels of land <1.5ha.
- Average farm size is less than half the national average.
- 70% of fields remain unaffected by reorganisation in the late 20th century.
- >12,500km of hedgerows and field boundaries providing homes for pollinating insects and a source of wild food.
- 220sq km land owned by conservation organisations or designated under international or UK law to protect wildlife including 64sq km internationally important sites and 51 SSSI's covering 55sq km.
- <3% land cover known wildflower meadows with estimated <40% fields semi-improved grassland with potential for enhancement.
- Nearly 50% of AONB supported by government-funded schemes to encourage environmentally sensitive land management (NE, 2013)
- 85% land is Grade 3 and 4 under the Agricultural Land Classification.
- <5% agricultural holders under 35 years old.
- Steep decline in livestock numbers with sheep and cattle numbers down by one-third since 2000.

## Evidence and further reading

Dolphin Ecological services (2013). Grassland SSCI Review. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.  
Fields in the High Weald: An Overview of Their Social, Ecological and Economic Value (2017). High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.  
Field systems in the High Weald: A landscape Approach to Assessment (2017). High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.  
Field systems in the High Weald: Character Statement (2017). High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.  
Field systems in the High Weald: Research History (2017). High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.  
High Weald AONB: Biodiversity Statement (2013). High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.  
High Weald Management Plan 2019 Consultation Workshop Report: Field and Heath (2017). High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.  
Jones, P.J. et al. (2009). Potential of the High Weald to Supply the Food Needs of its Population under Conventional and Organic Agriculture. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.  
Vorley, B. (2014) Restocking the Weald. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.  
NE funded nature recovery report

*The existence of a flourishing and progressive agriculture is fundamental to... the preservation and enhancement of the characteristic landscape.'*

Report of the National Parks Committee, Sir Arthur Hobhouse, 1947

**Objective FH1**

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

**Rationale**

To contribute to sustainable domestic food and non-food agricultural production, to support a working countryside, reduce carbon emissions, and to reduce the dependency of the UK on non-sustainably managed agricultural land and the need for long-distance transport that produces air pollutants, causing harm to health and the environment.

**Objective FH2**

To maintain the pattern of small irregularly shaped fields bounded by hedgerows and woodlands.

**Rationale**

To maintain fields and field boundaries that form a part of the habitat mosaic of the High Weald; and to maintain this key component of what is a rare UK survival of an essentially Medieval landscape.

**Objective FH3**

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

**Rationale**

To improve the condition, landscape permeability and connectivity of fields and heaths and their associated and interrelated habitats (such as hedges, trees, woodlands, ditches, ponds and water systems) for wildlife.

**Objective FH4**

To protect individual archaeological features as well as and historic assets and pattern of fields and heath.

**Rationale**

To protect the historic environment of the AONB that includes the pattern of fields, and individual archaeological features.

**Direction of travel 2029**

The management of fieldscapes will need to change substantially over the next five years with regenerative approaches to food production and nature recovery becoming the norm. The comprehensive decline in biodiversity will not be reversed by focusing on nature reserves only (although this is important). Fieldscapes will need to be restored so all wildlife can thrive there. Productive land managed regeneratively will need to be interspersed with wilder areas providing reservoirs for pollinators and other wildlife. New and innovative crop management approaches, such as agroforestry, will need to be trialled with layered production of nuts, soft and top fruit becoming more common, taking advantage of the High Weald's ability to grow trees and grass well. Small scale regeneratively based vegetable production to supply local markets will need to increase, drawing on the High Weald's mixed farming history. Chemical input from pesticides and fertilizers will need to be drastically cut. There may be a small increase in tree cover and scrub, but most of the fieldscape and heathy areas will remain as open habitats.

## Character Component: Land-based economy and rural living

The High Weald AONB is characterised by a broad-based economy but with a significant land-based sector and related community life focused on mixed farming (particularly family farms and smallholdings), woodland management and rural crafts.

### Key Characteristics:

- Land-based workers at a proportion higher than the rural average but with an ageing profile.
- Strong influence of London and other employment areas such as Gatwick on the social character and commuting patterns.
- Tendency for greater self-sufficiency in smaller communities to the east of the area away from major population centres.
- Retention of woodland workers and their families who have a multi-generational relationship with, and whose livelihoods rely on, the area's coppice woodlands.
- An expensive landscape to manage due to its small-scale nature and hedged bank and ditch boundaries.
- High house prices in relation to wages leading to increasing tendency for land-based workers to live out of the area.
- Strong rural community life based around small towns and villages supported by a network of valued and accessible local services and amenities, such as village halls, shops and post offices, clubs and societies, and infrastructure including bus services and IT provision.
- Increasing population as rural living coupled with the popularity of home-based working increasing people moving into and working within the High Weald.

### Top 5 Issues

1. Low wages and lack of affordable housing and well-designed workspace affecting recruitment and retention of workers and constraining ability of land-based businesses to grow.
2. Holdings which are typically small (by national standards) struggling to remain economic in the current market under traditional livestock management regimes and uncertainty over future agri-environmental schemes, while high cost of land and decline in affordable farm tenancies are a barrier to new entrants to agriculture.
3. Changing land use, away from traditional enterprises to, for example, camping and glamping sites and development, which cumulatively threaten long-term food production.
4. Loss of traditional skills due to aging workforce and contracting farm and woodland economies, and lack of economic value in land-based products constraining innovation.
5. Closures and cuts to rural services and amenities, including bus services, Post Offices, village shops and banks.

## Natural and cultural capital – facts and figures

- Agriculture, forestry and fishing account for 13% of businesses (employing 8% of the workforce) compared with 3% in the South East (employing 1% of the workforce).
- 38% of employment is in micro businesses compared with 17% in the South East.
- 29% of the working age population are retired compared with 21% in the South East.
- Rural incomes are slightly lower than those in the South East but average house prices are 42% higher.
- Self-sufficient in cereals, fruit and lamb but an under- supply of potatoes, beef, fresh vegetables and salads.

## Evidence and further reading

Bibby, P. (2007). Historic Farm Complexes in Current Socio-economic Context: High Weald. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.  
Defra Rural Statistics Unit (2012). High Weald AONB: Economic profile. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.  
Farming in the High Weald: Current situation and future needs (2014). High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.  
Jones, P. J. et al. (2009). The potential for the High Weald to supply the food needs of its population under conventional and organic agriculture. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.  
Vorley, B. (2013): Restocking the Weald: Securing the future of livestock farming in the High Weald's working landscape. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.  
Bibby, P (2014)

### Objective LBE1

To improve returns from, and thereby increase entry and retention in, farming, forestry, horticulture and other land management activities that conserve and enhance natural beauty.

### Rationale

To sustain an economically viable land management sector, with a particular emphasis on sustainable and small-scale farming and forestry.

### Objective LBE2

**To reconnect settlements, residents and their supporting economic activity with the surrounding countryside.**

### Rationale

To understand and enhance the synergy of the local economy, society and environment, and the relationship with the surrounding countryside and wild species, that defines sustainable rural settlement. To provide opportunities for economic activity that supports land management objectives and AONB designation.

### Objective LBE3

To improve amenities, infrastructure (including the provision of appropriate affordable housing), and skills development for rural communities and related sectors that contribute positively to conserving and enhancing natural beauty

### Rationale

To foster community life and economic activities – including heritage conservation, sustainable tourism and outdoor education – that support conservation of the AONB.

Lord Strang, Chairman of the National Parks Commission in 1959 called on the government to

*‘secure modern standards of living in the countryside with improved rural housing and new small rural industries to provide employment’ but observed that these must be ‘fully sympathetic to, and in scale with, the landscape and local style of building’*

### **Direction of travel 2029**

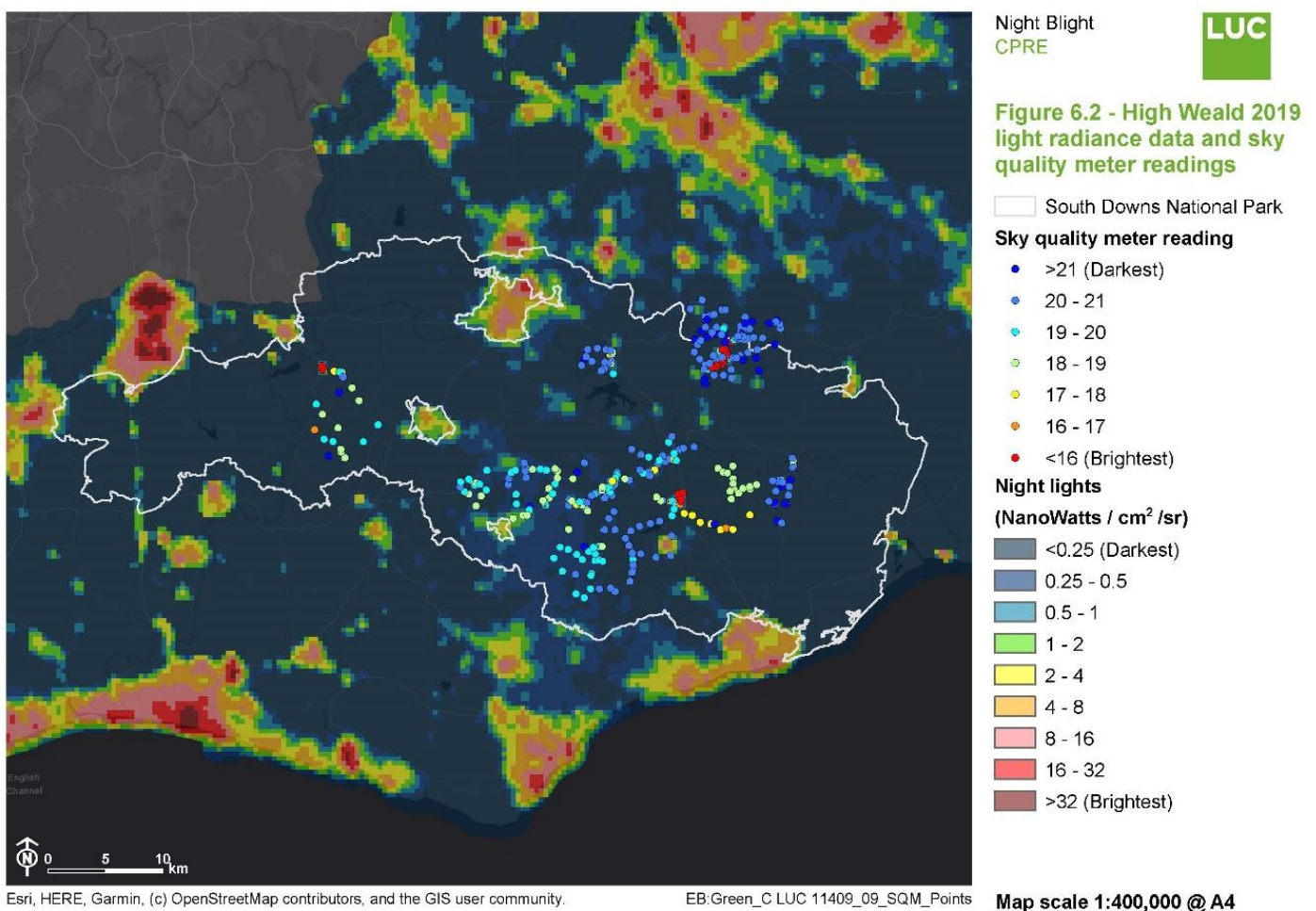
A renaissance in land-based activity and rural living will be needed to meet the net-zero challenge. Support should be focused on reconnecting people with the land and driving innovation in carbon-neutral small-scale food production, forestry and rural skills development. Investment in land-based education, skills, and businesses will need to be significantly enhanced to ensure sufficient land management capacity is created alongside the resilient and flexible skills required to adapt to a warming, more unpredictable, climate. Affordable housing will be essential. Increased working from home will continue to stimulate community activities, rural services, and demand for access to countryside resources creating opportunities for new relationships with nature.

## Character Component: Dark Skies

The High Weald AONB is characterised by having some of the darkest skies in the South-east of England, this gives the AONB a sense of remoteness and peacefulness and connects the natural environment to the cultural and historic landscape.

### Key Characteristics

- Intrinsically dark landscapes with a sense of naturalness
- Our own galaxy the Milky Way is observable, as well as the planetary bodies
- Key constellations such as Orion, Ursa Major and Cassiopeia are visible to the naked eye
- Deep sky objects are visible to the naked eye, such as Andromeda Galaxy and Orion Nebula
- The High Weald has some of the intrinsically darkest skies in Southern England with the least skyglow
- Much of the central and eastern parts of the AONB are intrinsically dark
- Many rural villages have few street lamps or no street lighting
- There are unlit roads including A-roads throughout the High Weald
- The High Weald supports populations of glow-worms, a now rapidly declining species dependant on dark skies for reproduction
- Fifteen of the 17 UK bat species are found in the High Weald
- Numerous species of night-flying moths which are UK BAP Priority species, and nationally scarce species are found in the High Weald



## Top five issues

1. Lack of minimum standards for external lighting that can be enforced. Standards are needed to set out basic principles of dark skies lighting and signpost to guidance and advice where needed.
2. Increased light pollution in rural areas from a variety of buildings and structures including but not limited to; new developments (street lighting and domestic light spill), housing designed with extensive glazing, such as wrap-around or floor-to-ceiling windows; external security lighting, rural out-buildings; public buildings and spaces such as railway stations; and domestic lighting where residents choose to light-up their homes and gardens at night.
3. Sky glow from built up areas adjoining the High Weald AONB, which reduces views of celestial bodies such as the Milky Way and Orion, leading to a loss of connection to the cultural heritage of night skies, and public enjoyment.
4. Impacts on local wildlife, where evidence shows light pollution disrupts circadian rhythms, migration, feeding and breeding across all animal groups including invertebrates, mammals, birds, and amphibians.
5. Lack of education on the importance of dark skies to human health and wellbeing as well as their significance to the natural environment.

## Natural and Cultural Capital – facts and figures

X % of LPAs and NPs with dark sky policies

X of X parishes have minimal or no street lighting

X parishes which have collected light metre readings

X of parishes with intrinsically dark skies

## References/evidence:

Cook, C. (2021) Ten Dark Skies Policies for the Government. The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Dark Skies  
CPRE, (2021). Sussex, Kent and Hampshire Night Blight, LUC  
HWJAC, (2019). High Weald Housing Design Guide, High Weald Joint Advisory Committee  
Miles, J et al. (2018), Guidance Note 08/18, Bats and artificial lighting in the UK, *Bats and the Built Environment series*, Bat Conservation Trust & Institute of Lighting Professionals  
CPRE, (no date), Nigh Blight, reclaiming our dark skies <https://www.nightblight.cpre.org.uk/>  
Institute of Lighting Professionals (no date), <https://theilp.org.uk/>  
International dark sky Association (no date), <https://www.darksky.org/>  
Dark skies Lighting, (no date), <https://www.darkskylighting.co.uk/>

### Objective DS1

**To preserve the dark skies of the High Weald AONB by minimising reduce light pollution, obtrusive external lighting and internal light spill from domestic, commercial, and public premises in both existing and new developments within the High Weald. Encourage more areas and communities to reach these standards.**

### Rationale

To protect and maintain the existing dark skies within the High Weald for the benefit of all, including future generations for our health and wellbeing, and enjoyment; for the benefit of wildlife and to reduce energy consumption.

**Objective DS2**

**To protect wildlife and sites for wildlife from light pollution across the High Weald.**

**Rationale**

Light pollution affects a wide range of nocturnal species, and those out during the day, from feeding to finding a mate and the ability to safely migrate. Light pollution is an additive stressor to habitat loss for already declining populations of many species across the High Weald.

**Objective DS3**

**To promote celebrations of dark skies within the High Weald**

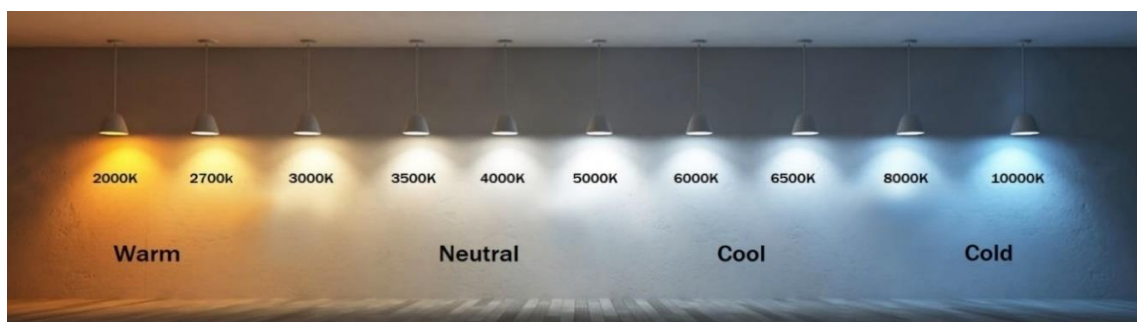
**Rationale**

The cultural importance of the dark skies is just beginning to be fully understood, and as such represents a new form of public enjoyment for many. Dark skies are found in myths, legends, and storytelling across the world, and have led to discoveries such as navigation, and our continued interest in exploring the universe. Promoting the enjoyment of dark skies benefits human health and wellbeing, increases our understanding and sense of place in the universe.

Best lighting practice:



Kelvin lighting spectrum:



**Direction of travel 2029**

To preserve and protect the night-time environment of the High Weald and to ensure astronomical dark sky objects such as the Milk Way remain visible to the naked eye, the level of artificial light at night will need to stay at its present low level, with this being achieved by adopting new technologies, and environmentally responsible outdoor lighting, along with commitment by individuals, communities, and businesses, including Highways Authorities and developers.

## Character Component: Perceptual and Aesthetic qualities

Aesthetic qualities are those perception-based qualities and cultural associations which are experienced in the High Weald's landscape and arise from people's interaction with nature.

### Key qualities<sup>5</sup>

- History-related qualities such as a sense of history and timelessness arising from an ancient un-enclosed countryside with a human-scale agricultural tapestry; veteran and ancient trees; medieval forests, heaths and commons; churches, historic buildings; and tangible legacies from the iron and wood industries (such as hammer ponds and place names) and major historic events such as the Battle of Hastings in 1066.
- Qualities associated with emotion and imagination such as,
  - a) a sense of intimacy, enclosure and remoteness due to the heavily treed landscape punctuated by unexpected and glimpsed long views, often uninterrupted, extending out beyond the Weald along the valleys with natural skylines and forested ridges occasionally punctuated by church spires, and often framed by field gates and wooded holloways.
  - b) a sense of wonder, renewal and connection with the natural world arising from the proximity of wildlife and opportunities for immersion in nature
  - c) a sense of freedom arising from access to a network of public rights of way (at a density of 1.8km per sq. km) and quiet roads suitable for walking and cycling, and opportunities to discover many accessible green spaces (including sandrock areas and rivers, reservoirs and coast) and unexpected features such as the 'mini-landscapes' of gill streams
  - d) a sense of rurality unusual in South-East England
- Character and gestalt qualities such as,
  - a) the homely, pastoral feel to the whole landscape arising from its human-scale pattern and productivity
  - b) Colour palette of greens (vegetation) and browns (clay, timber and iron) representing the materials from which the landscape is constructed
  - c) A rich and varied biodiversity
  - d) a recognisable and unifying mosaic of open and wooded habitats
- Sensory qualities such as
  - a) Quietude and tranquillity with large areas of natural rural soundscape and perceived distance from urban noise
  - b) natural soundscapes including the ability to enjoy varied birdsong
  - c) exposure to seasonal sensations such as wind and warmth, and diurnal fluctuations in light and dark
  - c) Vivid seasonal colour change including the whites and blues of ancient woodland ground flora in the spring and the oranges and browns of autumnal trees and woodlands
- Symbolic and inspiration qualities such as,
  - a) the idea of the High Weald as a 'quintessential English pastoral landscape'
  - b) the association of dark autumnal nights and Sussex villages with bonfire societies
  - c) the legacy of physical features and ideas left by writers, artists, poets, gardeners and craftspeople inspired by the landscape such as Kipling's house at Batemans, Christopher Lloyd's house and garden at Great Dixter, the Cranbrook Colony of artists, A.A. Milne
  - d) traditions illustrating the close relationship between nature and place including skills and crafts; traditional breeds; local food and drink
  - e) distinctive public realm features such as fingerposts and milestones.

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<sup>5</sup> Quality categories based on Brady 2003

## Top five issues

1. Declining opportunities for people to experience the countryside and related skills and activities beyond recreational use, along with a declining connection with the countryside and knowledge of the role it plays in producing food, materials and a healthy enjoyable environment in which to live.
2. Increasing visitor numbers leading to urbanisation and additional recreational infrastructure around villages and popular sites, and lack of awareness of the countryside code by new users, creating tension between different user groups.
3. Poor accessibility for many, particularly urban users, with declining or expensive public transport services and lack of travel routes for pedestrians, cyclists and riders, declining rights of way maintenance, and lack of signage.
4. Erosion of rurality and tranquillity through urbanising development including new housing, camping/glamping accommodation and activity, traffic and noise
5. Degradation of nature, including biodiversity decline, erosion of habitats and damage to natural systems reducing people's rich experience of nature.

### Objective PQ1

**To increase opportunities for learning about and celebrating the High Weald's character and aesthetic qualities and to promote and facilitate contributions by communities and individuals to the conservation and enhancement of the High Weald**

#### Rationale

To help develop emotional connection to the landscape encouraging and enabling people to care for the High Weald and support its conservation.

### Objective PQ2

**To protect the unspoilt rural landscape with its intrinsic sense of naturalness, valued views and the extent of green space which foster experiences of rurality and tranquillity.**

#### Rationale

To prevent the loss of contained green space, glimpsed and long views, and tree-canopied skylines, especially with regard to developments that fringe existing settlements in the High Weald, which would impinge on people's perception of greenness and rurality.

### Objective PQ3

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

#### Rationale

To meet the demand for informal recreation from residents and those living close to the to the AONB, whilst ensuring infrastructure, services and activities are consistent with conserving and enhancing natural beauty and its quiet enjoyment for this and future generations.

## Direction of travel 2029

Policy and actions will need to protect the physical features that aesthetic qualities rely on. A preserved and restored High Weald AONB will contribute to a 'Natural Health Service' for people now and in the future, drawing on the area's aesthetic qualities to foster enjoyment and wellbeing and encourage fair access for everyone to so that everyone feels welcome and included, while ensuring that nature and beauty are not harmed. Improved and fair access will not just relate to opportunities for recreation but to everything that a naturally functioning healthy countryside can provide including clean air, clean water, healthy food, and the opportunity to learn new skills and interact with nature.

## Drivers for Change: Cross cutting themes and response

Achieving the Management Plan’s strategic objectives and its 2029 targets will require urgent and ambitious action by all. This section of the Plan sets out our strategic aims on which resources should be focussed, including priorities and investment programmes for partners and others, that deliver multiple benefits across the identified character components in response to the drivers for change.

Despite current threats, there are many solutions that will support the High Weald AONB landscape remain culturally and environmentally important for future generations, and help meet the Management Plan objectives, including natural flood management including leaky woody dams, sustainable building design and micro-energy generation, natural regeneration of woodlands, regenerative farming practices and reinstating lost hedges.

Importantly, a solution or mitigation for one of the priorities is often part of the solution or mitigation for another priority, especially regarding more nature focused solutions which result in win-win outcomes. For example, the reinstatement of lost hedgerows confers multiple benefits:

| <b>Example: replanting lost hedgerows: Benefits</b> |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Biodiversity</b>                                 | Provides habitats - shelter and food resource for multiple wild species above and below ground including for pollinators<br>Protects freshwater ecosystems – slows soil run-off and pollution<br>Improves connectivity between habitats – provides corridors for species to move along between patches of habitat<br>Reduces the need for pesticide use – by providing a habitat for common pest predators   |
| <b>Climate</b>                                      | Increases carbon storage and sequestration – in both the soil and plant biomass<br>Cuts down wind speeds - protects crops and other habitats, reduces wind throw of trees<br>Provides natural flood prevention – soil can hold more water and reduces runoff<br>Helps regulate water supply to crops – better water storage capacity of the soil   |
| <b>Soil</b>   | Protects soils from erosion – reduces runoff, improves soil health<br>Provides protection for crops - provides shelter from wind<br>Improves structure and drainage of soils – improves soil health and increases soil biota   |
| <b>People, farming and landscape</b>                | Enhances and maintains a key characteristic of the High Weald’s cultural landscape – hedges are an integral landscape feature to the High Weald ‘mosaic’.<br>Absorbs noise and pollution – increases tranquillity<br>Provides shelter and winter feed for livestock – supports farmers to keep livestock outside all year round and reduces costs<br>Makes available ‘wild’ food for foraging – provides access for people to experience the rural environment |

## Regenerative Land Management and Restoring Soil Health

Soil health underpins the unique character and distinct form of the High Weald's landscape and biodiversity.

Soils are one of the most valuable natural resources we have and are critical to life on Earth. Recognising the importance of soil, and its linchpin role in planetary health means prioritising soils and soil health across the High Weald AONB. Regenerative agriculture is a suite of practices that put soil health front and centre, which allows farming to be more in tune with nature. As a result, it is seen as a more climate resilient approach to farming, whilst also supporting nature recovery. (add ref)

Healthy soil is complex and abundant with biodiversity, like any other ecosystem. Soil biodiversity is made up of thousands of species, many of which are microscopic in size, such as springtails, nematodes, fungi and bacteria, and account for between a quarter and a third of all species on Earth. Estimates abound, but a teaspoon of healthy soil contains billions of organisms from thousands of different species.

Apart from providing a medium to grow our food in, soil underpins many ecosystem services, and the loss of and degradation of healthy soils has a knock-on effect to these services that sustain life comfortably. Loss of soil is a major problem because soil creation is an extremely slow process taking anywhere between 100 to 1,000 years for one inch of soil to form. Threats to the soils within the High Weald such as compaction, erosion and use of petrochemicals increase poor soil structure, affect soil's ability to absorb and hold water, deplete soil biodiversity, reduced plant growth capacity, and effect nutrient flow to belowground food webs. This leads to reductions in soil functioning which reduces carbon stores and sequestration, imbalances soil nutrient content, and predicates the need for applications of artificial fertilizers and pesticides.

Soil and soil health is a cross cutting element that underpins all of the key components of natural beauty in the High Weald, from geology and the types of soil found here, to the numerous undisturbed pastures and (field and heath), that support land-based economies. This includes objectives to protect and enhance soils, to enhance the ecological function of fields and, improving the returns from and farming and horticulture.

### Supporting and Delivering Soil Health

HM Government: 25-year plan to improve the environment

Policy 3: Improving soil health and restoring and protecting our peatlands

i. Developing better information on soil health

[25-year-environment-plan.pdf \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

Defra: Construction Code of Practice for Sustainable Use of Soils on Construction Sites

Currently under review/consultation as of Jan 2023

## Soil Health Principles

*A graphic to illustrate the principles of soil and soil health and a complimentary graphic which demonstrates best practice/ambitions. This will illustrate all the points listed in the boxes below.*



The Ambitions for soil management

- Keep soil surface disturbance to a minimum
- Keep soils covered
- Keep plant roots in the ground
- Maximise above and below ground biodiversity

## Soil Health Priority:

The priority for delivering soil health in the High Weald AONB over the next five years is through the continued promotion and guidance of soil monitoring and regenerative agricultural practices for soil health and restoration. Regenerative agriculture also delivers on climate change via minimally disturbed soils which improves soil carbon storage and sequestration, and aids nature recovery from the ground up, it also fits with the High Weald landscape of small irregularly shaped fields, that hints at historic grazing methods mirroring this new technique. There is a growing number of farms across the High Weald that are incorporating regenerative practices, particularly with livestock grazing.

Protecting and enhancing soil health provides better food security through increased self-sufficiency. Many of the techniques of regenerative agricultural practices can often lead to pastures becoming resilient to the climate crisis, including droughts, as well as help farmers mitigate for flooding by increasing water infiltration in the soil, and greater carbon storage because of healthier root and fungal networks.

### Apply regenerative agriculture practices

Regenerative agriculture is a way of farming that puts the health of the soil first. Interest in regenerative agriculture has increased dramatically and is continuing to expand and has been referred to as the 'new green food revolution' and the 'next big food trend'.

**Monitor Soil health monitoring** collects base-line data through simple to apply soil monitoring techniques on soil structure, stability, water infiltration and biodiversity quickly, with easily understandable results which can be used to adjust management approaches. This can also include eDNA analysis of soil.

**Utilise no or min-till farming** There are a variety of well-established minimum till techniques, which are suitable for most soils and many crops particularly cereal, cover crops and oilseed rape. Around a quarter of the fields in the High Weald are in crop or horticulture production.

**Rotational grazing** is a short duration high density grazing technique. Fields are divided up into paddock sized parcels where livestock is moved onto a new paddock every 12 hours to 2 days and are not returned to that paddock until up to 4-7 weeks later when the pasture vegetation has fully recovered.

**Increase Agroforestry** incorporating trees and hedges into the farm enterprise, such as livestock grazing beneath and between trees, or crops grown between rows of trees. The trees are often part of the economy of the farm providing timber and other products, as well as being of even greater benefit to soil health and therefore farm productivity.

**Utilise cover cropping** means growing a non-commercial crop for the benefit of the soil, both to prevent erosion if it would otherwise be left bare, and to improve the soil health for future crops in between standard cash crops. This technique has been shown to increase earthworms, which in turn increase water infiltration, nutrient cycling and improve overall soil health.

**Companion / intercropping** growing two complementary crops together to utilize space and ensure soil coverage. There is already evidence that intercropping can boost yields, aid pest management, and reduce the need for artificial fertilizers and pesticides.

**Regenerative horticulture** is the growing of fruit and vegetable crops using holistic and organic techniques such as stock-free approaches, permaculture and no dig to minimise soil disturbance and improve soil health, as well as eliminate pesticide use, and encourage pollinates and natural pest control. Regenerative horticulture is also relevant to orchards, community gardens and allotments.

**Delivering key objectives: G1, G3, G4, FH1, FH3, LBE1**

## Biodiversity & Nature Recovery

Biodiversity is a fundamental component of natural beauty and helps define the distinctive landscape patterns of the High Weald AONB. Biodiversity drives opportunities for people to access and engage with the natural world and fosters understanding of the importance of the High Weald AONB.

Recovering nature in the High Weald AONB means giving nature more space, providing quality well managed habitats and ensuring connectivity between those habitats; in other words, providing bigger, better, more and joined up places for nature<sup>1</sup>. The High Weald AONB's nature recovery priorities for the next five years are restoring species rich grasslands, deer management, restoration of hedges, the creation of more messy boundaries and better water quality for freshwater habitats. These priorities will enhance habitats, increase biodiversity and build a more resilient and connected network for wildlife across the High Weald AONB. They feed into Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) and are the nature recovery priorities for Environmental Land Management schemes (ELM) in the High Weald AONB.

The High Weald AONB contains many different habitats and landscape features that collectively support a wide diversity of species, from broadleaf woodland to wildflower meadows, open heath and sandstone outcrops to ponds, rivers, and coastal cliffs. The importance of the region's biodiversity stems not only from the rarity and variety of these species, but also from the ancientness, interconnectedness and assortment of the habitats that support them. Indeed, it is the essentially medieval origin of the High Weald landscape, along with the existence of a patchwork of small-scale and linear landscape features created through long-standing human-environment interactions, which combine to significantly enhance the region's ecological connectivity and, ultimately, its resilience. In the case of the High Weald, the biodiversity value of its landscape really is greater than the sum of its parts.

Nature recovery is fundamental to all of the key components of natural beauty in the High Weald, from ancient woodlands which support a wide range of plants, and animals including birds, bats and invertebrates, to the numerous undisturbed pastures that support species rich grasslands or waxcap communities. This includes objectives to protect and enhance soils, to enhance the ecological function of fields, routeways and woodlands.

### Supporting and Delivering Nature Recovery

Colchester Declaration (2021)

[Colchester Declaration: National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty \(landscapesforlife.org.uk\)](https://landscapesforlife.org.uk)

Making Space for Nature (2010)

[‘Making space for nature’: a review of England's wildlife sites - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

Landscapes Review (2019)

[DEFRA - Landscapes Review - Final Report 2019 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

## Statutory requirements relevant to Nature Recovery

The Environment Act (2021) has brought with it responsibilities for local authorities in the fight to halt biodiversity loss:

### Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS)

- LNRS are delivered by county councils. The High Weald AONB crosses East Sussex, West Sussex, Kent and Surrey. LNRS will need to have regard for Nature Recovery strategies in AONB Management Plans
- LNRS underpin the national Nature Recovery Network (NRN) by establishing spatial mapping and planning tools to identify existing and potential habitat for wildlife, and agreeing local priorities for enhancing biodiversity
- LNRS identify investment opportunities for nature locally rather than being the delivery mechanism for nature recovery
- All public bodies must have regard for any relevant LNRS

### Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

A legal mandate for a (minimum) 10% net gain in biodiversity associated with new developments. Developers must demonstrate this net gain in biodiversity for new developments from late 2023 onwards. The gains can be either on the development site or on an off-site location agreed upon with the local authority.

## Rural Funding relevant to Nature recovery

### Environmental Land Management (ELM)

ELM schemes replace previous Countryside Management Schemes. Aimed at landowners and farmers by providing financial support to make changes that have environmental benefits, via providing public money for delivering public goods. There are three schemes:

- **Sustainable Farming Incentive**
- Local Nature Recovery
- Landscape Recovery

[Environmental land management schemes: overview - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/topics/environmental-land-management)

### Spotlight on: Wilding

Wilding restores naturally functioning ecosystems at nature's pace. However, wilding does not always equate to abandonment. It can be far more nuanced, and much thought and planning may need to go into some sites which are being considered for a wilding project.

Wilding considerations within the High Weald AONB:

- Careful planning may be needed and may require expert guidance
- Most suited to small-scale wilding projects which help buffer other core habitats, provide connectivity across the landscape, but do not impact on land which is needed for agricultural or is being managed to enhance other habitats such as species rich grassland
- Agricultural wilding projects using livestock, preferably traditional breeds such as Sussex Red cattle
- Reintroductions of lost species such as beavers and pine martens
- Work with and enhance the existing medieval landscape character

## Nature Recovery Ambitions

*A graphic to illustrate ty best practice/ambitions for nature recovery. This will illustrate all the points listed in the boxes below.*



### Principles

- Structural diversity including messy margins
- Increased biodiversity
- Functional systems – quality hedges
- Buffering
- Bigger, better wildlife sites
- Connectivity
- Native species (plants)
- Messy boundary
- Species rich grassland

## Nature Recovery Priorities:

The priorities for delivering nature recovery within the High Weald AONB over the next five years are set out below. These priorities also deliver the largest gains towards nature, stack benefits for climate change and soil health, and conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the High Weald landscape by helping to deliver key objectives of the identified character components.

### Restoration of species rich grasslands

Species rich grasslands are our most threatened habitat in the High Weald. They are often undervalued, under recognised, and over or under managed, and as a consequence many are being lost to development, tree planting schemes and changes in land management such as the creation of conventional vineyards.

Fragmented remnants of species rich grasslands are found across the High Weald. They contain a diversity of 'fine' grasses and wildflower species and have a unique mix of species endemic to this landscape. They also hold important wildlife value. Species rich grasslands in the High Weald can be diverse in fungi, especially waxcaps, which generally indicate that a grassland and its soils have been undisturbed for a long time.

Delivering key objectives: [G4](#), [FH3](#), [PQ1](#), [PQ2](#)

### Wilder woodlands through Deer management

Over population of deer is having a significant impact on our woodlands. From grazing bark on mature trees, to leaving woodlands denuded of ground flora, as well as browsing coppiced woodlands, newly planted and naturally regenerated trees and shrubs. They also damage crops, eat grasslands set-aside for agricultural use, and cause hundreds of road accidents a year throughout the High Weald in collisions with vehicles.

The High Weald has a long association with wild deer, for example what we now know as the Ashdown Forest was originally a deer park 700 years ago, but their natural predators have long been extinct in England. There are now six species of deer found in the High Weald although only two are native: the red and roe deer. The deer populations have exploded in recent years.

Delivering key objectives: [W1](#), [W2](#)

### Hedge restoration

There has been a national loss of hedges and hedgerows over the last 100 years in Britain. The High Weald is no exception with 344 km of hedge lost since the 1800s in just eight parishes in the High Weald (AONB data). More recent loss is concerned with the loss of structure and condition of hedges.

Hedges and hedgerows (rows of trees) are distinctive features of the High Weald landscape. They border the multitude of small irregular fields and provide connectivity between parcels of woodland and species rich grasslands. Hedges provide multiple services including carbon capture, buffer rivers and streams from pollution, prevent flooding, improve soil health, and provide habitat for a variety of species.

Delivering key objectives: [G1](#), [G3](#), [G4](#), [FH2](#), [FH3](#), [W2](#), [PQ2](#)

### Messy boundary creation

Messy boundaries, which are made up of outgrown hedges, scrub and tall grasses are often undervalued as important buffers to habitats, and often deemed less valuable because they are seen as untidy.

Messy boundaries make good buffers by protecting the edges of habitats such as woodlands, and by preventing pollution and siltation in water courses. They also provide structural diversity between different habitats, and support wildlife by providing additional shelter, feeding, and breeding sites, as well as being valuable habitats in their own right with their own ecosystem and dependant species.

Delivering key objectives: [G3](#), [R2](#), [FH2](#)

### Quality of fresh water

Only around 11 % of the rivers and reservoirs tested across the High Weald AONB meet Good Ecological Status (EA), and even these all tested positive for priority hazardous substances. Other pollutants such as microplastics are not even yet being systematically monitored for.

The High Weald AONB has over 4,500 km of rivers and tributaries, and more than 13,000 ponds, that are home to a number of rare and protected plants and animals from many specialist invertebrates to fish and amphibians and iconic freshwater mammals such as otters. Freshwater ecosystems also provide vital services we rely on such as water for drinking and irrigation to climate regulation.

Delivering key objectives: [G1](#), [G3](#), [R2](#), [PQ2](#)

## Climate Crisis - Achieving net zero

The High Weald AONBs distinctive Atlantic climate is found nowhere else in the southeast of England. These cool and wet conditions which are found predominately in gill woodlands are a distinctive part of the natural beauty of the High Weald, however climate change threatens these Atlantic microclimates.

Predicted changes in the climate for the Southeast of England suggest hotter and drier summers, and warmer wetter winters, as well as an increase in extreme weather events, which will become more frequent, of longer duration and greater intensity. These changes pose a threat to the character of the High Weald landscape AONB, impacting both the cultural and natural heritage of this landscape. Increases in storm events and other weather extremes are likely to exacerbate erosion of the coastal cliffs at Hastings, see increases in tree loss from windthrow across the High Wealds wooded landscape, raise the risk of forest fires and escalate flooding of properties and infrastructure. The changes to our climate will alter the suit of species found in our woodlands, grasslands and heathlands, as some species struggle to survive whilst others move in. Some habitats found across the High Weald AONB are more sensitive to the climate crisis than others, such as rivers and streams, and other wetter habitats. Whilst other types of woodland and grassland are less sensitive to climate change<sup>1</sup>, however that does not mean they will not be affected, as the hotter and drier summers, and wetter winters are expected to impact all habitats in some capacity.

As a nationally protected landscape, the High Weald AONB's priority for climate mitigation is in nature-based solutions which simultaneously work to mitigate aspects of the climate crisis while restoring and enhancing naturally functioning systems such as natural flood management, traditionally managed woodlands and healthy soils.

The climate crisis will alternately affect all of the key components of natural beauty in the High Weald, whilst many will be able to support climate mitigation. From, increased pests and diseases in trees in woodlands, to carbon sequestration in trees and soils, changes from traditional agricultural, to land use that suit

warmer conditions, and regenerative farming practices which support carbon sequestration and have greater water holding capacities. This includes objectives to minimise the impact of shifting climate conditions.

### Supporting and Delivering Climate Mitigation

#### Local Authorities declaration of a Climate Emergency

Since 2019 local authorities nationally have been declaring climate emergencies and producing action plans to tackle the emergency. Most of the fifteen local authority partners to the High Weald AONB have produced plans and set net zero carbon targets.

#### Colchester Declaration (2021)

the National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty believes that 'climate change is the biggest threat to humanity and one of the greatest threats to biodiversity...' and that AONBs have a role to play in offering solutions to mitigate climate change.

The High Weald AONB already stores large amounts of carbon in its soils due to the undisturbed nature of many grasslands and ancient semi-natural woodlands, making a sizeable contribution to climate mitigation:

- Up to 26.8 million tons of carbon (0-150cm depth) is stored in High Weald soils.
- Woodland covers 28 % of the High Weald AONB, well above the national average, and as such the amount of carbon dioxide sequestered across this landscape is substantial, averaging 149,910 tons of carbon a year.<sup>1</sup>

## Climate Change Ambitions

*A graphic to illustrate the demonstrates best practice/ambitions. This will illustrate all the points listed in the boxes below.*



Example

The principles for climate resilience

- Nature based solutions -
- Nature flood management
- Woodlands managed properly
- Sustainable farming
- Trees and reduced temps
- Small scale local renewable projects
- Energy where it exists
- Modal shift – different types of bike lanes and reduced speed limits depending on the road type.

### Spotlight on: Tree Cover

Increasing tree cover is a nature-based solution to help mitigate the climate crisis through the storage of carbon dioxide. The High Weald already has the highest cover of woodland in England. However, increases in tree cover can be accommodated in the High Weald, through increased scrub habitat (managed), thickened hedgerows and in-field trees, ideally via natural regeneration. However, due to the High Wealds medieval fieldscape, large woodland creation schemes are unsuitable.

- Hedges can accommodate trees either directly planted or left to mature through natural regeneration
- Hedgerows can be planted specifically to mature as a line of trees rather than to be managed as a hedge
- Agroforestry, introducing trees to the farmed landscape, within fields – these trees also provide shelter for livestock
- Unmanaged fields and verges will naturally return to woodland through natural regeneration
- Urban tree planting within towns and villages throughout the High Weald
- Reinstating traditional woodland management such as coppicing where it has been lost is often more important than planting new woodlands

**Right tree, right place, right reason.**

## Climate crisis priorities

Whilst the High Weald AONB stores and sequesters large amounts of carbon dioxide, this in itself is not a replacement for continued work towards the net-zero emissions targets as set out by the local authorities. The focus for the High Weald should be on building a resilient landscape for future generations through nature-based solutions, modal shifts in transport and renewable energy solutions. The following priorities also deliver the largest gains, and conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the High Weald landscape by helping to deliver key objectives of the identified character components.

### Nature based solutions

Nature-based solutions are those solutions which provide mitigation to the climate crisis through the natural functioning of ecosystems, such as floodwater attenuation from floodplains and saltmarsh, carbon storage in soils and woody plants, the ability to soak away extreme precipitation in healthy soils and green spaces, and lower temperatures under tree canopies especially in urban and suburban areas. Nature-based solutions, if applied correctly also deliver in conjunction with benefits to nature recovery and soil health.

**Delivers key objectives:** [G1](#), [G2](#), [G3](#), [G4](#), [W1](#), [W2](#), [FH3](#), [LBE1](#), [PQ2](#)

### Modal shifts in transport

**Twenty-four percent of the UK greenhouse gas emissions come from transport, private car use is likely to be high within the High Weald due to the lack of public transport infrastructure compared to urban areas.**

Shifts away from car-centric thinking in planning and development, coupled with reductions in speed limits would allow people to move within the High Weald more sustainably and allow safe access for cyclists and pedestrians through pro-active non-car route planning. Additionally increased investment in charging points for electric cars across the High Weald will encourage increased use of electric vehicles.

**Delivers key objectives:** [G3](#), [R1](#), [DS1](#), [PQ2](#),

### Renewable energy

**Renewable energy harnesses other sources of energy that already exists in the natural world, such as wind, wave, and sunlight and converts it into useable forms of energy such as electricity. Renewable energy supplied 39.3 % of the UK's electricity in 2021, however this still only accounted for 6 % of the UK's total energy use in 2021 (ONS, 2022).**

The High Weald has been in part, shaped by harnessing natural sources of energy for the iron and wood industries, some dating back to pre-Roman times with the formation of hammer ponds and dams to power mills, forges, and windmills. Renewable energy in the High Weald can often be accommodated into the small-scale landscape via domestic or smaller projects, for example prioritising solar panels on roofs of existing development and brownfield land, (depending on visibility in the landscape) before considering solar fields, and by following the standards and guidance from Historic England for historic buildings.

**Delivers key objectives:** [G3](#), [LBE2](#)

## People and Access

The High Weald AONB is a respite from the highly developed southeast of England, spreading over four counties, with over one million people living within 5 km of the High Weald AONB, as well as accessible to those in London, Brighton and other cities in the Southeast. There is a wealth of countryside with public access across the High Weald which includes 2,570 km of Public Rights of Way, Country Parks at Hastings and Buchan, long distance trails such as the Cuckoo trail and the Forest Way, Forestry Commission woodlands and both council and eNGO run reserves like Crane Valley, Brede High Woods, Broadwater Warren, and St Leonard's Forest.

We are intimately connected to the natural world, and the importance of this connection is a growing area of research, especially within health and **wellbeing**. It is now readily accepted that exposure to nature and natural environments confers many benefits to human health. The benefit of accessing nature has advantages for all, at every age, socio-economic status, gender and ethnicity.

However, not everyone has equitably **access** to the natural environment, and without it, it is difficult to reap the most benefits from it. Access and inclusion to the widest diversity of people in natural environments covers everything from proximity of green spaces, disabilities which prevent access, absence of essential facilities and infrastructure, lack of transport to and from and the finances to access as well as provisioning access for future generations.

The **quality** of the natural environment that the public access is also important. There is growing evidence that the higher the levels of biodiversity (plants and animals) the greater the health and wellbeing benefits and accessing a range of different or diverse natural environments.

An **understanding** of biodiversity and the natural world affects our connection to it and how we interact with it. Understanding how rural environments are managed too, ensures their benefits extend well beyond their immediate area, as well as increasing environmental awareness and supports appreciation and perceptions of natural environment.

Peoples' opportunity to experience the natural beauty in the High Weald relies on equitable access. This may be access to experience tranquillity in woodlands, be able to afford to farm or work land within the High Weald, or to use the extensive network of public rights of way. This includes objectives to maintain routeways, experience rurality and tranquillity and to reconnect settlements to economic activities in the surround countryside.

## Supporting and Delivering People and Access

Landscapes Review (2019)

[DEFRA - Landscapes Review - Final Report 2019 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/421202/DEFRA_Landscapes_Review_Final_Report_2019.pdf)

Improving access to greenspace a new review for 2020

[Improving access to greenspace: 2020 review \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/421202/Improving_access_to_greenspace_2020_review.pdf)

HM Government: 25-year plan to improve the environment

[25-year-environment-plan.pdf \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/421202/25-year-environment-plan.pdf)

## People and Access Ambitions



# Example

The principles access and people illustrated in the above graphic:

- A variety of activities across the high weald
- Education on the environment and environmental issues
- Equitable access - gates paths,
- Appropriate interpretation boards
- Facilities at selected sites
- Downloadable info on getting into the HW
- Signage promoting HW AONB
- Waymarked trails and routes
- Well maintained paths and furniture

### Spotlight on: Woodlands and people

Woodlands offer a sense of place, and a link to our past which make them culturally and spiritually important as well as healthy environments to get immersed in. The High Weald AONB has the highest cover of woodland in England at 28 %, which is well above the average of 10 % for the rest of the country. Woodlands often hold a special place in people's hearts and can be awe inspiring places to visit. But research shows that woodlands are also especially good for our wellbeing. Because of their physicality they are often able to screen out noise and other less desirable aspects of the modern world, can take up large numbers of people without feeling crowded and can offer a wide range of activities better than other natural environments (Forestry Commission, 2005). The mental health benefits of woodlands are estimated to be worth around £141 million in England alone. This is thought to be because of a range of factors such as the reduction in noise pollution but a rise in natural sounds such as bird song, being physically active and lower air pollution levels (Saraev et al., 2020 (FC)). And, accessing woodlands has been shown to have a more positive association on children's cognitive and mental health compared to grassland and blue natural environments such as lakes and rivers (Maes et al, 2021).

## People and Access Priorities

The priorities for delivering People and Access within the High Weald AONB over the next five years are set out below.

Investment is required to enable the High Weald to be truly equitably accessible to the widest range of people, who want to visit. Although the High Weald AONB has a rich network of public rights of way, not all people are able to get to these, or use them. The following priorities will help support people to access the High Weald, and support a wide range of health and wellbeing benefits, and conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the High Weald landscape by helping to deliver key objectives of the Management Plan.

### Investment in new green spaces

The creation of new nature reserves and Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) sites for recreation within the High Weald which are close to where people live and have the infrastructure to support a range of access needs, and recreation opportunities such as cycle lanes, whilst ensuring infrastructure and activities are consistent with conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the High Weald and its quiet enjoyment.

**Delivering key objectives: LBE2, LBE3, PQ1, PQ2, PQ3**

### Public rights of way maintenance

Maintaining the extensive routeways that bisect the High Weald AONB, including the maintenance of footpaths, replacing stiles with gates, ensuring the working condition of paths, gates, bridges, benches, and other green space furniture. Signposts and other signage are visible and relevant and up-to-date.

**Delivering key objectives: R2, PQ1, PQ2, PQ3**

### Transport into the High Weald

Barriers to accessing the High Weald include economic, social, health and education. The High Weald borders ethnically diverse conurbations, and area of social deprivation. Additionally, the High Weald is not well served for rail travel, or buses outside of between town travel.

**Delivering key objectives: PQ3, LBE2**

### On site infrastructure

To have equitable access to the countryside and green spaces, a range of needs must be catered for, including disabled parking spaces, wheelchair/mobility scooter friendly paths and routes, rest points such as benches, surfaced paths which are maintained, interpretation boards, waymarked trails or routes, as well the maintenance of green space infrastructure. The quantum, siting and design of onsite infrastructure and furniture must be consistent with conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the High Weald.

**Delivering key objectives: LB3, PQ2, PQ3**

## Land use, Planning and Development in the HW AONB

Meeting the climate, biodiversity and inequality challenges of the next 20 years will require transformational change in the way that development is planned for and delivered in the High Weald AONB. As landscapes nationally designated for their outstanding natural beauty, AONBs should be leaders in sustainable planning and design. The challenge will be to provide much needed and genuinely affordable homes and workspaces for rural workers and local people, while restoring nature, growing healthy food and reducing carbon emissions. As the AONB continues to evolve to meet the needs of current and future generations, this must happen in a way that respects its landscape character, natural resources, and cultural heritage. There is an opportunity to integrate local development plans with broader land use strategies helping to provide a more holistic approach to securing a sustainable future for the High Weald AONB.

*image of compatible new development*

Research in 2022 shows that the building of new homes under a business-as-usual scenario will use up all of the country's cumulative carbon budget by 2050.

### Local plan policies and the AONB

Responsibility for planning in AONBs lies with the relevant local authority. The AONB Management Plan does not form part of the statutory development plan, but local planning authorities and neighbourhood planning bodies should take the AONB Management Plan into account when preparing local and neighbourhood plans. AONB Management Plans should also be material considerations for making decisions on planning applications within AONBs and their setting.

The 11 district and boroughs with land in the High Weald AONB each have local plans and strategies that contain policies specific to the AONB, as do many of the parishes that have a 'Made' Neighbourhood Plan. The waste, mineral and highway strategies prepared by the four county councils with land in the AONB may also have AONB specific policies.

As part of their shared ambition to coordinate policies across the AONB, High Weald partners commit to providing a representative with sufficient experience and seniority from each local authority to the Officers' Steering Group (OSG) which meets regularly during the year to build policy consensus and develop joint working initiatives.

### AONB 'setting'

The term 'setting' is used to refer to areas outside the AONB where development and other activities may affect land within an AONB. Its extent will vary depending upon the issues considered but some can be mapped, for example, the impact of development on views into and out of the AONB. Section 85 of the CROW Act 2000 requires public bodies to consider whether any activities outside the AONB may affect land in an AONB. Not all activities will be detrimental; conservation practices and economic activities outside the AONB can support the AONB's conservation purpose.

## National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and AONBs

National planning policy is set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The NPPF applies as a whole to AONBs as it does to non-designated areas. However, two paragraphs refer specifically to AONBs, paragraph 176 and 177<sup>6</sup>.

The NPPF and the accompanying Planning Practice Guidance form important material considerations with regard to development management and confirm that:

- **The scale and extent of development in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) should be limited.**<sup>7</sup>
- **The presumption in favour of sustainable development does not automatically apply (where the application of policies in the Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed, or where any adverse impacts would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the Framework taken as a whole) within the High Weald AONB**<sup>8</sup>.
- **There is a presumption that planning permission should be refused for major development in AONBs**<sup>9</sup>.
- **Policies for protecting AONBs may mean that it is not possible to meet objectively assessed needs for housing and other development in full**<sup>10</sup>.
- **AONBs are unlikely to be suitable areas for accommodating unmet needs arising from adjoining, non-designated, areas.**

Paragraph 176 of the NPPF states:

*'Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues. The conservation and enhancement of wildlife and cultural heritage are also important considerations in these areas, and should be given great weight in National Parks and the Broads. The scale and extent of development within all these designated areas should be limited, while development within their setting should be sensitively located and designed to avoid or minimise adverse impacts on the designated areas.'*

### **Planning Principle 1**

In order to demonstrate that consideration of local plans, site allocation proposals and planning applications are consistent with national policy, and in particular para 176, the High Weald Partnership recommends that proposals be accompanied by suitable assessment reports which

- specifically set out how proposals have been informed by the Management Plan and, where relevant, the HW Housing Design Guide,
- set out how any adverse impacts on the character and conservation purpose of the AONB, and on the specific components of character as set out in this Plan, including cumulative impacts, have been avoided or minimised in the proposals. LVIA reports, assessments of impact on scenic beauty, and Design & Access Statements are all useful tools in this regard.
- clearly inform planning decision-makers in considering the scale, extent, location and design of development, in accordance with para 176.

**Delivering key objectives: G2, G3, S1, S2, S3, R1, R2, W1, W2, W3, F1, F2, F3, F4, LBE2, LBE3, DS1, DS2, PQ2**

<sup>6</sup> NPPF 2021

<sup>7</sup> NPPF 2021 para 176

<sup>8</sup> NPPF 2021 para 11 (d) and its footnote 7

<sup>9</sup> NPPF 2012 para 177

<sup>10</sup> NPPF 2021 para 11 (b) (i)

## Major Development in the HW AONB

Paragraph 177 of the NPPF states:

*'When considering applications for development within National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, permission should be refused for major development other than in exceptional circumstances, and where it can be demonstrated that the development is in the public interest. Consideration of such applications should include an assessment of:*

- a) the need for the development, including in terms of any national considerations, and the impact of permitting it, or refusing it, upon the local economy;*
- b) the cost of, and scope for, developing outside the designated area, or meeting the need for it in some other way; and*
- c) any detrimental effect on the environment, the landscape and recreation opportunities and the extent to which they can be moderated.'*

Major development as referred to in paragraph 177 of the NPPF is not defined, but Footnote 60 of the NPPF explains:

*'For the purposes of paragraphs 176 and 177, whether a proposal is 'major development' is a matter for the decision maker, taking into account its nature, scale and setting, and whether it could have a significant adverse impact on the purposes for which the area has been designated or defined.'*

### **Planning Principle 2**

Noting that major development is a matter of planning judgement for the decision maker, the High Weald Partnership recommends that the following key indicators be used to suggest that a development is major in the context of the High Weald AONB:

- Where the nature or scale of the proposal is inconsistent with the small-scale patterning of the High Weald landscape (including the dispersed character of the historic settlement pattern, the scale of the 'host' settlement, and the location of the proposed development) or erodes the natural beauty for which it is designated.
- Where the proposal would have an adverse impact on the High Weald character of the surroundings in which it is set, in particular when considered against the defining components of character set out in the Management Plan.
- Where it has an adverse impact on the purposes of designation as set out in this Plan.

**Delivering key objectives: ALL, in particular S1 and PQ2**

### **Planning Principle 3**

In respect of the exceptional circumstances test for major development, the High Weald Partnership recommends that:

- the NPPF presumption that permission should be **refused** for major development other than in **exceptional circumstances** be recognised and given great weight in planning decisions
- under NPPF 177 (a), the impacts upon the local economy include regard to impacts on the agricultural capacity, and local land-based employment of the HW (as a component of natural beauty) that would be impacted by the proposal;
- under NPPF 177 (c), the impacts and detrimental effects are, inter alia, assessed robustly against the conservation Objectives set out in this Management Plan, and any other supporting guidance produced by the HW Partnership, and that any mitigation proposals are themselves compatible with the Management Plan's objectives

**Delivering key objectives: G2, G3, S1, S2, W1, FH1, FH2, FH3, LBE1, LBE2, DS2, PQ2, (in addition to statutory purpose of designation)**

## New Housing Development in the HW AONB

Development in the High Weald should lead by example. The High Weald Partnership recommends that development should be ‘landscape-led’ and consistent with the objectives set out in this Plan and expanded on in the **High Weald Housing Design Guide**<sup>11</sup>. The Guide sets out the urban design expectations for all new housing developments within the High Weald AONB, with the objective of achieving higher quality and landscape-led design that reflects intrinsic High Weald character, that steers away from generic or suburban layout and design approaches, and that is instead embedded with a true sense of place, without stifling innovation and creativity.



Landscape-led design means using landscape as a framework to understand the site and formulate a design response. The term landscape used here includes landscape history, physical character and perceived qualities, and socio-economic and ecological functioning all of which contribute to understanding a place. A design response includes issues such as site capacity, layout, form, scale and detailing as well as any landscaping and ecology plans which combine to make a place beautiful and distinctive, and integrate it into the surrounding AONB.

As well as providing a brief explanation of the High Weald AONB and its settlement character, the Design Guide format is intended to help structure the design process, with 10 Design Themes ranging from **Responding to Site & Landscape Context**, **Layout & Structuring the Site**, and **The Right Built Form**, to more detailed matters such as **Parking Strategies**, **Building Appearance**, and **Reinforcing Local Planting Character**. Each Design Theme contains detailed analysis and advice, illustrated with photographs and diagrams, and a summary checklist, with a particular emphasis on tailoring design approaches to support the overall character and identity of the High Weald. As such, it aligns with the advice in the NPPF (para 128) and in the National Design Guide advocating locally-based Design Guides and regarding their scope and purpose.

### **Planning Principle 4**

The High Weald Partnership recommends that

- the High Weald Housing Design Guide is used by developers and designers to create schemes which contribute positively to the character and natural beauty of the High Weald AONB, and by partners to inform planning policies, site allocations and development management decision-making.
- net zero should be the standard for all new housing development in the High Weald, contributing to the UK’s legally binding net zero targets and partner authorities own net zero policies.
- new development should contribute positively to nature recovery, ensuring that opportunities for biodiversity gains are maximised and the functioning of natural processes are protected.
- local plan polices prioritise alternative mechanisms to improve delivery and affordability while minimising land take, to help deliver housing within the AONB in a manner that complies with the NPPF and which can help conserve the character and beauty of the HW AONB. For instance, encouraging the subdivision of larger homes into smaller ones and the efficient utilisation of the existing building stock and brownfield sites, along with ensuring that energy-efficient new development makes most efficient use of land, whilst still having appropriate regard to retaining and incorporating landscape features.

**Delivering key objectives:** G2, G3, S1, S2, R1, R2, W1, W2, FH2, FH3, LEB3, DS1, PQ2

<sup>11</sup> [Insert weblink](#)

### **Historic built environment**

The historic environment is fundamental to the distinctive character, sense of place and natural beauty of AONBs<sup>12</sup>. The rich built heritage greatly informs the character of the HW AONB; historic hamlets and farmsteads are an intrinsic part of the distinct and picturesque landscape, with the rolling pastureland and small ancient woodlands of the countryside interspersed with the rich clay-tiled roofs of historic buildings. Along with the domestic building stock of farmhouses and cottages, building typologies reflect locally distinct historic agricultural practices, for example the distinctive brick roundels of the hop industry's oast-houses, fine timber-framed barns and modest brick cowsheds, dairies and outbuildings.

National planning policy places great importance on the conservation of these Heritage Assets (chapter 12 of the NPPF) which can be classified as 'designated' (i.e. those benefiting from statutory designation, such as Listed Buildings, Conservation Areas, and Scheduled Ancient Monuments), and 'non-designated' (other historic features and structures which contribute positively to the physical, historic and socio-cultural character of the area, and which warrant retention and interpretation, and which can be identified in 'Local Lists' (prepared by LPAs or via Neighbourhood Plans), or during the decision-making process.

#### **Planning Principle 5**

The High Weald Partnership recommends that appropriate regard is had to Heritage Assets, their historic interest and their settings, in the planning process; in planning policy and site allocations process, neighbourhood planning, and in decision-making, in order to conserve and enhance the character and natural beauty of the AONB

#### **Delivering key objectives: S3, PQ2**

### **Energy Efficiency and Historic Buildings**

To help meet net zero ambitions, the energy efficiency of historic buildings is an important consideration; Historic England recognise the urgent need for climate action and believe that England's existing buildings have an essential role to play in fighting climate change. Sustainability in building is not just associated with operational energy consumption, but also the embodied energy used in the construction of buildings, and to meet the carbon neutral targets we must recycle, reuse and responsibly adapt our existing historic buildings. Older buildings have survived because of their durability and adaptability, and continuing to adapt, upgrade, repair and maintain them so they remain useful and viable makes good social, economic and environmental sense.

It is important to recognise that retrofitting measures which may be suitable for modern (post-war) housing stock) can be damaging to older buildings, either through causing unacceptable damage to the character and appearance of historic buildings, or through causing damaging technical conflicts between existing traditional construction and changes to improve energy efficiency.

Historic England's extensive research in the complex area of understanding and improving the energy performance of historic buildings has led to their overarching guidance: Energy Efficiency and Historic Buildings: How to Improve Energy Efficiency, which sets out their holistic 'whole building approach' which can help in meeting the combined objectives of increasing energy efficiency and sustaining significance in heritage assets, while avoiding unintended consequences.

The 'whole building' approach recognises that the thermal efficiency of historic buildings can be greatly improved without compromising elements that contribute to their significance or character.

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<sup>12</sup> [Joint Statement on the Historic Environment in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty | Historic England](#)

To support this approach, Historic England have also produced a more detailed suite of guidance on the principles, risks, materials and methods of installing insulation and draught-proofing, and the introduction of Low and zero carbon technologies to historic buildings.

#### **Planning Principle 6**

The High Weald Partnership considers that energy efficiency strategies and decision-making affecting the historic built environment should follow best practice advice from Historic England, in order that energy conservation measures are balanced with conserving the historic environment that contributes to the natural beauty of the AONB.

**Delivering key objectives: G3, S3**

#### **Public Realm**

The historic public realm across the High Weald plays an important role in defining the special character of the AONB. Historic features such as locally distinctive paving, milestones, and historic fingerpost signs, along with red telephone kiosks and letterboxes, contribute positively to the character of the rural public realm. The materials, finishes and elements used within the public realm often make a significant contribution to an area's sense of place, and the retention and sensitive repair, and, where appropriate, reinstatement of such features is important in maintaining character.

Rural areas can also suffer suburbanisation through inappropriate creation of footways with raised kerbs, the loss of grass verges and excessive road signage and street lighting.

The public realm plays an important function in the quality of everyday life throughout the AONB, from the accessibility and convenience of bus stops, benches and litter bins, to the community activities and events enabled by quality public spaces.

Meanwhile considerable new public realm is created in new developments, which offers the opportunity to enhance the landscape character and ecological value of existing retained green infrastructure on-site or adjacent, as well as providing new positive planting. Within new developments, existing site features such as trees, hedgerows, ponds and streams should be retained as part of the public realm to embed a genuine local sense of place in new schemes, while new green spaces and habitats for wildlife should be maximised, with a range of native plantings. Further, green spaces within sites bring with them opportunities to enhance the locality through their management, drawing on local traditional land-management skills (e.g., coppicing) and supporting local industry.

#### **Planning Principle 7**

The High Weald Partnership recommends that

- Historic public realm features in the AONB are recognised as Heritage Assets, and should be retained in situ and repaired appropriately, in order to conserve their contribution to the natural beauty of the AONB
- Design choices for new public realm infrastructure, including paving, signage and lighting, have regard to the objectives of the Management Plan
- New public realm soft landscaping schemes are informed by the advice in the High Weald Housing Design Guide regarding creating multi-layered planting strategies of native trees, hedging plants and wildflowers, avoiding ubiquitous, suburbanising planting of ornamental ground-cover shrubs or locally non-native or invasive species.

**Delivering key objectives: S3, R1, PQ2, PQ3**

## High Weald Charter for residents and visitors

The following are actions that all residents, visitors and businesses can take to help care for this nationally-important landscape.

### **M Buy local products and services from farmers and woodland managers who actively manage their land to benefit the environment**

The landscape and wildlife value of the area's woodlands, hedges, meadows, heathlands and field margins are dependent on traditional management. Money invested in products and services that help support this management is money invested in conserving the AONB and its local economy.

### **M Manage your land for wildlife and maintain the rural nature of your property**

Fields, woodland, paddocks and gardens support valuable and threatened wildlife. Inappropriate materials and features, often associated with urban areas, are leading to the gradual loss of the AONB's valued rural feel.

### **M Help prevent the spread of invasive and harmful plant and animal species**

Introduced plant, animal and fish species spread rapidly in the High Weald countryside, competing with our native wildlife and leading to its loss.

### **M Use less water**

Demands for water lead to high levels of water extraction, damaging the wildlife of the AONB's streams, rivers and wet grasslands. Increased demand in future will create pressure for new reservoirs within the AONB.

### **M Reduce, reuse and recycle, and dispose of all litter responsibly**

Litter spoils enjoyment of the countryside for the majority of residents. Less rubbish means less pressure for landfill sites and incinerators in the AONB.

*97% people enjoy the High Weald countryside*

High Weald Public Survey 2018

**M Respect other users – follow the Countryside Code**

Through responsible behaviour we can all use and enjoy the countryside without damaging the enjoyment or livelihoods of others.

**M Slow down for people, horses and wildlife**

Traffic spoils enjoyment of the High Weald for 80 per cent of its residents. Speeding cars kill people, horses, badgers, deer and foxes, and ancient routeways and their rare plants are damaged by inconsiderate driving and parking.

**M Avoid using the car where possible and consider using renewable energy in your home**

Emissions from petrol and other non-renewable fossil fuels contribute to climate change and lead to degradation of valuable habitats such as sandrock and gradual loss of wildlife such as bluebells.

**M Take pride in the High Weald – promote its special features and places to family, friends and visitors**

Promoting what you find special about the High Weald is the best way of encouraging commitment and action by others to the area.

**M Have a say**

Your views can influence care of the area – use consultation processes operating at parish, district, county and AONB level to steer policy and action that affects the area.

**M Get involved – support local conservation organisations**

With your financial and practical support, local conservation organisations can take action to care for the area such as monitoring threatened wildlife, undertaking practical conservation tasks and lobbying government.

## Definition of terms used in the context of this plan

Aesthetic – Concerned with beauty, or the appreciation of beauty

Assart – Land enclosed from woodland often still with numerous trees on boundaries

Character – A distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements (or components) that makes an area different from other areas

Conservation – The preservation, protection or restoration of the landscape

Culture – The sum total of people’s beliefs, customs, social groupings, knowledge and technology, not inherited through biology

Dark skies – Where you can see starry skies and our own galaxy, the Milky Way

Field – An area of land, often enclosed, traditionally used for cultivation or the grazing of livestock

Field system – A group or complex of fields sharing a common character which appear to form a coherent whole (in the High Weald this usually results from the influence of topography and land use but also historic features)

Gill – A deep cleft or ravine, usually wooded and forming the course of a stream

Heritage Asset – defined in the NPPF as a building, monument, site, place, area or landscape identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, because of its heritage interest. It includes designated heritage assets and non-designated assets identified by the local planning authority (including local listing).

Historic Landscape Characterisation – Method of identification and interpretation of the varying historic character within an area looking beyond individual heritage asserts to an understanding of the whole landscape

Inned rivers – reclaimed often marshy land through draining and other engineering technics of the day

Key characteristics – Combinations of elements particularly important to character that help make that character distinctive

Landscape – An area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors

Natural beauty – For the High Weald AONB, natural beauty is defined by the Statement of Significance.

Natural assets – Biological assets, land and water areas with their ecosystems, subsoil assets and air

Net zero - Net zero means that any carbon emissions created are balanced (cancelled out) by taking the same amount out of the atmosphere. In 2019, the UK government became the first major economy to pass a net zero emissions law with a target that will require the UK to bring all greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050.

Regenerative agriculture – A system of farming principles and practices that increases biodiversity above and below the soils’ surface, restores soil health and rebuilds soil organic matter, improves watersheds, and enhances ecosystem services

Routeway – Any route between places across either land or water

Setting – The surroundings in which the AONB is experienced by people

Shaw – a narrow strip of woodland

Significance – What is special and valued about the AONB to this and future generations

Species-rich grassland – A grassland displaying a wide variety of wildflowers and grasses with the exact composition varying according to the dynamic interaction of factors such as management, drainage, history and soils

Sustainable land management – Farming and other land management activity that conserves the character of the AONB, enhances the diversity and biomass of characteristic wildlife, improves soil quality and the functioning of natural systems; and supports local livelihoods and social structure

Wooded pasture – The product of historic land management resulting in a typical vegetation structure of large, open-grown or high forest trees (often pollards) at various densities in a matrix of grazed grassland, heathland or woodland

Zero carbon      Zero carbon means that no carbon emissions are being produced from a product or service.

## Glossary

|             |   |
|-------------|---|
| HLC         | Historic Landscape Characterisation                   |
| JAC/HWJAC   | High Weald Joint Advisory Committee                   |
| NAAONB      | National Association for AONBs                        |
| NP & AC Act | National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 |
| RIGs        | Regionally Interesting Geological Sites               |
| SAC         | Special Areas of Conservation                         |
| SSSI        | Site of Special Scientific Interest                   |

## Disclaimer

Adoption of this management plan by partner authorities does not necessarily imply endorsement of the views and conclusions of documents identified in this Plan as 'Evidence and further reading'.

## Appendix x: AONB designation, policy and legal framework

### Purpose of designation

The primary purpose of AONB designation is to ‘conserve and enhance natural beauty’<sup>13</sup> but the architects of the 1949 Act recognised other underlying principles which were important aspects of the designations’ success. These included the need to maintain a ‘thriving community life’ with particular emphasis on farming and forestry, and the need to promote understanding and enjoyment of the area’s special qualities by people.

These subsidiary purposes – in effect, qualifications of the primary purpose – are those defined in the Countryside Commission statement 1991<sup>14</sup>, restated in 2006<sup>15</sup>. The basis for the wording of the subsidiary purposes can be found in the Countryside Act 1968 (section 37):

- In pursuing the primary purpose of designation, account should be taken of the needs of agriculture, forestry and other rural industries, and of the economic and social needs of local communities. Particular regard should be paid to promoting sustainable forms of social and economic development that in themselves conserve and enhance the environment.
- Recreation is not an objective of designation, but the demand for recreation should be met so far as this is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty and the needs of agriculture, forestry and other uses.

Although AONBs do not currently have the statutory second purpose of National Parks which is ‘to promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities [of the area] by the public’, the 1949 Act assumed that AONB’s would also fulfil this function and this intent is reflected in subsequent policy documents (ref) and the duty placed on AONB conservation boards by the CRoW Act 2000 which adopts the same language (ref).

### Responsibility for conservation and enhancement of AONBs: the legal framework

AONBs exist within a legal framework which has been progressively strengthened since the first AONBs came into existence after the Second World War.

- **The 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act** made provision for the designation of AONBs and National Parks. It provided AONBs with protection, under planning law, against inappropriate development and gave local authorities permissive powers to take action for ‘preserving and enhancing natural beauty’.
- **The Countryside Act 1968 (Section 37)** placed a responsibility on local authorities, statutory conservation bodies, and civil servants, in exercising their functions under the 1949 Act (as amended by subsequent legislation) to ‘have due regard to the needs of agriculture and forestry and to the economic and social interests of rural areas.’ Within AONBs this means a responsibility to acknowledge and, where appropriate, to promote farming, forestry and the rural economic and social context wherever this can be done without compromising the primary purpose of conserving natural beauty.
- **The Environment Act 1995** confirmed replacement of ‘preserve and enhance’ with ‘conserve and enhance’ in relation to the purpose of National Parks and duties of public bodies towards them.

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<sup>13</sup> Add reference

<sup>14</sup> Add reference

<sup>15</sup> Add reference

■ **The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW)** subsumed and strengthened the AONB provisions of the 1949 Act. It brought the primary purpose in line with that of National Parks, clarified the procedure for their designation, and created a firm legislative basis for their protection and management giving responsibility for their conservation and enhancement primarily to local authorities. In particular:

- Section 82 reaffirms the primary purpose of AONBs: to conserve and enhance natural beauty.
- Section 83 establishes the procedure for designating or revising the boundaries of an AONB, including Natural England's duty to consult with local authorities and to facilitate public engagement.
- Section 84 confirms the powers of a local authorities to take 'all such action as appears to them expedient' to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of an AONB, and sets consultation and advice on development planning and on public access on the same basis as National Parks in the 1949 Act.
- Section 85 places a statutory duty on all relevant authorities '...in exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect land [in an AONB] to have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty...'. 'Relevant authorities' include all public bodies (county, borough, district, parish and community councils, joint planning boards and other statutory committees); statutory undertakers (such as energy and water utilities, licensed telecommunications companies, nationalised companies such as Network Rail and other bodies established under statute responsible for railways, roads and canals); government ministers and civil servants. Activities and developments outside the boundaries of AONBs that have an impact within the designated area are also covered by the 'duty of regard'.
- Sections 86 to 88 allow for the establishment in an AONB of a Conservation Board to which the AONB functions of the local authority (including development planning) can be transferred. Conservation boards have the additional but secondary function of seeking to increase public understanding and enjoyment of the AONB's special qualities. They also have an obligation to 'seek to foster the economic and social well-being of local communities' in co-operation with local authorities and other public bodies.
- Sections 89 and 90 create a statutory duty on all AONB partnerships (local authorities and Conservation Boards) to prepare a management plan 'which formulates their policy for the management of their area of outstanding natural beauty and for the carrying out of their functions in relation to it', and thereafter to review adopted and published Plans at intervals of not more than five years. Where an AONB involves more than one local authority they are required to do this 'acting jointly'.
- Section 92 makes clear that the conservation of natural beauty includes the conservation of 'flora, fauna and geological and physiographical features.'

■ **The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (NERC):**

- Section 99 formally clarifies in law that the fact that an area consists of or includes land used for agriculture or woodlands, or as a park, or 'any other area whose flora, fauna or physiographical features are partly the product of human intervention in the landscape' does not prevent it from being treated, for legal purposes, 'as being an area of natural beauty (or of outstanding natural beauty).'
- Schedule 7 asserts that an AONB joint committee of two or more local authorities, or a conservation board, can constitute a 'designated body' for the performance of functions allocated to Defra.

## **The international context**

AONBs in England, Wales and Northern Ireland are part of the international family of protected areas. As cultural landscapes, produced through the interaction of humans with nature over time, they have a special significance (together with UK National Parks) being recognised by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) as ‘Category V – Protected Landscapes’. These offer a unique contribution to the conservation of biological diversity, particularly where conservation objectives need to be met over a large area with a range of ownership patterns and governance. They can act as models of sustainability, promoting traditional systems of management that support key species.

Category V protected landscapes are defined by IUCN as:

*‘A protected area where the interaction of people and nature over time has produced an area of distinct character with significant ecological, biological, cultural and scenic value: and where safeguarding the integrity of this interaction is vital to protecting and sustaining the area and its associated nature conservation and other values.’*

The Council of Europe Landscape Convention (2000) ratified by the UK government in 2006 provides a definition of landscape as ‘An area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.’ This is a rich concept that puts people at the heart of landscape (the commonplace and ‘degraded’ as well as the eminent) each of which has its own distinctive character and meaning to those who inhabit or visit it.

## **High Weald designation history (ref)**

The report of the first National Park Committee, set up in 1929, mentioned the wooded hill country of the High Weald, essentially Ashdown Forest, as an area requiring measures to protect its bird interest. A subsequent report in 1945, the Dower Report, included the ‘Forest Ridges (Horsham to Battle)’ in its list of ‘Other Amenity Areas not suggested as National Parks’. Dower had recognised that some areas might not be suitable for National Park status because of their size or lack of ‘wildness’ but they nonetheless required safeguarding for their ‘characteristic landscape beauty’. A follow-up report, the Hobhouse Report, in 1947 included the Forest Ridges in a list of 52 Conservation Areas (largely based on Dower’s ‘Other Amenity Areas...’) which, it proposed, should be designated for their high landscape quality, scientific interest and recreational value. It wasn’t until 1969, following coordinated landscape surveys by county and district councils, that the wider High Weald was put forward to the Countryside Commission for consideration as an AONB. Detailed work on the boundaries was then carried out and designation of the High Weald was confirmed in 1983.

### **Since the 1949 Act there has been continuous development in the policy and legislative context of AONBs, shaped by a number of key policy documents including:**

- Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty – A Policy Statement (Countryside Commission & Countryside Council for Wales, CCP356, 1991)
- Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty – A Guide for Members of Joint Advisory Committees (Countryside Commission & Countryside Council for Wales, CCP461, 1994)
- Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty: Providing for the future (Countryside Commission, CCWP 08, 1998)
- Protecting our finest countryside: Advice to Government (Countryside Commission, CCP352, 1998)
- Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plans: A Guide (Countryside Agency, CA23, 2001)
- Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. A Guide for AONB partnership members (Countryside Agency, CA24, 2001)
- Guidance for the Review of AONB Management Plans (Countryside Agency, CA221, 2006)
- Guidance for assessing landscapes for designation as National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in England (Natural England, 2011)

## Appendix X: Documents prepared in support of this Plan

[tbc]

- AONB Management Plan Review 2019: Engagement and Consultation Report, High Weald Joint Advisory Committee
- AONB Management Plan Review 2019: Strategic Environmental Assessment, Joint Advisory Committee
- AONB Management Plan Review 2019: Habitats Regulations Assessment, Joint Advisory Committee
- AONB Management Plan Review 2019: Equality Impact Assessment Screening Report, Joint Advisory Committee
- AONB Management Plan Review 2019: Health Impact Assessment Screening Report, Joint Advisory Committee
- Monitoring the Condition of the AONB and the Performance of the AONB Management Plan 2014 – 2019, High Weald Joint Advisory Committee, August 2017
- AONB Management Plan Review 2019: Context and Issues, High Weald Joint Advisory Committee, March 2017.

All documents prepared in support of this Plan can be found at [\(add weblink\)](#)

## Appendix X: A brief history of the High Weald

*'Unless a man understands the Weald, he cannot write about the beginnings of England...'*

**Hilaire Belloc**

Termed Anderida silva by the Romans, it was referred to as Andredesleah ('leah' suggesting wood pasture)<sup>3</sup> in the Anglo- Saxon Chronicle, and later as Andredesweald (the high forest of Andred) shortened to Weald in Saxon charters (sometimes associated with weald-bera or den-bera – a right to feed swine in the forest)<sup>4</sup>. The Weald is one of the longest lasting regional names in Britain.

### Prehistory

It is possible that the system of moving livestock into seasonal grazing areas in the Weald from the surrounding downs and vales originated in the Neolithic period, or even earlier. Mesolithic and Palaeolithic flint scatters are concentrated close to springs and on the drier ridgetops. There is significant evidence for communities using and clearing woodland, cultivating land and for the formation of heathland by the Bronze Age.

Iron Age ironworks are concentrated around the northern and eastern fringes of the High Weald, enabling the export of iron via tributaries of the River Thames and the Brede and Rother. The location of routeways close to Iron Age forts and camps suggest a degree of control and supervision over trade in livestock and also the export of iron and other products out of the Weald.

### The Roman period (AD 43-420)

The High Weald was the premier iron producing district in Britannia during the Roman occupation, with up to 2,000 bloomeries scattered across the area and nine industrial scale sites. Iron production, which peaked in the 2nd and first half of the 3rd centuries AD, was located within 3.5km of known Roman roads and concentrated to the east, where it was managed as an Imperial estate by the Roman Fleet (the Classis Britannica). Here it had good access to the navigable waterways of the Brede and Rother, and to major highways linking to both the London market and the wealthy villas and cornlands of the South Downs.

The Roman roads that intersect the High Weald, and which enabled the movement of military force and the extraction of iron, broadly correspond in their alignment with earlier routeways and in some cases intersect them. Unlike most routeways which avoid boggy ground, Roman roads drove across the landscape and required paved fording points where they crossed rivers and streams. Recorded Roman villas are very rare in the High Weald because the control of the Roman Fleet inhibited the development of private estates.

|                           |                      |
|---------------------------|----------------------|
| Prehistory<br><br>Image 1 | Roman<br><br>Image 2 |
|---------------------------|----------------------|

### The Saxon period (420-1066)

Routeways provided the framework for territorial units – called ‘lathes’ in Kent and Surrey, and ‘rapes’ in Sussex – that developed after the Roman period and up to the adoption of counties and then the parish system from the 8th and 9th centuries. These routeways connected parent manors in surrounding arable landscapes to the woodland resources and rich pastures of the Weald, often at distances of 20 or 30 miles apart. These included the temporary swine pastures or ‘dens’ (concentrated in Kent) where pigs and sometimes cattle and sheep were herded to feed on acorns and beech mast in the autumn.

The surveyors for Domesday Book (1086-7) used pigs as a way of calculating the value and extent of woodland. The right of tenants to graze pigs in wood pasture areas (called ‘pannage’) developed from the 9th century and continued into the 14th and 15th centuries. Other areas along routeways were used as seasonal pastures or stopping-off points, including ‘folds’ and areas which became greens and forstals within farming settlements.

### The Medieval period (1066-1540)

The practice of temporary grazing from outlying manors had declined by the 11th century, probably due to the gradual break-up of the large estates by the Saxon kings through granting of lands to secular and ecclesiastical holders. Between the 9th and 12th centuries, seasonal pastures had developed into individual and clustered groups of farmsteads as more land was enclosed for growing crops and pasturing cattle. By the 14th century the High Weald’s characteristic dispersed settlement pattern was well established, with the land mostly worked from individual family farms set in anciently-enclosed fields for managing crops and pasturing animals carved out of woodland and wood pasture.

The numbers of permanent farmsteads increased until the 14th century, requiring an increasingly dense network of routeways to link them and provide access to fields and common land. A number of new farms were created out of the woodland from the 11th century. By the late 13th century, the Wealden landscape comprised a scattering of gentry properties intermingled with a mass of small peasant holdings, many of which developed – as a result of amalgamation – in the 14th and 15th centuries into larger freehold properties. Yards in farmsteads were used to manage pigs, which continued as an important part of the local farming economy, and cattle, which continued to be driven out of the area on the hoof for finishing. Cattle became an increasingly important export between the 14th and 18th centuries, and most locally produced corn was produced as animal feed and for home consumption rather than as an export crop.

Villages, such as Goudhurst, Burwash (planned along a ridgeway), Wadhurst and Ticehurst, with marketplaces for trading local products (iron, livestock, cattle hides and woodland products) developed in the 13th century along and at the meeting point of routeways. Fine Medieval houses attest to their relative wealth and their occupants often combined farming with trade.

For five hundred years the rivers of the Eastern High Weald were an important link for trade and war between the wooded interior and the seaports of Winchelsea and Rye, which after the storms of 1285 and in the early 14th century gradually silted. Many routeways connected the Weald to navigable rivers and ports. Timber and firewood, mostly bound for France and Flanders, were the major exports from Kent and Sussex ports through to the 16th century, and the relative ease of export stimulated the woodland industry in this part of the Weald. Up to the late 15th century the River Rother was navigable to Reading Street, Smallhythe and Newenden, with Henry V’s 1000-ton ship, The Jesus, built at Smallhythe in 1414. The last Royal Commission at Smallhythe was Henry VIII’s great ship, the 300-ton Great Gallyon, ordered in 1546. Silt and the great storm of 1636 saw the end of the shipbuilding industry, but wooden barges were still moving timber and goods from the interior of the High Weald until the end of the 19th century when the last barge, Primrose, was built.

### The post-Medieval period (1540-1750)

Some colonisation of the woodland continued up to the 17th century, by which time there was a considerable growth in population linked to the growth of industries such as broadcloth manufacture and iron founding. More houses were built along routeways, enclosing areas of common land along them. In some areas as many as a quarter of families were housed in areas enclosed from wayside common.

The Weald again became a centre of British iron making from the early 16th century, following the successful import of blast furnace technology from the Low Countries in the 1490s, concentrated in the eastern and central Weald but with significant expansion to the north and west. Interconnecting chains of leats, dams and hammer ponds were constructed to provide sufficient head of water for the forges, and wealthy ironmasters built notable mansions such as Gravetye and Great Shoemiths. The industry declined in the late 17th and 18th centuries as a result of cheaper imports, the rising price of fuel, the successful development of the use of coke, and the loss of naval contracts to provide cannon.

Most of the wool for dyeing was imported from Romney Marsh into the main cloth manufacturing areas around Cranbrook and Tenterden. Cloth was then transported overland by packhorse and more rarely wheeled transport to dealers in London. Smaller items including ironwork such as horseshoes and glass were also exported in this way. By the end of the 17th century many clothiers and ironmasters were moving into cattle rearing in response to increasing demand for beef. The hop industry developed on an industrial scale from this period, supplying maltings and breweries and stimulating the management of woodlands and shaws for fuel, and the growing of chestnut for hop poles.

| Image 1 Medieval | Image 2 post medieval |
|------------------|-----------------------|
|                  |                       |

### The Industrial Revolution (1750-1914)

Over this period the Weald shifted from a diverse industrial and farming economy to one that was more linked to the development of capital in London and the coastal resorts, and the enjoyment of its landscape by new residents and visitors.

Social commentators Arthur Young, William Cobbet and others noted the ornamental landscapes of the new gentry and admired the area's wayside cottages with their gardens. As droving of livestock continued to decline there was further enclosure of roadside commons and greens for new houses (called 'purperture' settlement), mostly driven by the large numbers of smallholders who were bereft of employment on account of the decline in the cloth and iron industries.

Most turnpikes in the High Weald were built on pre-existing highways between the 1730s and 1770s. They were of particular importance in easing the export of timber and corn, and in supplying goods and services for the burgeoning south coast resorts such as Brighton and Hastings. Although many turnpike trusts had closed down by the 1880s, they stimulated property transactions and enabled significant amounts of residential development. These were concentrated in the areas south of Tunbridge Wells and around the Brighton-London road to the west. From the 18th century, a trend in 'pleasure farms' saw some farmsteads converted into residential use with routeways diverted and made into private drives, which approached through new ornamental landscapes.

Farmland was reorganised with enlarged fields, existing or straightened hedgerows dotted with trees. Farmsteads were also reorganised often around courtyards to help produce more manure for fields yielding more corn for export.

The railway network intensified these developments, often increasing the demand for improved roads to connect new housing to railway stations. Additional cattle yards were built around railway stations (for example at Hawkhurst and Paddock Wood) and rail was increasingly used for exporting livestock, hops and milk. Railways, and at the end of this period motor cars and buses, also enabled tourism accompanied by guides and books such as Arthur Beckett's *The Wonderful Weald* (1911).

The last hundred years, 1914 to the present

The increased appreciation of the High Weald's historic landscape and heritage has been accompanied by the decline of traditional agriculture, cattle droving (cattle were still being driven to markets in the 1930s) and woodland management. Car ownership increased dramatically, leading to the further decoupling of settlement from land use. The building of bungalows and renovation of historic houses became common, and the areas around the Weald experienced a substantial and disproportionate increase in housing compared to the rest of England in the inter-war period.

Until the 1950s the Weald changed at a slower pace than most other regions in Britain. For 700 years prior to this, agriculture and the pattern of fields, hedges and surrounding woodland remained relatively unaltered. Since then, farming and forestry, always difficult on the poor soils, have been pushed further to the economic margins. This decline in mixed farming and woodland management is a major threat to the long-term survival of the High Weald's distinctive landscape character.

|                               |                            |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Image 1 Industrial revolution | Image 2 last hundred years |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------|

1. Edited and adapted from Harris, R.B. (2004). *Making of the High Weald*, & Lake, J. (2018). *Routeways of the High Weald*. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
2. Della Hooke, 'The Woodland Landscape of Medieval England' in N.J Higham and Martin J Ryan, *Place-Names, Language and the Anglo-Saxon Landscape*, 2011, p.150.
3. Robert Furley (1871). *A History of the Weald of Kent*, p.88.

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## **Agenda Item: 9**

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

**Date:** 22 March 2023

**Title of Report:** Revenue Budget 2023/24

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

**Purpose of Report:** To approve the Revenue Budget 2023/24

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### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Joint Advisory Committee is recommended to:

1. thank local authorities for increasing their contributions to the High Weald AONB Partnership in 2023/24
  2. approve the revenue budget for 2023/24
  3. note that the review of local authority contributions will continue in 2023/24 as part of the process of agreeing the Service Level Agreement 2024-2029.
- 

### **1. BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 This report sets out the budget for 2023/24 following a consultation approved by the committee at its last meeting of 23 November 2022.
- 1.2 The budget 2023/24 reflects the budget review undertaken in 2022/23.

### **2. FINANCIAL APPRAISAL**

- 2.1 Appendix A presents the forecast out-turn for 2022/23, the budget for 2023/24 and an indicative budget for 2024/25. Appendix B summarises the project budgets. Appendix C presents an indicative 5-year budget.
- 2.2 The Department for Food, Environment and Rural Affairs (Defra) contribution for 2023/24 has been confirmed at £318,130.
- 2.3 The allocation of £270,600 equivalent to 85.1% of the Defra single pot contribution, to core activities, and other income of £6,000 will achieve a balanced budget for 2023/24.

### **3. BUDGET 2022/23**

- 3.1 The High Weald core budget is forecast to have a surplus of £6,300 in 2022/23. The surplus arises from savings due to vacant roles: Senior Adviser (Planning and Design) and Land Management Project Officer. The forecast reserve at 31 March 2023 is £229,600. The forecast reserve at 31 March 2024 is £229,600.

### **4. BUDGET 2023/24**

#### Core Budget – Expenditure

- 4.1 The budget for 2023/24 is presented in Appendix A. It is based on the 2022/23 figures with inflation at the ESCC applied rate of 4% for salaries and 3% for other costs. The budget allows for:
- (i) Staff costs: a budget for a core team of 5.8FTE staff which includes any 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) provides a flexible 'single pot' contribution for core and projects from a dedicated protected landscape budget.
- 4.3 Defra have confirmed the funding settlement for 2022/23 as £318,130. The contribution is standstill figure with the grant uplift of £40,667 in 2022/23 maintained.
- 4.4 Defra's total contribution for 2023/24 is shown in appendix A. It shows the allocation of £318,130 contribution with £270,600 to Core and £47,530 to Projects.

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

- 4.7 The levels of support from each authority are shown in Appendix A.

- 4.8 Nine authorities have increased their contributions as requested, three authorities have increased their contribution by an alternative amount, and three authorities are unable to increase their contribution but will review as part of the process of agreeing the Service Level Agreement 2024-2029.

### **Self-funding projects**

- 4.9 JAC expenditure on self-funding projects is presented at Appendix B and is estimated to be £1,350,100 in 2023/24.
- 4.10 The project budget reflects the evolution of the Partnership's services. The Partnership is now operating three significant grant programmes: the Farming in Protected Landscapes Grant Programme (supported by 1.6FTE); Sussex Lund and the National Grid Landscape Enhancement Initiative.
- 4.11 The Community Outreach programme includes High Weald Heroes (supported by an 0.6 FTE), High Weald Walks Festival and the Access and Recreation project. The Land Management programme includes the Deer Initiative project (supported by an 0.6 FTE) and the Cuckmere and Coombe Slow the Flow project (supported by 1 FTE). A sum of £47,530 has been allocated to Projects from the Defra single pot contribution.
- 4.12 Appendix B indicates the contributions from local authority partners to Partnership-led management plan delivery.
- 4.13 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.

## **5. FINANCIAL ISSUES 2024/25 AND BEYOND**

- 5.1 A five-year budget projection (Appendix C) suggests a balanced budget can be achieved without use of the Partnership's reserves. It assumes that:
- (i) inflationary pressure beyond 2023/24 will reduce on all costs from current levels to 3% or below.
  - (ii) that local authorities can maintain their contributions at 2023/24 levels with an annual inflationary increase
  - (iii) an increasing proportion of the Defra grant is allocated to the core budget each year
  - (iv) additional local authority contributions are achieved through the process of agreeing the Service Level Agreement 2024-2029.

### Reserves

- 5.2 There is a need to hold a Redundancy and HR reserve that allows for:
- (i) Redundancy costs

- (ii) Re-instatement of budgets for full time core posts to enable future recruitment
- (iii) Post regradings if required to enable retention and recruitment and service delivery
- (iv) Temporary financing of project staff where there is a break between externally funded contracts and it would be prudent to retain staff during this period
- (v) Any increases to staff on-costs, for example national insurance and pension
- (vi) Meeting budget deficits arising from any unavoidable reductions in individual local authority contributions within an SLA period.

5.3 A sum of £175,000 is required for these purposes.

5.4 The reserve balance of £54,600 allows for:

- (i) Cost increases that exceed inflationary assumptions that can't be absorbed by savings
- (ii) Occasional and planned one-off core costs that are not included within the budget, for example printing the management plan, IT investment
- (iii) Unplanned costs, for example additional costs arising from changes to Government or East Sussex County Council policy.

#### Service Level Agreement

5.5 The AONB Partnership's services are evolving within a challenging context. A review of the service, and the budget underpinning that service, will be ongoing as part of renewal of the Partnership's Service Level Agreement.

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

6.1 The 2023/24 core budget is a balanced budget.

6.2 The five-year budget projection suggests a longer term balanced budget can be achieved with ongoing support from local authority partners.

6.3 These conclusions form the basis of the report recommendations.



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

| <u>2021/22</u> |   | <u>2022/23</u> |                 | <u>2023/24</u>  |               |               |               |                 | <u>2024/25</u> |
|----------------|---|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|-----------------|----------------|
| <u>Outturn</u> | <u>Core Budget</u>  | <u>Budget</u>  | <u>Forecast</u> | <u>Original</u> | <u>Budget</u> |               |               | <u>Original</u> |                |
| £'000          |   | £'000          | £'000           | £'000           | Inflation     | Pressures     | Other         | Budget          |                |
|                | <u>Expenditure</u>  |                |                 |                 | £'000         | £'000         | £'000         | £'000           |                |
| 230.3          | Staff costs   | 264.3          | 258.2           | 264.3           | 18.7          | 30.5          | 0.9           | 314.4           | 323.8          |
| 51.1           | Accommodation/office equipment                              | 34.3           | 34.2            | 34.3            | 1.0           | 0.0           | 0.0           | 35.3            | 36.4           |
| 5.6            | Partnership running costs                                   | 6.8            | 9.2             | 6.8             | 0.2           | 0.0           | 0.0           | 7.0             | 7.2            |
| 31.7           | Support services  | 31.7           | 31.7            | 31.7            | 1.0           | 0.0           | 0.0           | 32.7            | 33.7           |
| <b>318.8</b>   | <b>Total Core Expenditure</b>                               | <b>337.1</b>   | <b>333.3</b>    | <b>337.1</b>    | <b>20.9</b>   | <b>30.5</b>   | <b>0.9</b>    | <b>389.4</b>    | <b>401.1</b>   |
|                | <u>Income</u>   |                |                 |                 |               |               |               |                 |                |
| (232.5)        | Defra   | (232.5)        | (249.9)         | (232.5)         | 0.0           | (20.4)        | (17.7)        | (270.6)         | (270.6)        |
| (22.4)         | East Sussex County Council                                  | (22.4)         | (22.4)          | (22.4)          | (5.0)         | 0.0           | 0.0           | (27.4)          | (28.2)         |
| (9.0)          | Kent County Council   | (9.0)          | (9.0)           | (9.0)           | (5.0)         | 0.0           | 0.0           | (14.0)          | (14.4)         |
| (9.3)          | West Sussex County Council                                  | (9.3)          | (9.3)           | (9.3)           | (5.0)         | 0.0           | 0.0           | (14.3)          | (14.7)         |
| (2.9)          | Surrey County Council                                       | (2.9)          | (2.9)           | (2.9)           | (5.0)         | 4.9           | 0.0           | (3.0)           | (3.1)          |
| (7.2)          | Wealden District  | (7.2)          | (7.2)           | (7.2)           | (2.5)         | 0.0           | 0.0           | (9.7)           | (10.0)         |
| (7.2)          | Rother District Council                                     | (7.2)          | (7.2)           | (7.2)           | (2.5)         | 0.0           | 0.0           | (9.7)           | (10.0)         |
| (5.6)          | Mid Sussex District Council                                 | (5.6)          | (5.6)           | (5.6)           | (2.5)         | 0.0           | 0.0           | (8.1)           | (8.3)          |
| (6.7)          | Tunbridge Wells Borough Council                             | (6.7)          | (6.7)           | (6.7)           | (2.5)         | 2.5           | 0.0           | (6.7)           | (9.4)          |
| (4.7)          | Horsham District Council                                    | (4.7)          | (4.7)           | (4.7)           | (2.5)         | 2.2           | 0.0           | (5.0)           | (5.2)          |
| (3.6)          | Sevenoaks District Council                                  | (3.6)          | (3.6)           | (3.6)           | (2.5)         | 0.0           | 0.0           | (6.1)           | (6.3)          |
| (0.8)          | Ashford Borough Council                                     | (0.8)          | (0.8)           | (0.8)           | (2.5)         | 2.5           | 0.0           | (0.8)           | (2.8)          |
| (1.5)          | Hastings Borough Council                                    | (1.5)          | (1.5)           | (1.5)           | (2.5)         | 0.0           | 0.0           | (4.0)           | (4.1)          |
| (2.2)          | Tandridge District Council                                  | (2.2)          | (2.2)           | (2.2)           | (2.5)         | 2.5           | 0.0           | (2.2)           | (3.5)          |
| (0.3)          | Crawley Borough Council                                     | (0.3)          | (0.3)           | (0.3)           | (2.5)         | 2.5           | 0.0           | (0.3)           | (1.6)          |
| (0.3)          | Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council                       | (0.3)          | (0.3)           | (0.3)           | (2.5)         | 1.3           | 0.0           | (1.5)           | (1.6)          |
| (14.7)         | Other income  | (9.8)          | (6.0)           | (6.0)           | 0.0           | 0.0           | 0.0           | (6.0)           | (7.3)          |
| <b>(330.9)</b> | <b>Total Core Income</b>                                    | <b>(326.0)</b> | <b>(339.6)</b>  | <b>(322.2)</b>  | <b>(47.5)</b> | <b>(2.0)</b>  | <b>(17.7)</b> | <b>(389.4)</b>  | <b>(401.1)</b> |
| 12.1           | Surplus/(deficit) transfer to/(from) reserves               | (11.1)         | 6.3             | (14.9)          | 26.6          | (28.5)        | 16.8          | 0.0             | 0.0            |
| <b>0.0</b>     | <b>Net Core Budget</b>                                      | <b>0.0</b>     | <b>0.0</b>      | <b>0.0</b>      | <b>0.0</b>    | <b>0.0</b>    | <b>0.0</b>    | <b>0.0</b>      | <b>0.0</b>     |
|                | <u>Self Funding Projects</u>                                |                |                 |                 |               |               |               |                 |                |
|                | See Appendix C for detail                                   |                |                 |                 |               |               |               |                 |                |
| 588.3          | JAC expenditure on self-funded projects                     | 1,101.1        | 1,040.2         | 1,350.1         |               |               |               | 1,350.1         | 510.8          |
| (72.8)         | Defra contribution to self-funded projects (Excluding FiPL) | (45.0)         | (68.3)          | (47.5)          |               |               |               | (47.5)          | (66.6)         |
| (163.5)        | Defra contribution to FiPL Project                          | (709.8)        | (570.4)         | (999.3)         |               |               |               | (999.3)         | 0.0            |
| (42.6)         | Local authorities contributions                             | (30.2)         | 0.0             | (42.3)          |               |               |               | (42.3)          | (74.8)         |
| (309.5)        | Other contributions to self-funded projects                 | (316.1)        | (401.5)         | (261.0)         |               |               |               | (261.0)         | (369.4)        |
| <b>(0.0)</b>   | <b>Net Self-Funded Project Budget</b>                       | <b>(0.0)</b>   | <b>(0.0)</b>    | <b>0.0</b>      | <b>0.0</b>    | <b>0.0</b>    | <b>0.0</b>    | <b>0.0</b>      | <b>0.0</b>     |
|                | <u>Total High Weald JAC</u>                                 |                |                 |                 |               |               |               |                 |                |
| 907.1          | Total core and project expenditure                          | 1,438.2        | 1,373.4         | 1,687.2         | 20.9          | 30.5          | 0.9           | 1,739.5         | 911.9          |
| (907.1)        | Total core and project income                               | (1,427.1)      | (1,379.8)       | (1,672.3)       | (47.5)        | (2.0)         | (17.7)        | (1,739.5)       | (911.9)        |
| <b>(0.0)</b>   | <b>Total High Weald JAC Budget</b>                          | <b>(11.1)</b>  | <b>6.4</b>      | <b>(14.9)</b>   | <b>26.6</b>   | <b>(28.5)</b> | <b>16.8</b>   | <b>0.0</b>      | <b>0.0</b>     |

| <u>Defra Funding</u>               | <u>2022/23</u> | <u>2023/24</u>   |
|------------------------------------|----------------|------------------|
|                                    | £000           | £000             |
| Defra funding on core budget       | (232.5)        | (270.6)          |
| Defra funding on projects budget   | (45.0)         | (47.5)           |
| Defra contribution to FiPL Project | (709.8)        | (999.3)          |
| <b>Total Defra Funding</b>         | <b>(987.3)</b> | <b>(1,317.4)</b> |

| <u>Reserves</u>                     | <u>£000</u> |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|
| Reserves at 31 March 2022           | 223.3       |
| Transfer to/(from) reserves 2022/23 | 6.3         |
| Reserves at 31 March 2023           | 229.6       |
| Transfer to/(from) reserves 2023/24 | 0.0         |
| Reserves at 31 March 2024           | 229.6       |
| Transfer to/(from) reserves 2024/25 | 0.0         |
| Reserves at 31 March 2025           | 229.6       |

**HIGH WEALD AONB JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

**SELF FUNDING PROJECTS OUTTURN for 2022/23, BUDGET, FORECAST for 2023/24 & INDICATIVE BUDGET 2024/25**

Appendix B

| 2021/22<br>Outturn<br>£'000 |  | Budget 2022/23 |                  |              | Forecast 2022/23 |                  |              | Indicative Budget 2023/24 |                  |              | Indicative Budget 2024/25 |                 |              |
|-----------------------------|--|----------------|------------------|--------------|------------------|------------------|--------------|---------------------------|------------------|--------------|---------------------------|-----------------|--------------|
|                             |  | Exp<br>£'000   | Income<br>£'000  | Net<br>£'000 | Exp<br>£'000     | Income<br>£'000  | Net<br>£'000 | Exp<br>£'000              | Income<br>£'000  | Net<br>£'000 | Exp<br>£'000              | Income<br>£'000 | Net<br>£'000 |
|                             | <b>1 Community Outreach</b>                            |                |                  |              |                  |                  |              |                           |                  |              |                           |                 |              |
| 0.0                         | JAC expenditure  | 9.4            |                  |              | 0.4              |                  |              | 20.8                      |                  |              | 21.3                      |                 |              |
| 0.0                         | Defra  |                | (8.5)            |              |                  | (0.4)            |              |                           | (14.0)           |              |                           | (13.5)          |              |
| 0.0                         | Local authorities                                      |                | 0.0              |              |                  | 0.0              |              |                           | (6.0)            |              |                           | (7.0)           |              |
| 0.0                         | Other  |                | (0.9)            |              |                  | 0.0              |              |                           | (0.8)            |              |                           | (0.8)           |              |
| 0.0                         | <b>Total Community Outreach</b>                        |                |                  | 0.0          |                  | 0.0              |              |                           | (0.0)            |              |                           |                 | 0.0          |
|                             | <b>High Weald Heroes</b>                               |                |                  |              |                  |                  |              |                           |                  |              |                           |                 |              |
| 26.9                        | JAC expenditure  | 26.7           |                  |              | 27.4             |                  |              | 28.9                      |                  |              | 29.7                      |                 |              |
| (25.9)                      | Defra  |                | (13.4)           |              |                  | (27.4)           |              |                           | (14.5)           |              |                           | (22.0)          |              |
| (43.9)                      | Local authorities                                      |                | (13.3)           |              |                  | 0.0              |              |                           | (14.4)           |              |                           | (7.7)           |              |
| 42.9                        | Other  |                | 0.0              |              |                  | 0.0              |              |                           | 0.0              |              |                           | 0.0             |              |
| 0.0                         | <b>Total High Weald Heroes</b>                         |                |                  | 0.0          |                  | (0.0)            |              |                           | 0.0              |              |                           |                 | 0.0          |
|                             | <b>2 Management Plan Evidence and Guidance</b>         |                |                  |              |                  |                  |              |                           |                  |              |                           |                 |              |
| 18.3                        | JAC expenditure  | 12.0           |                  |              | 8.2              |                  |              | 25.0                      |                  |              | 25.0                      |                 |              |
| (18.3)                      | Defra  |                | (12.0)           |              |                  | (8.2)            |              |                           | (12.0)           |              |                           | (12.0)          |              |
| 0.0                         | Other  |                | 0.0              |              |                  | 0.0              |              |                           | (13.0)           |              |                           | (13.0)          |              |
| (0.0)                       | <b>Total Management Plan Evidence and Guidance</b>     |                |                  | 0.0          |                  | 0.0              |              |                           | 0.0              |              |                           |                 | 0.0          |
|                             | <b>3 Landscape Enhancement*</b>                        |                |                  |              |                  |                  |              |                           |                  |              |                           |                 |              |
| 379.6                       | JAC expenditure  | 337.2          |                  |              | 433.8            |                  |              | 276.1                     |                  |              | 434.8                     |                 |              |
| (28.5)                      | Defra  |                | (11.1)           |              |                  | (32.3)           |              |                           | (7.0)            |              |                           | (19.1)          |              |
| (32.5)                      | Environment Agency                                     |                | (32.5)           |              |                  | (32.5)           |              |                           | (14.1)           |              |                           | 0.0             |              |
| 1.3                         | Local authorities                                      |                | (10.9)           |              |                  | 0.0              |              |                           | (21.9)           |              |                           | (60.1)          |              |
| (120.0)                     | Other  |                | (20.8)           |              |                  | (17.4)           |              |                           | (47.4)           |              |                           | (20.6)          |              |
| (8.3)                       | Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund              |                | 0.0              |              |                  | 0.0              |              |                           | 0.0              |              |                           | 0.0             |              |
| (8.6)                       | National Grid Grant programme                          |                | (81.9)           |              |                  | (146.6)          |              |                           | (0.7)            |              |                           | 0.0             |              |
| (183.0)                     | Sussex Lund Grant programme (Charities Aid Foundation) |                | (180.0)          |              |                  | (205.0)          |              |                           | (185.0)          |              |                           | (335.0)         |              |
| (0.0)                       | <b>Total Landscape Enhancement</b>                     |                |                  | 0.0          |                  | 0.0              |              |                           | 0.0              |              |                           |                 | 0.0          |
|                             | <b>5 Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme</b>     |                |                  |              |                  |                  |              |                           |                  |              |                           |                 |              |
| 163.5                       | JAC expenditure  | 709.8          |                  |              | 570.4            |                  |              | 999.3                     |                  |              | 0.0                       |                 |              |
| (163.5)                     | Defra  |                | (709.8)          |              |                  | (570.4)          |              |                           | (999.3)          |              |                           | 0.0             |              |
| 0.0                         | <b>Total Project Development</b>                       |                |                  | 0.0          |                  | 0.0              |              |                           | 0.0              |              |                           |                 | 0.0          |
|                             | <b>4 Project Development</b>                           |                |                  |              |                  |                  |              |                           |                  |              |                           |                 |              |
| 0.0                         | JAC expenditure  | 6.0            |                  |              | 0.0              |                  |              | 0.0                       |                  |              | 0.0                       |                 |              |
| 0.0                         | Defra  |                | 0.0              |              |                  | 0.0              |              |                           | 0.0              |              |                           | 0.0             |              |
| 0.0                         | Other  |                | 0.0              |              |                  | 0.0              |              |                           | 0.0              |              |                           | 0.0             |              |
| 0.0                         | Local authorities                                      |                | (6.0)            |              |                  | 0.0              |              |                           | 0.0              |              |                           | 0.0             |              |
| 0.0                         | <b>Total Project Development</b>                       |                |                  | 0.0          |                  | 0.0              |              |                           | 0.0              |              |                           |                 | 0.0          |
| 588.3                       | JAC expenditure (to Appendix B)                        | 1,101.1        |                  |              | 1,040.2          |                  |              | 1,350.1                   |                  |              | 510.8                     |                 |              |
| (236.2)                     | Expenditure funded by Defra (to Appendix B)            |                | (754.8)          |              |                  | (638.7)          |              |                           | (1,046.8)        |              |                           | (66.6)          |              |
| (42.6)                      | Expenditure funded by LAs (to Appendix B)              |                | (30.2)           |              |                  | 0.0              |              |                           | (42.3)           |              |                           | (74.8)          |              |
| (309.5)                     | Expenditure funded by Other (to Appendix B)            |                | (316.1)          |              |                  | (401.5)          |              |                           | (261.0)          |              |                           | (369.4)         |              |
| 0.0                         | <b>TOTAL JAC expenditure/income</b>                    | <b>1,101.1</b> | <b>(1,101.1)</b> | <b>0.0</b>   | <b>1,040.2</b>   | <b>(1,040.2)</b> | <b>0.0</b>   | <b>1,350.1</b>            | <b>(1,350.1)</b> | <b>0.0</b>   | <b>510.8</b>              | <b>(510.8)</b>  | <b>0.0</b>   |

\* Does not include the costs of the FIPL-funded Deer co-ordination project to avoid double counting of expenditure

## Appendix C

|   | 2023/24      | 2024/25      | 2025/26      | 2026/27      | 2027/28      |
|---|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| <u>Expenditure</u>                        | £000         | £000         | £000         | £000         | £000         |
| Staff costs                               | 314.4        | 323.8        | 333.5        | 340.2        | 347.0        |
| Accommodation/office equipment            | 35.3         | 36.4         | 37.5         | 38.3         | 39.1         |
| Partnership running costs                 | 7.0          | 7.2          | 7.4          | 7.5          | 7.7          |
| Support services                          | 32.7         | 33.7         | 34.7         | 35.4         | 36.1         |
| <b>Total Core Expenditure</b>             | <b>389.4</b> | <b>401.1</b> | <b>413.1</b> | <b>421.4</b> | <b>429.9</b> |
| <u>Income</u>                             |              |              |              |              |              |
| Defra                                     | 270.6        | 270.6        | 278.7        | 284.3        | 290.0        |
| Uplifted LA contributions 23/24           | 112.8        | 116.2        | 119.7        | 122.1        | 124.7        |
| Additional LA contributions (through SLA) | 0.0          | 7.0          | 7.2          | 7.3          | 7.4          |
| Other income                              | 6.0          | 7.3          | 7.5          | 7.7          | 7.8          |
| <b>Total Core Income</b>                  | <b>389.4</b> | <b>401.1</b> | <b>413.1</b> | <b>421.4</b> | <b>429.9</b> |
|   | 0.0          | 0.0          | 0.0          | 0.0          | 0.0          |
| Reserves                                  | 229.6        | 229.6        | 229.6        | 229.6        | 229.6        |

Agenda Item: 10

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

**Date:** 22 March 2023

**Title:** AONB Partnership grant programmes

**By:** AONB Business Manager

**Purpose:** To update members on Partnership-led grant programmes supporting delivery of AONB Management Plan objectives.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. Note the scope and scale of the AONB Partnership's grant programmes
  2. Welcome the extension of the Farming in Protected Landscape Programme to 31 March 2025
  3. Note the contribution the grant programmes make to delivering the AONB Management Plan and other local authority strategies and plans
  4. Note the key risks and their management.
- 

### 1. Background

- 1.1 One of the AONB Partnership's core functions is to secure resources to enable delivery of the AONB Management Plan.
- 1.2 In the past the AONB Partnership has focused on securing external funding for large, multi-year partnership projects, usually led by the AONB team. Many have been nationally acclaimed and provided a model for projects elsewhere in the country.
- 1.3 Projects have included the Weald Forest Ridge Landscape Partnership Scheme, the Weald Meadows Initiative, the Weald Heathland Initiative, and the Ancient Woodland Restoration Project.
- 1.4 High Weald Heroes, the Partnership's primary school education initiative, the High Weald Deer Initiative, and the Cuckmere and Coombe Slow the Flow Initiative, are ongoing projects that follow this delivery model.
- 1.5 More recently however, the AONB Partnership has been delivering this core function through the management of grant programmes for other bodies.

- 1.6 The Partnership is now in its seventh year of managing Sussex Lund, fifth year of administering National Grid's Visual Impact Provision funds, second year of managing Defra's Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme and first year of managing Defra funds for access improvements.
- 1.7 This report summarises operational activities, highlights some of the grant awards made in 2022/23, and sets out the key risks associated with this new direction.

## **2. The Grant Programmes**

### Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme

- 2.1. The time limited Farming in Protected Landscapes programme is a part of Defra's Agricultural Transition Plan and was set up in July 2022.
- 2.2 It offers funding to farmers and land managers in AONBs and National Parks through the dedicated protected landscape bodies.
- 2.3 The programme will fund projects that:
  - support nature recovery
  - mitigate the impacts of climate change
  - provide opportunities for people to discover, enjoy and understand the landscape and its cultural heritage
  - protect or improve the quality and character of the landscape or place.
- 2.4 The programme's success has led to its extension by a year to 31 March 2025.
- 2.5 The High Weald AONB Partnership has been allocated a total of around £3.5 million from the programme. The allocation is based on a formula that considers the size of farming area, number of farm holdings, the size of surrounding populations, and local deprivation.
- 2.6 In 2022/23 grant awards totalling £476,100 will enable delivery of 44 projects. There is a substantial sum of £2.9 million to award in 2023/24 and 24/25.

### National Grid's Visual Impact Provision - Landscape Enhancement Initiative (VIP-LEI)

- 2.7 This programme aims to reduce the visual impact of National Grid's transmission lines on the landscape or improve the visitor experience in areas affected by the lines.
- 2.8 The Partnership has secured an overall sum of £450,000 from this programme and awarded individual grant to 24 landowners for new hedges, hedge restoration, new

hedgerows trees, managing woodland boundaries and creating and enhancing woodland rides, glades, and ponds.

- 2.9 Most of the projects are now complete. However, there is an opportunity to secure additional funding from this non-competitive programme which is ongoing.

### Sussex Lund

- 2.10 Sussex Lund, established by Lisbet Rausing and Peter Baldwin, improves the landscape of the High Weald AONB by making contributions to small, practical projects that have immediate effect and inspire wider change.
- 2.11 The programme scope expanded in 2022 to allow projects that improve people's experience of the High Weald, with an emphasis on young people, new residents, visitors, and those experiencing 'nature poverty'.
- 2.12 Although the programme focuses on the High Weald AONB, the programme encourages and considers projects in nearby towns and countryside.
- 2.13 There is approximately £250,000 to award each year. Since 2017, there has been 222 grant awards with a total value of £1,159,000.

### Access for all programme

- 2.14 In September 2022 Defra offered the Partnership £184,336 for capital projects to make protected landscapes more accessible to people of all ages and abilities and from all backgrounds. A further £219,025 will be available in 2024/2025.
- 2.15 These funds have allowed strategic partners to undertake access improvements across the High Weald. In 2022/23 the funds allowed surfacing improvements in a country park, boardwalk installation in popular greenspace, the purchase of gates to replace stiles and the purchase and installation of a disabled access toilet.

## **3. Scheme Operation**

- 3.1 Operating the grant programmes involves a range of skills to deliver the following activities:
- Securing and managing resources to run the programmes
  - Promotional activity including setting up and running events
  - Developing and publishing scheme criteria and grant forms
  - Providing project development and grant application advice
  - Assessing grant applications and producing grant panel reports
  - Setting up and supporting grant panels
  - Producing grant contracts/onward agreements
  - Dealing with variation requests
  - Providing support with project delivery
  - Inspecting works and processing claims

- Setting up and running grant administration systems
  - Setting up and running grant monitoring and evaluation systems
  - Producing programme reports
  - Assessing and managing risks.
- 3.2 The operation of each grant programme is bespoke, reflecting the funder's requirements. Together the scale and scope of the grant programmes is substantial.
- 3.3 A sum of £129,000 p.a. is available through Defra and Lund Trust to operate Farming in Protected Landscapes and Sussex Lund. There are no additional funds for management of the Access for All programme.

#### 4. Highlights

- 4.1 There are many highlights from the projects supported by the grant programmes. The following projects illustrate the range of people participating in the grant programmes and the breadth of the action.

##### ***Pastures for Life Association – Mentoring Project***

- A mentoring initiative to help livestock farmers transition to high nature value farming methods through peer-to-peer sharing of knowledge and expertise. In the High Weald the project involves 4 mentors, 24 mentees and a further 72 farmers. The project was initiated in the High Weald and has expanded to other protected landscapes in the South East and the North of England. Supported by Farming in Protected Landscapes.

##### ***Chiddingstone Farm***

- Development of a more nature friendly, climate resilient and profitable farm system on a 24ha holding through installation of a mobile planned grazing system and creation of 1ha of floodplain woodland. A typical grant application. Supported by Farming in Protected Landscapes.

##### ***Plawhatch Farm***

- Attendance on a 4-day training course in the Fundamentals of Holistic Management for all nine members of the Plaw Hatch Farm management to help create a long term regenerative biodynamic farm management plan. In addition, planting of a 240m hedgerow and restoration of a 0.25ha wooded shaw. Supported by Farming in Protected Landscapes.

##### ***Landscape-scale hedgerow restoration***

- Restoration of 23km hedges by 24 landowners, reducing the visual impact of National Grid's transmission line, recovering nature, linking wildlife habitats, reducing flood risk, capturing carbon and providing shelter for grazing animals. Supported by National Grid's Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI).

- ***Deer management incentive project***

A time-limited project to increase culling of fallow does in two areas of the High

Weald with high deer numbers. Collaborative management and monitoring over 4,000ha driven by an annual drone survey, events, and carcass payments. Supported by Farming in Protected Landscapes.

#### ***Standen Fruit Farm Community Orchard Association***

- Restorative pruning of 150 traditional orchard trees, planting of 75 new fruit trees and installation of nesting boxes for the rare Noble Chafer in a habitat-rich traditional apple and cherry orchard. Purchase of a second-hand tractor to enable grassland management and bracken control.

#### ***Wild About Dark Skies Roadshow***

- Five events in four communities to raise awareness of dark skies and the light pollution involving a planetarium, expert speakers, stargazing, bat-detecting and other educational activities. Delivered by a partnership between community 'Wild about Groups', supported by the AONB team.

4.2 The grant awards are enabling a range of individuals and organisations to undertake works that will conserve and enhance the High Weald and deliver AONB management plan objectives.

4.3 The awards are also valuable and significant investment in the rural land-based economy, with most projects using local suppliers and contractors.

### **5. Risks**

5.1 The biggest risk with the grant programmes is that insufficient projects will come forward to allow use of all the grant funds available.

5.2 This may arise for multiple reasons, not least that projects within the High Weald tend to be small-scale, a reflection of land holding size in the High Weald.

5.3 The AONB team's capacity to promote the programmes, facilitate applications and manage and administer the scheme is also a limiting factor.

5.4 Staff (1.6 FTE) have been recruited to help run the programmes and the Partnership's recent increase in financial support for the core team in 23/24 will allow capacity to be increased in 23/24.

### **6. Conclusions and reasons for recommendations**

6.1. All the grant programmes are welcome. They recognise that protected landscapes are unique and special, and that land managers, farmers and communities based within them need help to conserve and enhance them. Together the scope and scale of the programmes is significant.

6.2. The programmes help deliver the objectives of the statutory High Weald AONB Management Plan, as well as the objectives of other local authority strategies and plans, for example economic development and climate change strategies.

6.3. The grant programmes will help deliver the emerging Local Nature Recovery Strategies.

6.4. Risks associated with the programmes are being managed.

**Contact details:**

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**Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme**  
**High Weald Grant Awards to 23.02.2023**

|                                   |   | Budget          | Budget          |
|-----------------------------------|---|-----------------|-----------------|
|                                   |   | £618,955        | £905,407        |
| Business name                     | Project Title   | Y2 -22/23       | Y3 - 23/24      |
|                                   |   | <b>£478,268</b> | <b>£319,270</b> |
| Tablehurst Farm                   | Tablehurst Farm Community Learning Hub  | £16,000.00      | £0.00           |
| Beech Estate                      | Environmental Enhancement Proposal  | £17,936.58      | £0.00           |
| Trottenden Farm                   | Nature and Place Project  | £8,277.40       | £0.00           |
| Pasture-Fed Livestock Association | Pasture for life mentoring project  | £44,978.00      | £49,189.00      |
| Sheffield Park Ltd                | Estate Management Plan  | £2,633.00       | £0.00           |
| CD & R Munn                       | Hodore Farm Surveys and Hedgerows   | £9,333.00       | £0.00           |
| Fontmills Farm                    | Fontmills Farm Meadow Diversification   | £10,165.00      | £400.00         |
| The Neville Estate Company Ltd    | No fence grazing  | £8,937.00       | £0.00           |
| Strawberry Hill Farm              | Restoration and rejuvenation of Strawberry Farm   | £18,843.40      | £0.00           |
| Lomas Farm                        | Water resilience and habitat enhancements at Lomas Farm   | £0.00           | £12,662.00      |
| Hancox Estate                     | Hancox Estate Regenerative Farming Project  | £14,009.84      | £0.00           |
| Bellhurst Farm                    | Bellhurst Farm Protected Landscape Scheme   | £3,818.60       | £0.00           |
| Chiddingstone Farm                | Chiddingstone Farm Regeneration Project   | £13,651.64      | £0.00           |
| Green Oak Farm                    | Green Oak Farm - Hedgelaying,   | £2,094.00       | £672.00         |
| RSPB                              | RSPB & Crowhurst Environmental group's wildflowers and hedgerows  | £352.50         | £0.00           |
| Fresh Meadows Farms               | Transformation to holistic management and regenerative farming  | £1,950.00       | £0.00           |
| Quoins Farm                       | Quoins Fencing to Protect and Enhance the High Weald Landscape  | £6,103.67       | £0.00           |
| Ashdown Forest Conservators       | Ashdown Forest Deer Survey using Thermal Imaging Drone  | £2,400.00       |                 |
| Ashburnham Place                  | Wildflower management   | £10,121.00      | £3,200.00       |
| Sarah Ravens Cutting Garden       | Perch Hill - Survey & Audit of Existing Conditions  | £4,424.00       | £0.00           |
| Mark Smith                        | Deer reduction programme  | £1,800.00       | £0.00           |
| Woodland Trust                    | Woodland Trust High Weald rhododendron eradication project  | £4,900.00       | £0.00           |
| Pickeridge Farm Partnership       | Hedgerows at Pickeridge Farm  | £7,126.33       | £0.00           |
| Swallowtail Hill Farm             | Enhancement of conservation, restoration and increased biodiversity management at Swallowtail Hill Farm                             | £4,224.00       | £6,400.00       |
| Buckhurst Estate                  | Buckhurst Deer Larder   | £33,860.00      | £0.00           |
| Penns Estate Venison Ltd          | The creation of two working deer management groups at Penns Estate & Paddockhurst Estate  | £44,040.00      | £39,240.00      |
| High Weald AONB Unit              | High Weald Deer Project   | £36,639.00      | £114,220.00     |
| Burgham Sheep                     | Hedge laying on Burgham Farm  | £3,785.60       | £2,704.00       |
| Hunters Farm                      | Hunters Farm Hedging Improvements   | £4,796.45       | £0.00           |
| Chiddingly LLP                    | Replacement of 8 existing stiles on two PROWs that bisect Chiddingly Farm with sprung gates.  | £1,588.00       |                 |
| Mountfield Court Estate           | Water quality improvement and grassland improvement with fencing to aid woodland preservation at Mountfield Court Estate.           | £25,532.55      | £0.00           |
| Bigges Farm                       | Restoration of historic hedgerow feature to create additional wildlife habitat and connectivity at Bigges Farm                      | £4,211.00       |                 |
| Peppering Enterprises             | Creating an exemplar sustainable smallholding at Manor Barn by bringing meadows and woodland under biodiversity-focused management. | £9,669.10       | £0.00           |
| Fresh Meadows Farms               | Deer Control and Venison enterprise   | £3,575.99       | £0.00           |
| Willards Farm                     | Wildflower meadow creation, boundary enhancement and farm facilities and deer management plan at Willards Farm                      | £2,976.00       | £27,937.80      |
| Hands of Hope                     | Reconnect communities to nature   | £10,870.98      | £0.00           |
| Peter Treherne                    | Matter of Britain   | £675.00         | £1,800.00       |
| Redleaf Estate                    | Support for increased deer management on Redlead Estate   | £4,200.00       | £0.00           |
| Risden Farm                       | introduction into a regenerative grazing system, combined with woodland shaw creation   | £25,653.18      | £14,581.60      |
| F&L Reeve                         | Water Systems to Support biodiversity enhancement at Lea Barn Farm  | £9,185.89       | £0.00           |
| Coldharbour Farm                  | Habitat creation and shelter belt for stock and Market Garden at Coldharbour Farm   | £6,332.96       | £20,202.25      |
| E&D Phizacklea                    | Standinghall high-seat network and thermal unit for deer management.  | £4,100.00       | £0.00           |
| Cockhaise Farm                    | Wood chipping and creation of more hedgerows  | £25,202.50      | £15,389.90      |
| Plaw Hatch Farm                   | Holistic Management Fundamentals course and Hedgerow planting   | £3,755.60       | £10,671.21      |
| Brickpits Organic Farm            | Hedgelaying at Brickpits Farm   | £3,539.22       | £0.00           |

Agenda Item: 11

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

**Date:** 22 March 2023

**Title of Report:** Service Level Agreement (SLA) Review

**By:** AONB Director

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are recommended to:

1. Note the report and;
2. Request that the Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) delegates the responsibility for reviewing the Service Level Agreement to the Management Board, which will set up a working group to undertake the review. The working group will report to the Management Board.

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### 1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The High Weald AONB partnership has been a strong partnership for many years. It is supported by the AONB Unit, a small specialist team providing advice and guidance on the conservation and enhancement of this nationally important and designated landscape. Officers from the Unit are employed on behalf of the partnership by East Sussex County Council (ESCC).
- 1.2 Before 2010 the AONB partnership operated under a rolling three-year Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Natural England. At the time Natural England contributed 75% of central government's funds per annum to the AONB partnership's core work and the remaining 25% made up by *pro rata* contributions from the 15-member local authorities.
- 1.3 The MOU, in effect, required all partners to sign up to the principle of continuing financial support at the agreed levels set out in the AONB Unit's budget.
- 1.4 In 2008 Natural England reviewed its arrangements nationally with all AONB partnerships and decided to require all partners to sign up to a more formal arrangement - a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA). The intention was the new MOA would run from 2008 and until 2011 (i.e. cover the remaining period of the original MOU arrangements) with the expectation a further three -year MOA would be signed to cover the period up to 2014.
- 1.5 However, some local authorities associated with several AONB partnerships across the country refused to sign up to a more formal agreement with Natural England. After intense negotiation, Natural England dropped the requirement for an MOA and settled for a more informal Partnership Agreement instead. In the case of the High Weald AONB partnership, 12 of the 15 High Weald local authority partners agreed to sign the proposed new agreement and the remaining three refused to do so until Natural England resolved several remaining issues.

- 1.6 In the event, this Partnership Agreement with Natural England was not implemented. The change of government in 2010 along with DEFRA replacing Natural England as the AONB partnership's government sponsor led to a hiatus. DEFRA subsequently confirmed it did not require a formal agreement to be put in place between itself and the local authority partners of the English AONB partnerships.
- 1.7 In September 2014 at a High Weald Officer Steering Group (OSG) meeting it was decided a straightforward and informal five-year agreement between the partner local authorities and ESCC (as the host authority for the AONB team) would demonstrate their on-going commitment to the AONB and the work of the AONB team. They felt it was important to have an agreement for them to refer to during budget setting discussions within their respective local authorities.
- 1.8 The first Service Level Agreement (SLA) between the partner local authorities and ESCC ran from 2015 to 2019 and it was signed by 13 of the 14 local authorities. The current SLA began in April 2019 and expires in March 2024 and has been signed by nine of the 14 local authorities. Only one local authority has not signed either SLA.
- 1.9 The current SLA 2019 – 2024 is appended to this report.

## **2.0 SLA REVIEW**

- 2.1 The current SLA has a year left to run. The AONB partnership's services have evolved considerably in recent years owing to the increasing demands and new expectations placed on the AONB Unit (see section 2.9 of the Risk Management Report). The next SLA should reflect these changing circumstances.
- 2.2 In addition, five of the 15 local authorities have asked that any review of their financial contributions to the AONB partnership is undertaken as part of the process of agreeing the SLA for 2024 – 2029.
- 2.3 To take account of this, the Management Board proposed at its recent meeting that the JAC delegates the responsibility to the Management Board for reviewing the SLA and for setting up a working group to prepare the next SLA. The working group would report to the Management Board.

## **3.0 CONCLUSION**

- 3.1 The current SLA between the partner local authorities and ESCC expires on the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024. The considerable demands and expectations placed on the work of the AONB partnership should be reflected in the SLA along with any review of local authority financial contributions.
- 3.2 In line with their role, the Management Board has offered to lead on the SLA review and set up a working group to prepare the next SLA.
- 3.3 These conclusions form the basis of the report recommendations.

**Contact:** Jason Lavender High Weald AONB Co-Director

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# High Weald Joint Advisory Committee Service Level Agreement



This Service Level Agreement is made between

**A. East Sussex County Council (Host Authority for the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee)**

**and**

**B. Local Authority as a member of the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.**

## **1. Agreement Purpose**

- 1.1 This Agreement provides a framework for the delivery of the duties and obligations arising from Part IV of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 as set out at Appendix 1. This Agreement is not intended to be legally binding, and no legal obligations or legal rights shall arise between the parties from the Agreement. The parties enter into the Agreement intending to honour their obligations.
- 1.2 An AONB Management Plan is central to meeting Local Authorities statutory duty under Part IV of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 for the conservation and enhancement of the AONB. The current High Weald AONB Management Plan, approved by all the constituent Local Authorities, covers the period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2024.
- 1.3 This Agreement indicates how the Authorities intend to co-operate to achieving the objectives set out in the Management Plan demonstrating that they are, collectively, meeting their continuing obligations in pursuance of the purposes of AONB designation.
- 1.4 This Agreement sets out the services to be provided by and through the Partnership, primarily through the activities of the High Weald AONB Unit.

## **2. Duration**

The Agreement is for the duration of the Management Plan, that is, over the next 4 years to 31 March 2024.

## **3. The Partnership**

- 3.1 The High Weald Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) was formally established in 1996 and is composed of Defra and the 15 local authorities whose areas are covered by the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) designation: Ashford Borough Council, Crawley Borough Council, East Sussex County Council, Hastings Borough Council, Horsham District Council, Kent County Council, Mid Sussex District Council, Rother District Council, Sevenoaks District Council, Surrey County Council, Tandridge District Council, Tonbridge and Malling District Council, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, Wealden District Council and West Sussex County Council.

3.2 The Partnership's current constitution and terms of reference were agreed on the 13 July 2005 (with minor amendments agreed 19 October 2009).

#### **4. Partnership Purpose**

4.1 The primary purpose of the High Weald JAC is to: conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the High Weald AONB. The JAC will also: increase understanding and enjoyment by the public of the special qualities of the AONB; and seek to foster the economic and social well-being of local communities within the AONB.

4.2 The Staff Unit works on behalf of the JAC to achieve these purposes through the following activities:

##### **A. Acting jointly to produce and review the AONB Management Plan as required by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000**

- Undertaking the statutory process required to review and publish the AONB Management Plan including preparation of the Strategic Environmental Assessment and Appropriate Assessment.
- Monitoring the condition of the AONB landscape as required to inform the MP review
- Promoting the AONB vision and management plan to help distinguish the AONB from adjacent countryside.
- Advising upon, facilitating and co-ordinating implementation by others of the Management Plan.
- Accessing resources for the delivery of AONB management activities.
- Developing an involvement by the community in the management of the AONB.
- Providing a management role to co-ordinate AONB protection through the actions of the AONB unit, the AONB Partnership and other partners at a local and strategic level
- Problem solving with the Staff Unit acting as co-ordinator and facilitators.

##### **B. Providing technical AONB advice and acting as an advocate for the High Weald AONB**

- Advising local authorities and other public bodies on compliance with Section 85 of the CROW Act 'duty of regard'
- Facilitating cooperation between local authorities on areas of common interest concerning the AONB
- Advising local authorities and other partners on their activities within the AONB, to encourage them to attain the highest possible standards
- Supporting and enabling the JAC, its Management Board, Officers Steering Group and individual members to fulfil their purpose and act as advocates for the AONB
- Providing landscape related planning advice (to local planning authorities and in conjunction with Natural England as appropriate in line with, and underpinned by, protocols).
- Working with and contributing to the NAAONB activities at national and regional level, including sharing advice and best practice nationally and providing financial support for this in line with an agreed business plan

- Supporting and contributing to regional activity between AONBs and protected landscapes to strengthen the status of AONBs individually and collectively.

### **C. Monitoring and reporting on progress**

- Monitoring and reporting on progress against AONB Management Plan and annual business plan targets.
- Providing monitoring and reporting information to Defra, and any other funding bodies, as required.

4.3 The level of each activity is guided by High Weald AONB Management Plan objectives and the Unit's 3-year business strategy. It is subject to available resources.

## **5. The Host Authority**

5.1 East Sussex County Council as Host Authority will be responsible for exercising its duties in relation to the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 and for: line managing the AONB Director, acting as employer for the Staff Unit, providing human resources and IT support and exercising responsibility for the financial management of the Partnership.

## **6. Local Authority Partners**

6.1 Local Authority Partners will be responsible for exercising their duties in relation to the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, and for: contributing to the costs of the Partnership in accordance with item 8; working with the Host Authority, Defra, Natural England and a range of other parties in relation to the management of the AONB; providing senior officer and member representation as set out in the constitution to support Partnership activity; and working with local government members to promote the role and value of AONBs to society and our natural environment.

## **7. Defra**

7.1 Though not party to this SLA, Defra will remain responsible for exercising its duties in relation to the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, and for: contributing to the costs of the Partnership working to the principles set out in the tri-partite Memorandum of Understanding between Defra, Natural England and the NAAONB, supporting the work of the Partnership; and working across Government and with national organisations to promote the role and value of AONBs to society and our natural environment.

## **8. Funding**

8.1 The 5-year indicative budget for the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee is as follows.

|                      | 19/20          | 20/21          | 21/22          | 22/23          | 24/25          |
|----------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
|                      | £              | £              | £              | £              | £              |
| <b>Expenditure</b>   | 740,000        | 740,000        | 740,000        | 740,000        | 740,000        |
| <b>Contributions</b> |                |                |                |                |                |
| Defra AONB fund      | 273,600        | 273,600        | 273,600        | 273,600        | 273,600        |
| Local authorities    | 84,700         | 84,700         | 84,700         | 84,700         | 84,700         |
| Other                | 381,700        | 381,700        | 381,700        | 381,700        | 381,700        |
| <b>Total</b>         | <b>740,000</b> | <b>740,000</b> | <b>740,000</b> | <b>740,000</b> | <b>740,000</b> |

8.2. The annual contribution from £XXXXXX Local Authority for 5 years from 2019/20 - 2023/24 will be £XXXXX.

**9. Monitoring**

9.1 The Staff Unit will submit an annual review to the Partnership and report biannually on its activities at the Partnership’s November and March meetings.

**10. Termination**

10.1 A partner may, by giving not less than 6 months’ notice, terminate this agreement setting out their reasons for termination.

Signed ..... Date .....

Position .....

Signed ..... Date .....

Position .....

# Appendix I

## 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 Joint Advisory Committee, 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.

Agenda Item: 12

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

**Date: 22 March 2023**

**Title of Report: Risk Management**

**By: AONB Director**

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## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Members are recommended to:

1. Note the report and;
  2. Request that the Management Board continues to work with the AONB Unit to consider the risks and identify measures and options to manage and mitigate the effect of these risks.
- 

### **1.0 Background**

- 1.1 The JAC is a strong partnership supported by the AONB Unit, a small specialist team providing advice and guidance on the conservation and enhancement of a nationally important landscape.
- 1.2 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. The most significant risk to the High Weald AONB partnership remains the increasing constraints and demands placed on both the financial and personnel resources of the AONB Unit.
- 1.3 The key risks to the Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) are set out in Appendix A.

### **2.0 Key risks 2023/24 and beyond**

#### COVID-19

- 2.1 We presume COVID-19 will continue to be a risk to people's health, and it remains a priority to ensure the staff and those we work with are kept safe.
- 2.2 COVID-19 has disrupted both our business planning and working arrangements since the start of 2020, and this is disruption will continue to some extent. This has had an impact on our work programme and the AONB Unit staff.

#### Government core budget funding settlement

- 2.3 Members will be aware that since 2010 the English AONB partnerships have accommodated a 36% cut in the government contribution to the core budgets. The total core funding from the government for all the 34 English AONBs is only half the core funding provided to a single National Park Authority. During this same period most of the local authority partners on the High Weald AONB partnership have maintained their contributions to the core budget, albeit without an increase in line with inflation.

- 2.4 The current financial situation's influence on the government's policies and priorities for our sector remain considerable. The government's stated intention in the autumn to impose further public spending cuts and make decisions of "eye-watering difficulty" will have significant consequences for the future funding and support provided by government and local authorities.
- 2.5 There is a major risk to the core work of the High Weald AONB partnership should the current funding situation continue or worsen, and should the government choose not to re-instate a stable and predictable funding settlement for AONB partnerships.
- 2.6 This will be exacerbated should the government require AONB partnerships to undertake further duties as part of the government's response to the Landscapes Review but fail to provide adequate, commensurate, and sustained resources. As reported at previous JAC meetings, the government's intentions on a stable and adequate funding settlement for the sector continue to be unclear.

#### Self-funded projects

- 2.7 Every year the AONB team secures and manages significant amounts of external funds to support residents, schools, farmers, community groups, and others with a range of projects throughout the AONB under four main programmes; Community Engagement (education, access and health and well-being); Management Plan (research, evidence, consultation, and production); Landscape Enhancement (farming, nature recovery, climate change and flood management); and Farming in Protected Landscapes. In addition, the AONB team administers and manages grant programmes on behalf of others (e.g. Sussex Lund, National Grid) which also bring considerable benefits across the AONB.
- 2.8 As with the core budget settlement, there is a major risk to the on-going management and success of these self-funding programmes should the existing constraints on the financial and personnel resources of the AONB Unit continue or worsen.

#### New and greater expectations and demands

- 2.9 The last two to three years have seen a greater pressure on the High Weald landscape along with several increasing and new expectations placed on the AONB Unit. These extra and new demands requiring the AONB Unit's attention continue to present a significant risk to the existing core work and remit of the AONB Unit. New demands include:
- The considerable rise in the numbers and the scale of housing development applications (particularly for major developments) affecting the AONB. Residents, consultants, local authority officers and Members are increasingly seeking our specialist advice, guidance, and input
  - Greater efforts by public organisations, the statutory undertakers, and others to meet their statutory duties towards the conservation of the AONB and their emerging climate change and nature recovery policies has resulted in an increasing demand for our advice and guidance
  - The transition to the Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELM) or something similar will require farmers to change their practices and demand is increasing for our guidance to help them achieve the multiple objectives ELM will expect

- The changing nature of landownership in the High Weald is a growing factor and new and inexperienced owners need tailored and integrated guidance and longer-term assistance to help them manage their farms and woodlands responsibly, and to prevent harm to the High Weald
- The expectation that more needs to be done to encourage a wider and more diverse range of people, and better public access to and enjoyment of the countryside requires our input and involvement
- Farming in Protected Landscapes (FIPL) has placed considerable demands on our existing resources - the setting up and managing a suitable governance structure and a grant administration system and the use of existing AONB staff to implement the scheme's objectives and support farmers and land managers submit strong grant applications

#### Staff succession planning

2.10 The majority of the AONB Unit staff are aging and staff succession planning is becoming a more important issue. The recruitment and retention of younger people and those with the relevant skills and experience is increasingly difficult for a variety of reasons. A failure to address this will be a risk to the future success of the AONB partnership and the work of the AONB Unit.

### **3.0 Risk mitigation**

#### COVID-19

- 3.1 We continue to monitor the situation 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.
- 3.2 The office at Flimwell has remained open and most of the staff continue to work from the office with the option to work at home if needed. Meetings and events are held either in-person or on-line, and school visits have been resumed where the teachers are happy to do so. Site, farm, and woodland advisory visits have continued with the appropriate measures.

#### Core budget funding settlement, self-funded projects, and new expectations and demands

- 3.3 The continuing financial and resources predicament facing the English AONB partnerships and exacerbated by recent events has yet to be addressed by the government. By necessity, the need for an adequate, long-term, and stable funding settlement is the primary concern of the High Weald AONB partnership.
- 3.4 Our experience dealing with the funding cuts since 2009 reminds us that all members of the High Weald AONB partnership will need to continue to demonstrate at the local and national government level the value and the worth of the work the AONB partnership does and lobby for adequate and stable long-term funding.
- 3.5 The development of secure and alternative long-term income streams to support the core remit of the AONB partnership may be possible and have been examined on a number of occasions. However, the difficulties achieving this are often under-estimated and any funds raised are unlikely to address any longer-term shortfall in contributions to our core budget. The focus is to remain a governmental and local authority supported partnership with a close relationship to government bodies whose policies influence management of the AONB landscape.

- 3.6 The High Weald AONB Unit's business strategy 2019 – 2024 aims to respond to the risks caused by the constraints on both the financial and personnel resources of the AONB Unit. It will be adapted to accommodate the emerging risks associated the greater pressures placed on the High Weald and the newer expectations and demands. The specific risks associated with the larger projects and grant schemes (e.g. FiPL) will continue to be assessed.
- 3.7 However, the assumption that the current and inadequate resources available to the High Weald AONB partnership can continue to cover the current and emerging demands while also meeting the government's stated vision that AONB partnerships are at the heart of nature recovery, landscape conservation, and climate change mitigation will need to be challenged. Asking the AONB partnership to do more with less is no longer a viable option.

#### Staff succession planning

- 3.8 Identifying and implementing a process and strategy for succession planning should allow us to develop existing and new members of staff who can move into leadership roles when they become vacant. Succession planning will also help us attract, recruit, and retain younger people and those with the appropriate skills to work for the AONB Unit.

#### **4.0 Conclusions**

- 4.1 Risk management systems are in place and conform to the appropriate East Sussex County Council policy.
- 4.2 It is clear the 2023-24 will continue to be characterised by the challenges outlined above. The constraints on both the financial and personnel resources of the AONB Unit remain the most significant risk to the core work of the High Weald AONB partnership.
- 4.3 The High Weald AONB Unit's current business strategy is tailored to the High Weald's local circumstances and specific needs. It aims to address the risks to the work of the High Weald AONB partnership, but this is no longer enough. The expectation that the partnership can continue to absorb the existing and additional demands without adequate resources needs to be challenged and then addressed.

**Contact:** Jason Lavender High Weald AONB Co-Director

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**Appendix A High Weald JAC - COVID-19 Key Risks 22.03.23**

**Sponsor: Sally Marsh/Jason Lavender**

**Author: Jason Lavender**

**Date: March 2023 - November 2023**

## Risk Log

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

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

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

| Unit ref | Risk no | Risk<br>What can go wrong  | Root Causes<br>How it can go wrong                                     | Owner         | Inherent Risk |             |  | Controls / Mitigating Actions<br>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 |  |               | 4             | 2           | Amber  |   | 2             | 4              | 2          | Amber       |             |
|          | 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 |               |             | 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. For more detail see paragraph 3.1 of the COVID-19 Risk Management report. | AONB Director   |               |                |            |             |             |

|  |   |  |  |               |   |   |       |   |               |   |   |   |       |
|--|---|--|--|---------------|---|---|-------|---|---------------|---|---|---|-------|
|  | 2 | Failure to meet current and revised work commitments and work programmes, unable to support individuals and organisations with their projects, difficulty securing funds to match external grants or to fund projects. AONB Unit staff unable to manage work commitments and caring duties. Recruitment of new staff suspended for the foreseeable future. | Reduced activity/service owing to changed working arrangements (internally and externally), inability to recruit new staff, additional caring duties for children and/or elderly relatives, and staff illness or absence (e.g. to assist with emergency planning). | AONB Director | 3 | 3 | Amber | Work primarily from home, maintain contact with colleagues, partners, and others, adapt work programmes to meet existing commitments and priorities where possible, and review work programmes regularly to reflect changing circumstances. For more detail see paragraph 3.4 of the COVID-19 Risk Management report. | AONB Director | 2 | 3 | 2 | Amber |
|  | 3 | Those receiving grants from the JAC are unable to start or progress and complete their projects within the agreed timescales.  | Restrictions placed on people's movements and activities, labour and material shortages, rising costs.   | AONB Director | 4 | 4 | Red   | Consult with the grant recipients and third party funders, review and change timescales, offer technical advice and moral support.  | AONB Director | 2 | 4 | 2 | Amber |
|  | 4 | Remote IT working systems fail and/or needs not met, staff unable to work efficiently, fewer outputs, current and revised work programmes compromised.   | Poor links to computer network/server results in slow machine operation, inability to download GIS data, update website etc.   | AONB Director | 2 | 3 | Green | Technical advice sought and recommendations/solutions implemented.  | AONB Director | 2 | 2 | 2 | Green |
|  | 5 | Failure to secure/receive adequate, stable, and long-term funding to the core budget. A reduction or loss of national and local government political and financial support to the AONB partnerships.   | 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 S of S & 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   |