

High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee



Agenda

High Weald JAC Meeting

Wednesday 22 November 2023

Acorn Tourism, WEC 10.30 am to finish with lunch

1. Presentation on Access and Recreation programme
To consider an overview of the AONB community outreach programmes and a presentation from Simon Fathers, Access and Recreation officer, on the new role and achievements to date
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. Election of Members of JAC Management Board
To elect Members to the Management Board Members due to changes within the local authorities (Election list appendix 1)
6. Minutes of the JAC meeting
To consider the minutes of the last meeting of the JAC held on 22 March 2023 (page 3)
7. Minutes of the Management Board Meeting
To note the matters arising from the Management Board meeting held on 20 September 2023 (page 10)
8. Minutes of the Officer Steering Group
To note the minutes of the last meeting of the OSG held on 13 October 2023 (page 16)
9. Revenue Budget for 2022/23
To consider and approve a report by the Treasurer on the draft Revenue Budget 2024/25 (page 23) Appendix A budget forecast; Appendix B Self-funded projects; and Appendix C, 5-year budget forecast.
10. High Weald Management Plan 2024-2029 update
To consider a verbal report on update the Members on the initial results from the draft Plan consultation, and the High Weald StoryMap.

11. National policy update

- To consider the launch of the new National Landscape branding campaign on 22 November 2023
- To consider a report on the Levelling-Up and Regeneration Act 2023 (page 28)

12. Risk Management

To consider a report by the AONB Co-Director on risk management (page 31); Appendix A: High Weald JAC - Key Risks

13. Any other business

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

Samantha Nicholas

Clerk to the High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee

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Appendix 1

High Weald Joint Advisory Committee
Election of Management Board Members
November 2023-2025

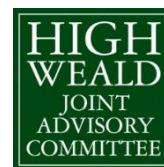


Position	Name	Local Authority
Election of Chair	Pete Bradbury	West Sussex CC
Election of Vice-Chair	Eleanor Kirby-Green	East Sussex CC
1 Election of MB Member	Nigel Williams	Sevenoaks BC
2 Election of MB Member	Lorraine Carvalho	Mid-Sussex DC
3 Election of MB Member	Sir Nicholas White	Tandridge DC
4 Election of cooptee to MB	Sylvia Tidy	Farming Cooptee
5 Election of MB Member	Vacant	
6 Election of MB Member	Vacant	

+Agenda item: 3

High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee

Minutes of Meeting



22 March 2023, online Microsoft teams 10.30am

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 (JAC Chair)
Cllr Mrs E Kirby-Green	East Sussex County Council (JAC Vice-Chair)
Cllr M Dickins	Sevenoaks Borough Council
Cllr J Vine-Hall	Rother District Council
Cllr J Howell	Wealden District Council, representing Cllr A Newton
Cllr I Irvine	Crawley District Council
Cllr Mrs S Carey	Kent County Council
Mrs S Tidy	Farming Cooptee
Mrs G Davison	Community Cooptee
Ms L Charman	CLA

Officers:

Mr J Lavender	AONB Co-Director
Mrs S Marsh	AONB Co-Director
Ms G Sherwin	AONB Business Manager
Ms D Russell	AONB Senior Planning & Design Advisor
Mr D Morrison	AONB Project Officer: Sussex Flow (Cuckmere & Combe)
Mr A Fowler	Finance Manager, East Sussex County Council
Ms J Hollingum	OSG Chair, Mid-Sussex District Council
Mr M Daly	OSG Vice-Chair, Horsham District Council
Mr A Sime	Planning Officer, Ashford Borough Council

1. Natural Flood Management in the High Weald

Presentation from Dean Morrison on the Sussex Flow (Cuckmere and Coombe) project. Dean outlined his role managing a three-year project understanding and identifying potential sites for natural flood management in the High Weald. This work will a longer-term plan of options to present to the Environment Agency and other partners such as the Local Authorities. Dean also works with and supports landowners

and communities in the upper Cuckmere valley to raise the profile of natural flood management (NFM) and provides advice and guidance.

- Dean outlined the tools and approaches he uses including the use of a mapping system (SCALGO) to run scenarios at a catchment and a farm scale to work out where flood management interventions would be most beneficial.
- Using this information, Dean will find suitable locations to install leaky woody dams (LWD) into watercourses as a low cost but highly efficient way to reduce flood risk and increase aquatic and riparian biodiversity. LWDs are increasing in popularity as a method of natural flood management, which involves the careful placing of felled trees and logs in-stream to slow and divert the flow of water. These permeable structures allow river water through in normal times and during heavy rain will slow floodwaters and prevent downstream peak flows and thereby protect built properties and settlements from flood damage.

- 1.1. The Members thanked Dean for his informative presentation and the wide-ranging projects that have benefit to the High Weald landscape.
- 1.2. The presentation will be added to the High Weald YouTube channel in due course.

2. Apologies

- 2.1 Apologies for absence were received from Cllr A Newton, Cllr A Pickering, Cllr D Davis, Cllr N Warne, Ms J Hull of the Forestry Commission and Ms L Newland of Natural England.
- 2.2 It was noted there had been some recent changes to the membership of the JAC. Cllr Liz Lockwood has recently resigned from Tandridge DC and has been replaced by Cllr Charlotte Swan. Councillor Josh Potts is the new Horsham DC representative on the JAC.
- 2.3 The Chairman thanked Cllr Lockwood for all the support she has given to the JAC over many years.

3. Members Interests

- 3.1 The Chairman reminded the Committee that this is a Member meeting although local authority officers can accompany their Member if they are asked to do so.
- 3.2 No declarations of interest were raised by the Members.

4. Urgent Matters

- 4.1 No urgent matters were raised.

5. Minutes of the Joint Advisory Committee meeting

- 5.1 **RESOLVED** to note the minutes of the JAC meeting held on 23 November 2022.

6 Minutes of the Management Board meeting

6.1 RESOLVED to note the minutes of the Management Board meeting held on 7 March 2023

7 Minutes of the Officer Steering Group (OSG)

7.1 RESOLVED to note the minutes of the OSG meeting held on 28 February 2023.

8 High Weald Management Plan 2024-2029

8.1 Sally Marsh took Members through the report in some detail to outline the progress to date on the current AONB Management Plan review. Sally also explained the changes to the timetable caused by the imminent publication of Natural England's new guidance for Management Plans (for AONBs and National Parks).

8.2 This guidance will need to be considered by the AONB team and used to inform the current draft AONB Management Plan. This means the Management Board will approve the start of the public consultation phase on the draft AONB Plan at their meeting in July 2023 resulting in delaying the public consultation until mid-August 2023, i.e., three months later than set out in the previously agreed programme.

8.3 Sally informed the Members that this delay would move the final AONB Management Plan signing off to March 2024, and this might present difficulties for some local authorities adopting the AONB Management Plan on time. However, the government has recognized this risk and has allowed reasonable flexibility with the timetable.

8.4 The report also recommends that the JAC signs off the Statement of Significant as there have been changes with the addition of Dark Skies, Land-based Economy, and Perceptual Qualities as part of natural beauty, with a few minor amendments to the current wording.

8.5 For details, refer to the report 'AONB Management Plan 2024 Review: update'.

8.6 Sally wanted to publicly thank the local authority officers on the High Weald Officer Steering Group (OSG) for the time they had spent contributing to this process to date.

8.7 The Chairman and the Members confirmed they supported the changes to the timetable and suggested each local authority will need to ensure their own internal procedures adopt the AONB Management Plan within a reasonable time. The Chairman thanked the officers for supporting this process.

8.8 Jennifer Hollingum, the OSG Chair confirmed that if the officers are made aware of the changes to the timetable, they should be able to put in place the mechanisms to adopt the plan within a reasonable time.

8.9 RESOLVED to:

- I. The agree the revised Plan timetable as set out in Appendix 1.**
- II. 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.**

- III. **Approve the Management Plan draft Statement of Significance for public consultation subject to agreement on minor text changes in Appendix 2.**
- IV. **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.**

9 Revenue Budget for 2022/23

- The Committee considered a report from Andy Fowler, from the ESCC Treasurer.

9.1 The report presented a budget position for 2022/23 and the forecasted budget for 2023/24 and an indicative budget for 2024/25. It highlighted:

- Core budget appendix shows A, shows a surplus £6,300 due to staff vacancies. This balance will be transferred into the reserves.
- The 2023/24 expenditure budget was presented in November 2022 and showed a 4% increase for staff pay awards and 3% for inflation on other costs. The income budget has been adjusted to reflect the revised local authority contributions and there is an increase amount allocated to the budget, to give a balanced budget.
- The 2024/25 indicative budget includes inflated expenditure and that has been offset with the annual inflationary increase to local authority contributions.
- Over the last few months some local authority partners have misinterpreted the reserves held in the budget and have made assumptions about how these reserves can be used. To address this misunderstanding, new details have been provided (paragraphs pt 5.2 to 5.4) in the budget report to make clear what the reserves are for and how and when they can be used.
- The indicative 2023/24 budgeted expenditure and funding for self-funding projects is shown in Appendix B. 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. The total spend is forecasted for £999.3k

9.2 The Chair thanked the local authorities that were able to increase their contributions to the AONB partnership budget. Cllr Bradbury also thanked the Cllr Kirby-Green, Cllr Dickins, and Cllr Vine-Hall for their support in this process.

9.3 RESOLVED to:

- I. **thank local authorities for increasing their contributions to the High Weald AONB Partnership budget in 2023/24.**
- II. **revenue budget for 2023/24 was approved.**
- III. **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.**

10 Grant Programmes

- 10.1** Gerry Sherwin reported that the AONB Partnership has been delivering parts of the core function through the management of grant programmes for other bodies.
- 10.2** The AONB Partnership is now in its seventh year of managing Sussex Lund, the fifth year of administering National Grid's Visual Impact Provision funds, and the second year of managing Defra's Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme. The AONB Partnership has also recently taken on the management of the Defra Access for All grant.
- 10.3** The AONB Partnership has also seen a considerable increase of consultations on development proposals, rights ways of diversions, change of land-use applications, woodland planting applications, and felling license applications. This absorbs more of the AONB team's time and reduces our ability to manage grants and seek additional funds from the usual and novel sources.
- 10.4** The time limited Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme is a part of Defra's Agricultural Transition Plan and was set up in July 2022, operating for 18 months and now entering its third year. FiPL has been successful, and Defra has secured funding for an extension to March 2025. In 2022/23 the AONB Partnership awarded grants totalling £476,100, which will ensure the delivery of 44 projects across the AONB. There is a substantial sum of £2.9 million to award in 2023/24 and 2024/25.
- 10.5** Sussex Lund has also been a very successful grant and this grant is set to continue. Grant support is primarily for projects within the High Weald but there is scope to support projects outside the AONB, which benefits a wider area of the local authority partners than just the AONB. There is approximately £250,000 available each year to support local projects and since 2017, the AONB Partnership has awarded 222 grants with a total value of £1,159,000.
- 10.6** This year Defra have offered additional funding for capital access projects. The funds were received in September 2022 with the requirement to allocate the funds by this March. Despite this very short timeframe, the team managed to commit over £100,000 funding to access projects as a result of establishing a range of strong and local working relationships with other organisations. Projects to date include:
- Installation of the high specification Changing Places disabled toilet at the Ashdown Forest Centre and a disabled access path, a key visitor site within the High Weald AONB
 - Bought and supplied many gates for local authority Rights of Way teams to help them in their efforts replacing stiles with gates across the AONB

- Boardwalks to improve access in woodlands to in collaboration with the Kent High Weald partnership (operate in Tunbridge Wells borough)
- Working with WSCC to improve public access within Buchan Country Park (benefiting residents of Crawley and Horsham)

10.7 Gerry emphasised that it takes a lot of effort to run grant programmes and to support the many varied applicants with the design and costing of their projects. Gerry outlined the range of projects that have been funded and the variety of applicants - community groups, parish councils, church groups, schools, farmers, and non-farming landowners. Small grants can be just as effective and important as the larger ones e.g. a £1,500 grant awarded to Plaw Hatch Farm allowed the farm management team to start and complete an effective business planning programme.

10.8 The Members noted that these grant programmes are a very considerable investment in the rural economy of the High Weald supporting not only the recipients but also benefitting a wide range of local suppliers and contractors, and this is vital for the health of the local rural economy.

10.9 It was also noted the main risk to the FiPL programme was that the AONB Partnership will be unlikely to commit the full funding for a variety of reasons. While the AONB team is actively seeking some larger projects, Gerry asked the local authorities to help by publicising the funding programme.

10.10 RESOLVED to:

- I. **Note the scope and scale of the AONB Partnership’s grant programmes**
- II. **Welcome the extension of the Farming in Protected Landscape Programme to 31 March 2025**
- III. **Note the contribution the grant programmes make to delivering the AONB Management Plan and other local authority strategies and plans**
- IV. **Note the key risks and their management.**

11 Service Level Agreement

11.3 Jason Lavender reported on the need to review the current Service Level Agreement, which is due to expire in a year’s time. Jason outlined the history of the various agreements used to date and the context for the next review, which can be read in the report accompanying this item.

11.4 Jason informed the Members that the services provided by, and the demands placed on, the AONB team have changed considerably, and the next SLA will need to reflect these changes. It was proposed at the Management Board meeting on 7 March 2023, that the Management Board would set up a sub-group drawn from the OSG members to review the current SLA, and this group will report to the Management Board.

11.5 RESOLVED:

- I. The report is noted and
- II. **The Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) delegated 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.**

12 Risk Management

12.3 The Committee considered a report by Jason Lavender on risk management which was covered in detail at the JAC meeting in November. The ongoing risks cover the Government core budget funding, self-funded projects, and staff succession with the risks to be mitigated.

12.4 RESOLVED: 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.

13 A.O.B.

13.3 The Chair felt it was important to state that meeting in person is invaluable and could all Members try to keep their diaries free for the JAC meetings. The dates for the JAC for the next couple of years will be sent round in advance for the next two years to help with this.

13.4 It was noted that once the local elections have been held, the Chair will write to the Cabinet leaders of each local authority partner in the early summer reminding them of the importance of the work the High Weald AONB Partnership undertakes on behalf of the AONB landscape, its local authorities, its residents, visitors, and farmers and land managers.

Agenda item: 7

HIGH WEALD JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE – Management Board
Minutes –Wednesday 20 September at Borde Hill Gardens, starting
at 10.30am followed by lunch.



Samantha Nicholas
Clerk to the High Weald AONB
Joint Advisory Committee

Present: Members:

CLlr P Bradbury	West Sussex County Council
Mrs S Tidy	NFU Co-optee
CLlr Nigel Williams	Sevenoaks District Council
CLlr Ian Irvine	Crawley Borough Council
CLlr Sam Raby	Horsham District Council
CLlr Lorraine Carvalho	Mid Sussex District Council
CLlr Andrew Mier	Rother District Council
CLlr Sir Nicholas White	Tandridge District Council

Also Present:

Jennifer Hollingum	OSG Chair (Mid-Sussex)
Jason Lavender	AONB Director (job share)
Sally Marsh	AONB Director (job-share)
Gerry Sherwin	AONB Business Manager
Sarah Brotherton	AONB Landscape Research Advisor

Actions

Paragraph 19 to approve the draft Management Plan for public consultation, to allow public consultation to proceed according to the agreed timetable, in accordance with the delegation approved by JAC at the meeting of 22 March 2023.

Paragraph 30 circulate an AONB Team organisational structure.

The Members were introduced to Borde Hill Gardens by Andrew John Stephenson-Clarke, the owner, and there was a short tour of the property after the meeting. The Chair thanked Andrew John and Eleni for opening their home for the Management Board Meeting.

Apologies

1. Cllr Eleanor Kirby-Green, Cllr Susan Carey, Cllr Andrew Wilson, Cllr Maya Evans, Cllr A Pickering, Cllr M Taylor, and Diane Russell

Members' Interests

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

Minutes of the meeting from 7 March 2023

3. The minutes for 7 March 2023 were agreed to be an accurate record.
4. The Chair confirmed that he had organised a visit to the AONB with the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for Natural Environment and Land Use), Trudy Harrison on 26 October 2023.
5. The Members were also reminded that Jason Lavender has offered another High Weald walk and talk on Friday 6 October 2023.

Election of Management Board Members for the period November 2023 to November 2025

6. Samantha Nicholas took the Members through the process for election of Management Board for November 2023-2025:
 - At the JAC Meeting on Wednesday 22 November 2023, the Management Board, including Chair and Vice-Chair positions will be elected. Due to the May 2023 election, there are currently four positions vacant on the Board.
 - All Members will receive an email with an election form attached before the end of September. If they are interested in being elected to the Management Board, they are required to send back the form with a proposer and seconder.
7. The Chair encouraged the Members who may be interested in holding a position on the Management Board to use this opportunity to discuss this matter with him after the meeting.

Service Level Agreement 2024-2029

8. Jason Lavender took the Members through the background to the Service Level Agreement:
 - Pre 2008 there was a Memorandum of Understanding, in 2008 NE wanted to make a stronger binding document which was resisted by the Local Authorities. The AONBs then moved from NE to Defra and the decision was made that agreements were not required.
 - In 2014, the OSG recommended that there should be an informal agreement, the Service Level Agreement (SLA), set up between East Sussex CC and the individual LAs within the AONB. This reflected the budget support over the period of the five-year Management Plan cycle and to aid the budget process within their organisations. The LAs signed up to this in 2015 and subsequently in 2019. The Service Level Agreement requires renewing by 31 March 2024
9. Jason informed the Members that due to increased workload the partnership now faces, the SLA will need to reflect the many challenges the partnership is taking on.

10. A sub- group has been set up through the Management Board, with Cllr Kirby-Green as lead Member. The Chair encourage new Members who may be interested to in participating in the sub-group to speak with him.
11. Jason informed the Members that all the local authority's officers wish to participate in the renewal of the SLA process. This will be an agenda item at the Officer Steering to be held on 12 October 2023.
12. Jason informed the Members the core funding formula is currently under review by Defra, which is based on a formula which, among other factors, considers the area of each AONB.
13. The Chair informed the Members that the JAC had recently approved a budget review. The Management Board had requested that LAs pay a flat fee of £2500 for District and Borough Councils and County Councils support an uplift of £5000. This increase in funding has allowed the team to expand and secured further match funding from Defra.
14. The Chair thanked the LAs who were able to increase their contribution to the AONB budget. Jason informed the Members that a small minority of the LAs would consider an uplift in contributions in line with the Service Level Agreement renewal.
15. Sylvia Tidy commented that due to increasing pressure on the Farming sector, development, and climate crisis this is the time to secure funding for environmental budgets.

High Weald AONB Management Plan 2024 update

16. Sally Marsh took the Members AONB Management Plan 2024 Review and supporting documents: Public Consultation draft sign-off report and the process leading up to this decision:
 - The Crow Act advised that AONBs should develop a 20-year Management Plan which is reviewed every five years. The High Weald AONB acted upon this, and the 20-year plan is now under review. At present there is a duty of regard for the LAs to adopt the Plan which becomes their policy document. The Levelling-up and Regeneration bill has put in the additional text '*must seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty*'.
 - 18 months ago, the Unit started work on reviewing the Management Plan with the 15 local authorities. However, the launch of the public consultation document was delayed due to Defra developing a guidance for AONB and National Park Management Plans. Defra are also adding in national targets for the landscape for net zero, biodiversity and diversity targets. The Bill will introduce them, potentially as mandatory requirements. The Plan may require modification once these targets are confirmed.
17. Sally gave particular thanks to Sarah Brotherton and Diane Russell for developing the Plan and Jennifer Hollingum, OSG Chair, for coordinating the officer's contribution to the Plan.
18. The public consultation will start on Monday 25 September and run for six weeks. The CEOs of each LA will receive an email as well as the Members and

the officers. The Members were urged to send this information to other Members to increase awareness.

19. The matter was raised, and no objections were given from the Members. It was also noted that thanks were given to the Officer Steering Group for their significant efforts to support the development of the Plan.
20. **IT WAS AGREED to approve the draft Management Plan for public consultation, to allow public consultation to proceed according to the agreed timetable, in accordance with the delegation approved by JAC at the meeting of 22/3/2023.**

National AONB Branding

22. Gerry Sherwin took the members through the new branding for AONBs England & Wales (presentation appended)
 - The brand changes have arisen from the Glover review and has been taken through a series of consultations with wide range of diverse groups.
 - In August 2022 NAAONB took on the brand partner Nice & Serious and looked at research about the current brand awareness of the 43 different logos.
 - The research showed that awareness is already low but AONBs fall behind National Parks and amongst the 16-24 age group there is only 22% awareness.
 - The decision was taken to streamline the logos, give them unified look, making them brighter and more graphic.
 - The branding has not changed significantly and reflects how the AONBs currently work towards. However, it is felt the unified identity will support additional funding from Government for core funding and with other partnerships.
 - The Members commented on how the logo remained close to the original anvil image and was a strong reflection that the current logo stood out amongst the other logos. The Members also reflected the concern that all landscape is national and how will the public differentiate between the protected landscapes and others.
 - The National launch will be in November 2023. This will be a soft launch and will be followed by a wider campaign in Spring 2024 to coincide with the Management Plan 2024-2029 launch.

National Programmes update

23. Sally Marsh informed the Members of the following National activities which will affect the team's workload:
 - The new National Landscape Partnership, part of the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill has been initiated. Two million has been set aside to set up structure for policy and planning at a national level. This involves National Trails UK and National Parks England and AONBs. There will be a core team for communication on areas such as Nature Recovery and National Planning to produce the necessary data to meet national outcome targets.
 - The potential to become statutory partners which was recommended in the Glover review.

- There is an overall increase in local level consultations such as Hedgerows and PROWS.
- The team have been involved in the County Nature Recovery strategies and developing a strategy for the AONB which will be aligned with Local Authority Plans.

AONB community and landowner programmes:

24. Gerry Sherwin updated the Group on the programmes the Unit are currently managing:

Community outreach programmes:

- The High Weald Walking Festival was held between 9 to 17 September and was very well attended. The Walking Festival is managed by a successful partnership with local Rambler groups across the High Weald, who focus on the key walks. The team also ran guided walks on topics such as Dark Skies and local landscape. The AONB Communication advisor, Emma White, manages the website and PR around the walks with a limited fund of £500.
- High Weald Heroes is a long running programme which encourages Primary Schools to hold landscape-based workshops meeting the curriculum targets. The AONB Education officer Rachel Bennington also produces school Welly Walks which are circular walks through the landscape from the school gate. Historic England has awarded a second grant for heritage workshops at 5 schools following the success of the workshops in 2021/22.
- The AONB has taken on an Access advisor, Simon Fathers who is managing the access grant. This has been used initially to support the installation of accessible PROW gates in partnership with Kent and East Sussex County Council. West Sussex CC has initiated talks to participate in 2024/25. It also funded 'Changing Places' toilets at Ashdown Forest Centre.

Farming and Landowner programmes:

- Sussex Lund is in its seventh year and the panel meeting will be held in December 2023. This is supported by the philanthropist, Lisbet Rausing, with annual fund of £250,000. The focus of this fund is nature recovery and projects working with nature deprived audiences. This year there has been 36 applications.
- The Farming in Protected Landscape Defra grant has 1.1 million to spend which was increased from Defra. To date 400 enquires have been received and each applicant has had advice and or site visits.
- The Royal Countryside Fund (formerly the Prince's Trust) has approached the High Weald to take on another grant programme which focusses on events tailored to Farmers local needs.
- The team is also giving advice on tree planting schemes as there is a concern that these are not scrutinised effectively and impacting on valuable unimproved grasslands. Gerry requested that if LAs have similar schemes that they also consult with the AONB team.
- Defra has awarded the AONB, through Test and Trails fund, £90,000 for a convening role.

Budget

25. Gerry Sherwin informed the Members that a balanced budget was presented at the March JAC meeting, for five years, which was partially due to the increased contributions from the LAs. However, there may be an increased pay award in 2024 which may again impact on the budget.
26. Core budget over around £320,000 with a current project budget of £800,000. There is also of reserve of £230,000 which is required for redundancies and pay increases as this is not supported by East Sussex CC. This has now been reflected in the budget papers.

Staffing update

27. Jason Lavender updated the Members on the new staff to the team:
 - Janet Whitman has joined the team from Natural England. Janet is a grassland specialist and has replaced Ross Wingfield.
 - Simon Fathers has joined as the Access and Recreation officer and has a wealth of experience with Rights of Ways.
 - Stephanie Mason who was in the position of FIPL administrator has moved to a landscape management officer role. Steph will also be leading the Royal Countryside Trust programme.
 - Daniel Cavill has taken over the role of FiPL administrator. Daniel is new to our industry but has a keen interest in the farming sector.
 - Our geographical maps QGIS support, Peter Matthew's contract with the Unit has now ended. Peter did an excellent job producing many of the information maps required for the Management Plan.

Risk Management

28. Jason highlighted the key risks to the Partnership:
 - The core budget remaining the same has limited the team expanding to meet the increased workload. 36% of the core budget has been cut impacting on future planning.
 - The issue with shorter term contracts for many of our land managers roles impacts on future planning and meeting project objectives.

Agenda items for the High Weald JAC meeting (22 November 2023)

29. The next meeting will be held at the Woodland Enterprise Site on Wednesday 22 November 2023, suggested topics are:
 - Election of Management Board
 - Budget report
 - Management Plan update
 - Cllr Sam Raby also suggested with the LAs working on Nature Recovery strategies it would be good to have a presentation on Natural Connectivity.
 - Natural England has offered to present the NE Planning Strategy.

AOB

30. The Chair suggested an organisational chart for the AONB Team should be circulated to the Members.



National brand strategy for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Origin of strategy and process

21 September 2019 Glover Landscapes Review published with a recommendation that 'the current cumbersome title 'AONB' should be replaced. Our suggestion is that they should be called National Landscapes ' and 27 proposals. Ten proposals under 'Landscapes for Everyone' including Proposal 7: A stronger mission to connect all people with our national landscapes.

July – December 2021 Over 70 people consulted on the AONBs brand: AONB partnerships and external partners including people working with people from deprived backgrounds, ethnic minority backgrounds, disabilities. LGBTQIA+ people, landowners, tourist organisations. Recommendations included deployment of a clear visual identity under the National Landscapes brand.

August 2022 - June 2023

Brand partner - Nice & Serious – appointed to develop brand strategy and brand identity with ongoing consultation via interviews, workshops and surveys with stakeholders and AONB teams.

June 2023 – October 2023

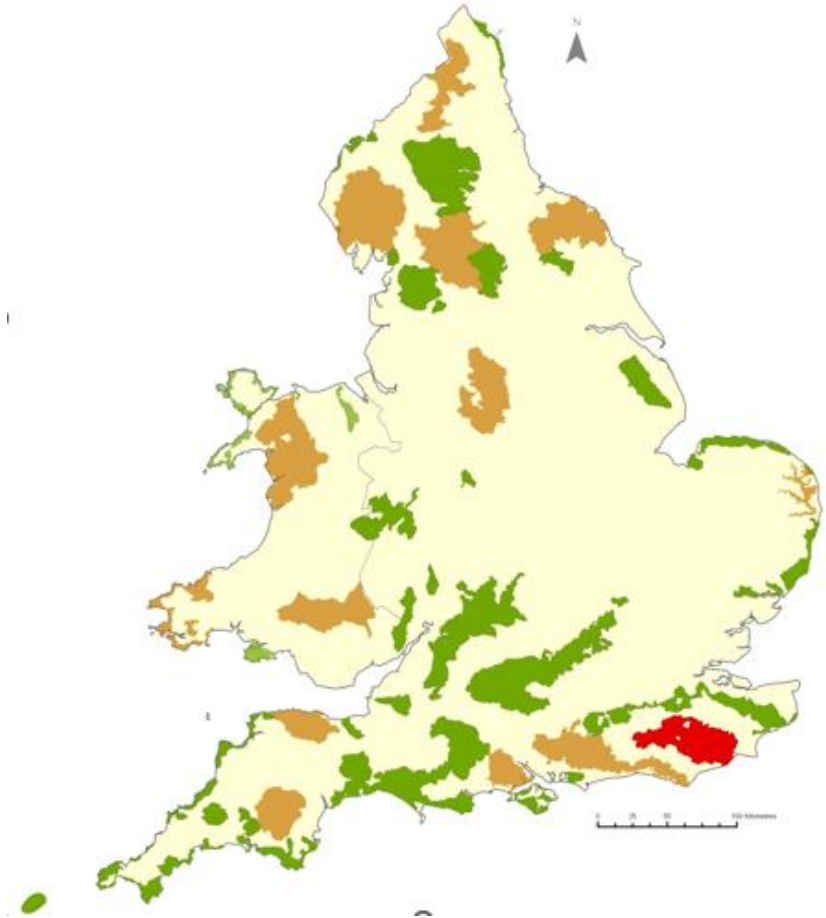
Strategy and identity published for dissemination to AONB Partnerships.

Issue: Low awareness of protected landscapes in the UK

Awareness of AONBs is less than half that for National Parks for most of the population.

Awareness is 49% compared to 74% for National Parks in the 55-75 age group.

It is 22% compared to 53% for National Parks in the 16-24 age group.



Issue: Inconsistent AONB partnership branding



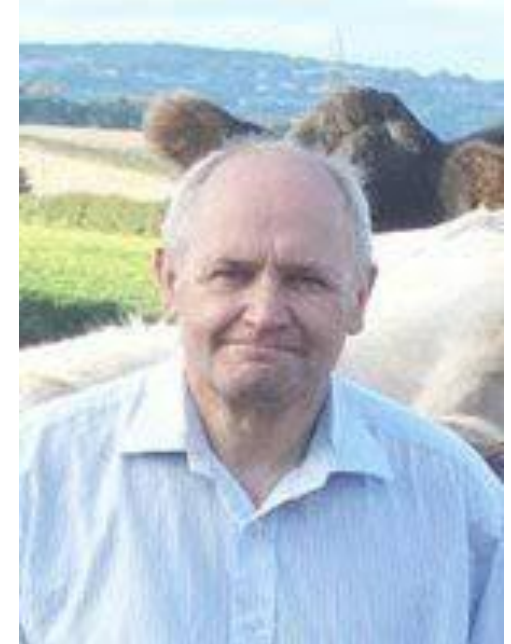
Philip Hygate, Chair, National Landscapes Association (formerly the National Association for AONBs)

“As Chair of the National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, it is a privilege to introduce the new National Landscapes brand to you.

The work in developing this new, united personality for our network has been conducted with the input of AONB teams, representatives of groups we haven't traditionally engaged with, the general public and existing stakeholders from partner organisations, landowners, local businesses and Welsh and English government.

The brand story captures the essence of our family – the ambition, collaboration, commitment and readiness to serve and share for the good of our landscapes; for nature, climate and people.

I commend the National Landscapes rebrand to you all as we stand at this threshold: where National Landscapes can become the landscape designation for the 21st century and beyond.”



New brand strategy - Vision

Our Vision

Our vision captures our ambition and represents the future we will have helped to create if we achieve our mission.

**Beautiful, thriving
landscapes that all
people feel part of**

New brand strategy – Mission

Our Mission

Our mission captures how we're going to achieve our vision.

Protect and regenerate our landscapes and make sure everyone can enjoy them

- **Convene:** Bringing together landowners, the local community and other organisations to create a Management Plan that represents a shared vision for the future of the landscape.
- **Enable:** Supporting our partners on the ground to put the Management Plan into practice.
- **Deliver:** Working with our partners to deliver our Management Plan. Creating the collective effort needed to protect and regenerate the landscapes, and make sure that everyone is able to access and enjoy their beauty.

New brand strategy – principles

Our strategic proposition

Our proposition summarises what makes us unique and forms the basis of the story we want people to understand when they think of us. Consider it as an 'internal mantra', it's not intended to be an external message or tagline.

Landscapes shape people, people shape landscapes.

When people experience the landscapes they are affected by it. It brings communities together and shapes our nation as a whole.

And the more people build a connection with the landscape, the more invested they become in shaping its future. It drives the passionate work of our partnerships, landowners and those who live and work in our landscapes. And invites in teams of volunteers to protect it, restore it and make them the best they can be.

New brand identity

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty - will be replaced by National Landscapes

Logos – more graphic and bolder

Colour palette – brighter

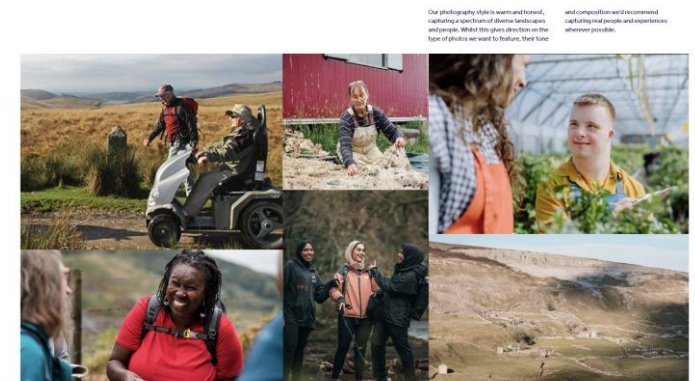
Typography – more accessible

Iconography – flexibility

Images - more welcoming

Design system – scope for mix and match

Grasslands	Oceans & Rivers	Rocky	Moors	Limestone
HEX: #1E8449 CMYK: 100, 54, 100, 11 Pantone: 349C	HEX: #005696 CMYK: 100, 80, 50, 10 Pantone: 286C	HEX: #E67E22 CMYK: 100, 70, 100, 0 Pantone: 148C	HEX: #8E44AD CMYK: 100, 70, 100, 0 Pantone: 549C	HEX: #95A5A6 CMYK: 100, 100, 100, 10 Pantone: 425C
HEX: #2ECC71 CMYK: 100, 50, 100, 0 Pantone: 347C	HEX: #3498DB CMYK: 100, 60, 100, 0 Pantone: 296C	HEX: #F1C40F CMYK: 100, 80, 100, 0 Pantone: 147C	HEX: #9B59B6 CMYK: 100, 60, 100, 0 Pantone: 556C	HEX: #BDC3C7 CMYK: 100, 100, 100, 0 Pantone: 424C
HEX: #27AE60 CMYK: 100, 50, 100, 0 Pantone: 346C	HEX: #2980B9 CMYK: 100, 60, 100, 0 Pantone: 295C	HEX: #F39C12 CMYK: 100, 80, 100, 0 Pantone: 146C	HEX: #8E44AD CMYK: 100, 60, 100, 0 Pantone: 549C	HEX: #BDC3C7 CMYK: 100, 100, 100, 0 Pantone: 424C
HEX: #2ECC71 CMYK: 100, 50, 100, 0 Pantone: 347C	HEX: #2980B9 CMYK: 100, 60, 100, 0 Pantone: 295C	HEX: #F39C12 CMYK: 100, 80, 100, 0 Pantone: 146C	HEX: #8E44AD CMYK: 100, 60, 100, 0 Pantone: 549C	HEX: #BDC3C7 CMYK: 100, 100, 100, 0 Pantone: 424C

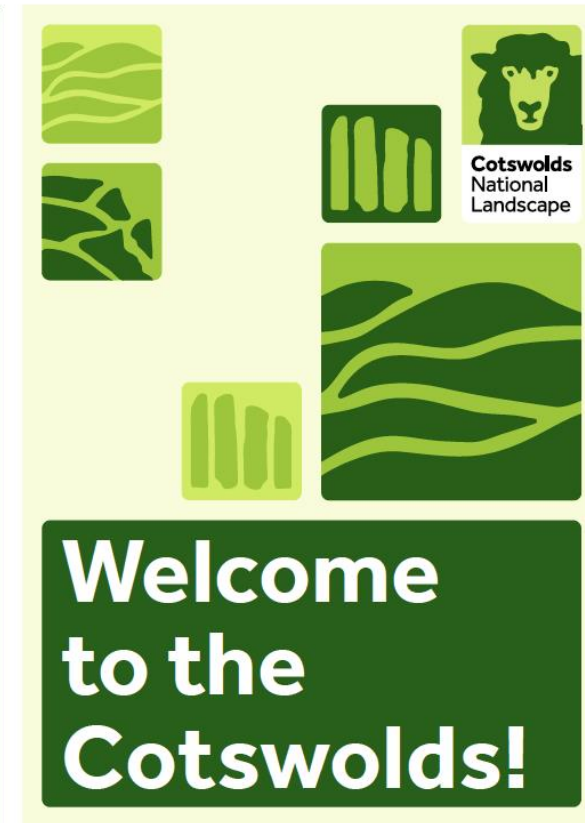
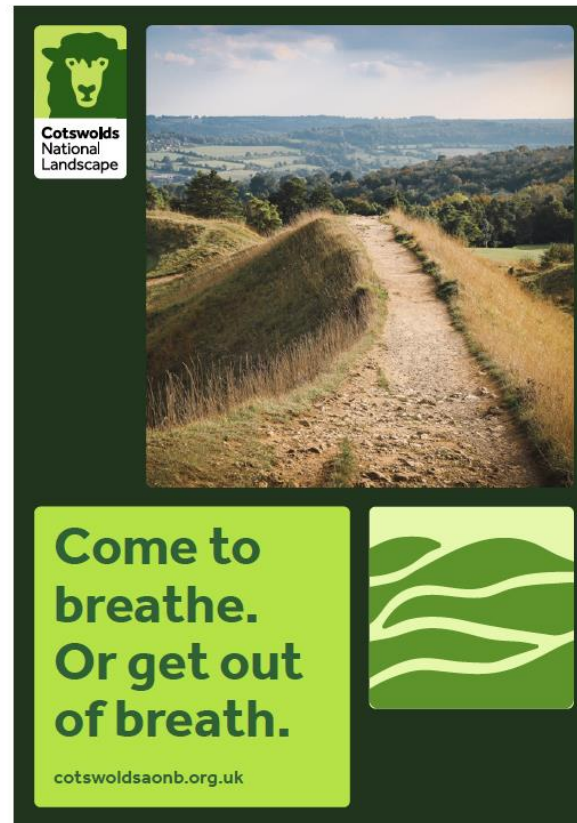
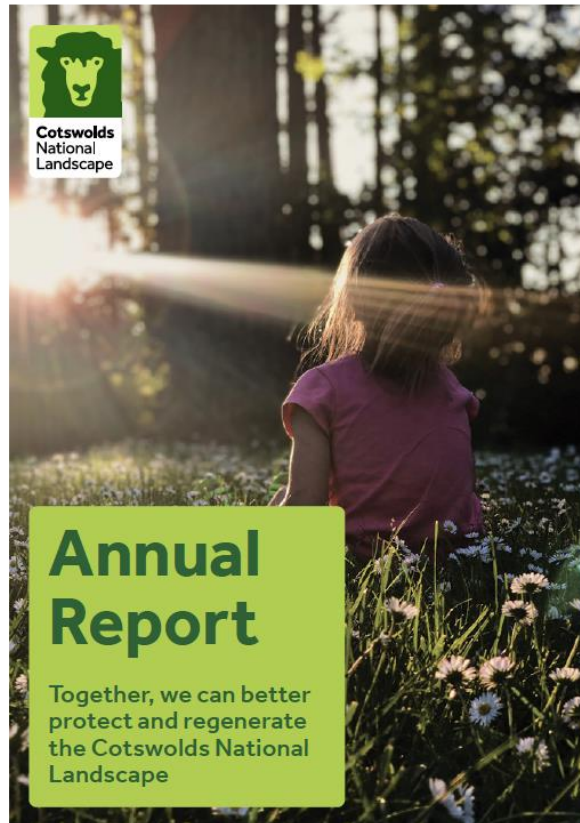


National landscape logos



Example of application of the brand identity

depending on our audience we can either scale up our patchwork graphics to be more dynamic or scale them down to be more refined and pared back.



Partners and policy makers



Volunteers and Visitors



Pros and cons of new identity

Pros

- A consistent national identity for AONBs and their partnerships will help us promote our brand
- 'National Landscapes' as a term is easier to use in communications and is less likely to be turned into an unwieldy acronym
- The brand design system provides flexibility to accommodate local needs
- **An improved national identity may enable future investment in AONBs**

Cons

- There are other Glover Review proposals (and local needs) that need more urgent consideration and investment
- Legislatively the term Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty will still apply – this may cause confusion
- National Landscapes as a term is less descriptive and emotive than Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- There has been limited testing of the new brand identify proposals
- The current AONB logo has been used for over 25 years and stands out from the crowd
- No additional resources to help AONB Partnerships deliver 'Landscapes for everyone' proposals

Next steps



National launch campaign – November 2023



Implementation fund - £5k



Trademarking by NAAONB



Local launch campaign as part of
Management Plan launch April 2024



High Weald National Landscape





Protected landscapes, the High Weald AONB and the High Weald AONB Partnership

Part of a family of protected landscapes

IUCN Category V Protected Area (Protected Landscapes)

“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 the **safeguarding the integrity of this interaction is vital** to protecting and sustaining the area and its associated nature conservation and other values”

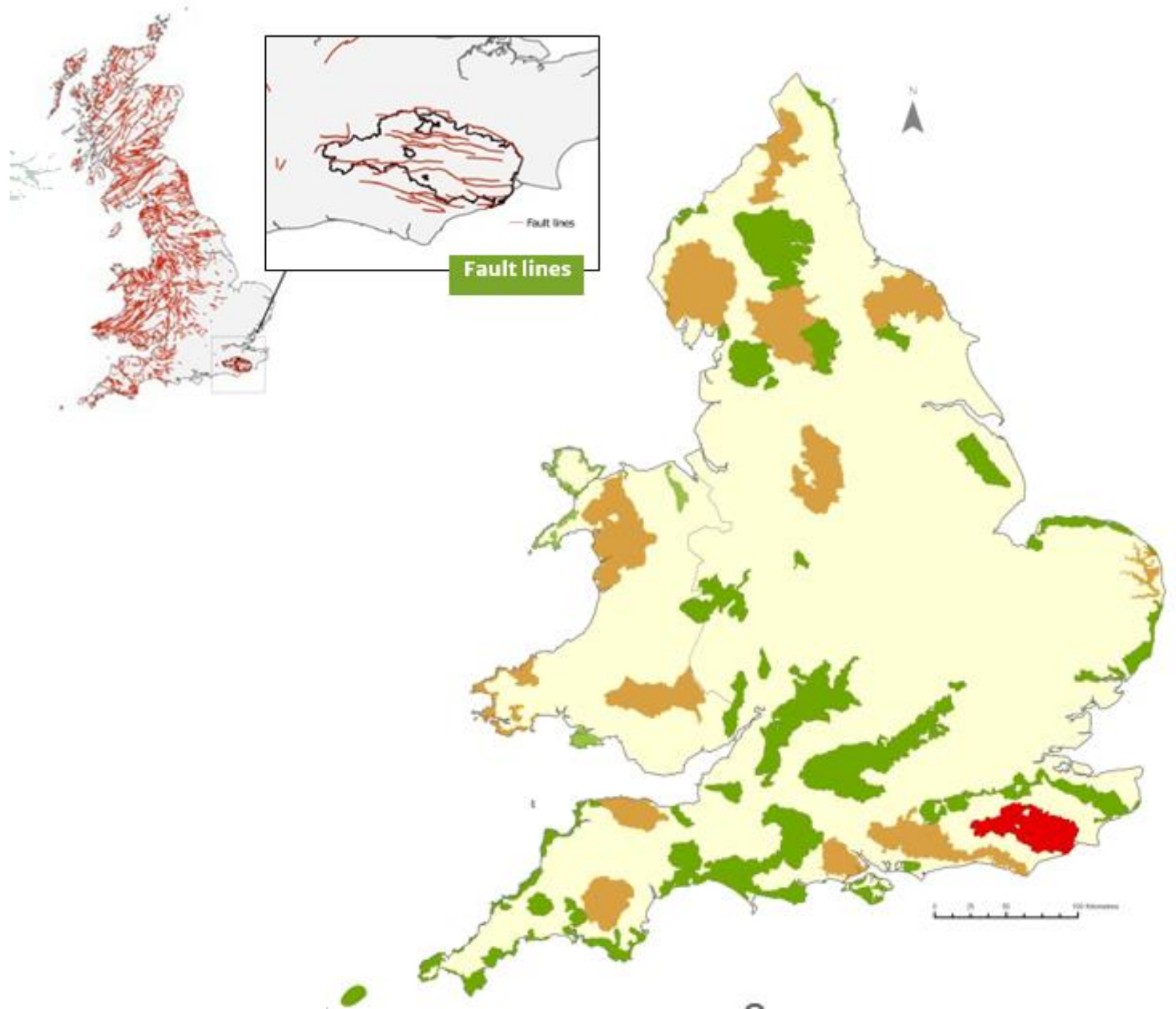


National map of protected areas

4th largest AONB: after the Cotswolds, North Pennines and North Wessex Downs

Larger than many National Parks

1,460 km² (560 square miles)

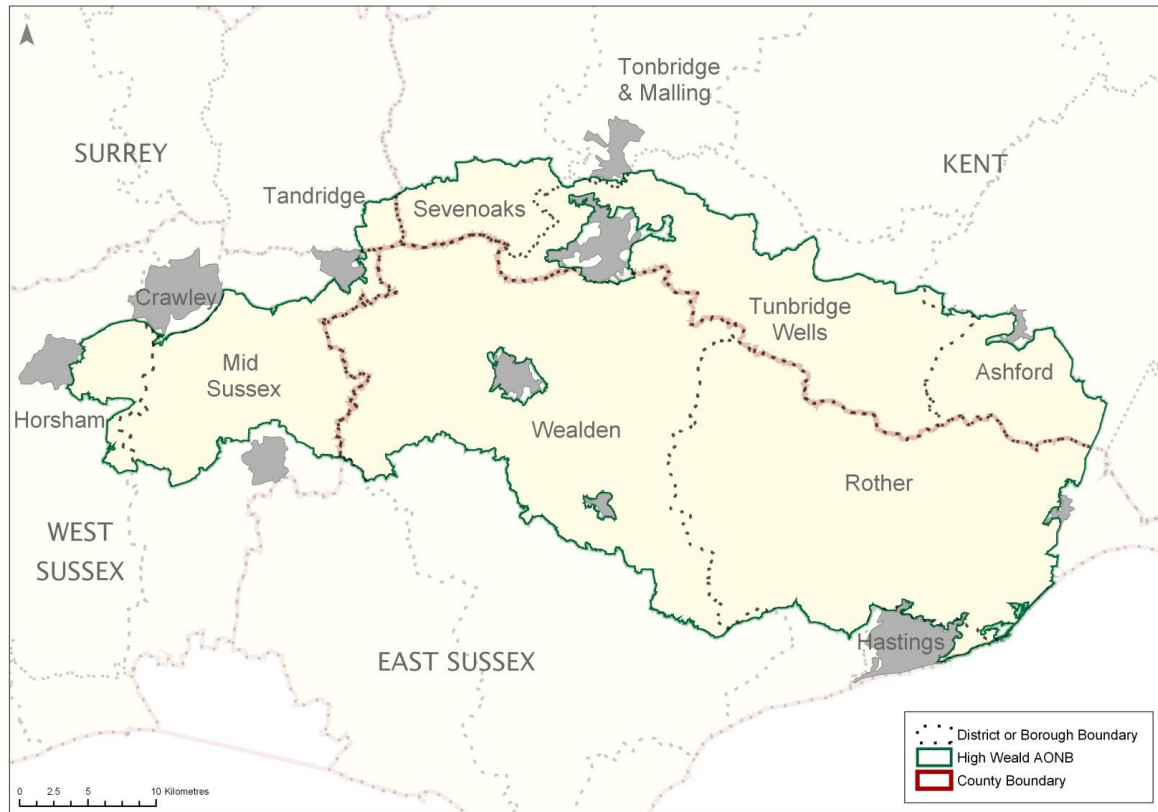


Protected landscapes within the South East



Designated 1983 (Surrey Hills 1958, South Downs 1966, Kent Downs 1968)

Local authority areas



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



A Medieval landscape



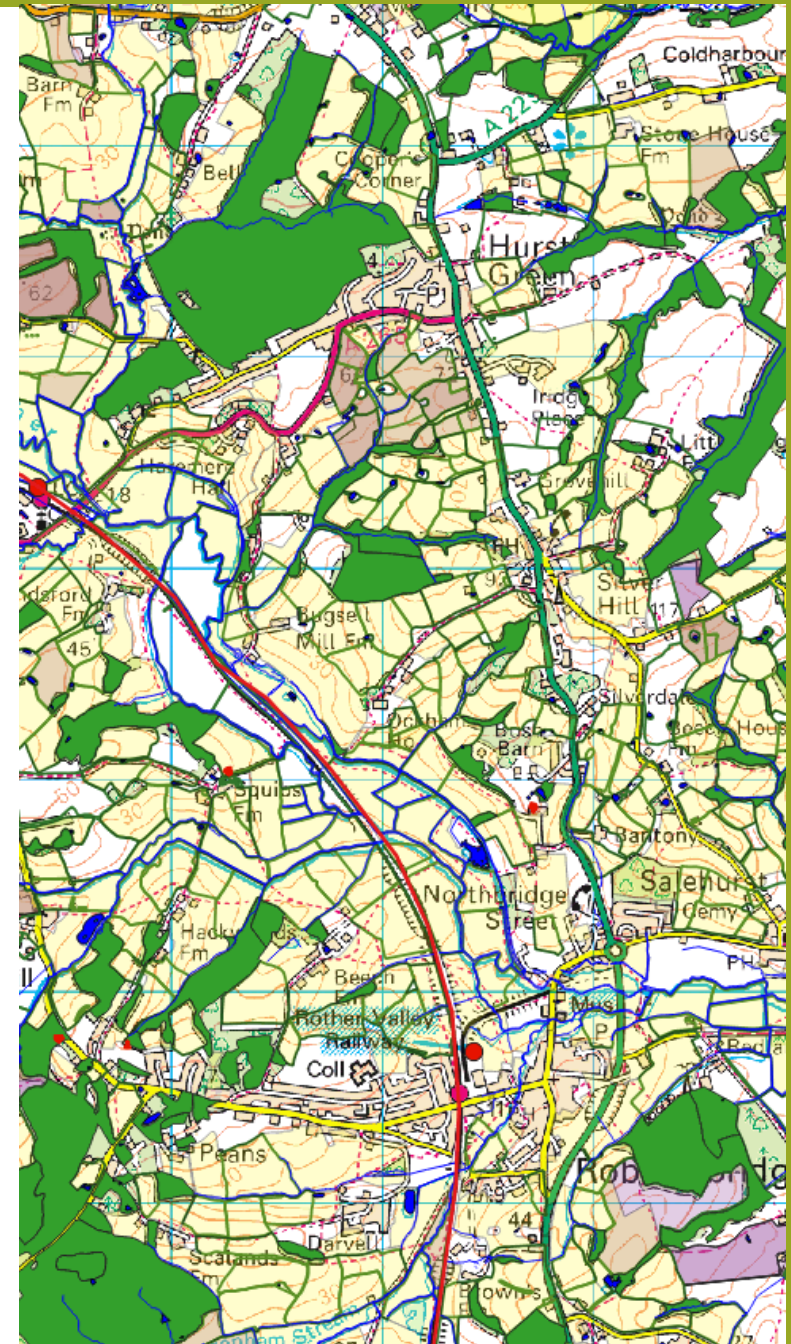
One that others aspire to.....



Special qualities

- Sandstone ridges and deep gills
- Ancient woodlands
- Dispersed settlement of historic farmsteads
- Historic routeways
- Small irregular fields and heaths.

Story map coming soon!



Partnership summary

High Weald AONB Partnership is made up of 15 local authorities, NE on behalf of Defra and 5 stakeholder representatives

Celebrated 30th anniversary in 2019

National and local government support for 'core' activity, but fundraise like a charity to deliver projects

Remit is broad: no powers. Provide specialist advice and guidance and convene, facilitate and deliver.

Work collaboratively to achieve purposes of designation

Source funds from a range of places to help stakeholders deliver the AONB

East Sussex County Council is the 'host authority'.



Partnership governance



Joint Advisory Committee (JAC)
22 members
(15 local authorities, Natural England and 5 co-optees)

Management Board
7 members
(4 vacancies)

AONB Unit
5.8FTE

- Topic / project / task groups**
- Officers Steering Group
 - Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) Local Assessment Panel
 - Sussex Lund Grant Panel
 - High Weald Walks Festival Group
 - Deer Management Project Group

POLICY & RESEARCH TEAM

Diane Russell

Planning Advisor
(1FTE)

Sarah Brotherton

Technical Officer
(0.6FTE)

COMMUNITY OUTREACH TEAM

Rachel Bennington

Education Officer (0.6FTE)

Simon Fathers

Access Recreation Officer
(1FTE)
Fixed term to 31.3.25

Sally Marsh/ Jason Lavender

Co-Director (1FTE)

Gerry Sherwin

AONB Business Manager (0.8FTE)

BUSINESS TEAM

Samantha Nicholas

Team Support Officer (0.8FTE)

Emma White

Communication Officer (0.6FTE)

Daniel Cavill

Senior Administrator (FiPL)
(1FTE)
Fixed term to 31.3.25

**5.8 FTE core
staff, 5.9 FTE
project staff**

LAND MANAGEMENT TEAM

Janet Whitman

Land Management Project Officer (1FTE)

Tobias Jackson

Land Management Project Officer (1FTE)
Fixed term to 31.3.25

Christine Meadows

Land Management Project Officer (0.2FTE)

Dean Morrison

Land Management Project Officer (Water
specialist)
(1FTE)
Fixed term 31.12.24

Sandy Williamson

Deer Co-ordinator (0.6FTE)
Fixed term 31.3.25

Steph Mason

Land Management Officer (0.5FTE)
Fixed term to 31.3.25

What we do

Produce the statutory AONB Management Plan (development of the evidence base, production in line with government guidance, consultation, publication and dissemination)

Provide advice and guidance on **national and local policy and development proposals** that affect the AONB

Provide advice and guidance on **sustainable land management**

Community outreach: access, engagement and empowerment

- Neighbourhood plans
- Dark Skies community project

- Grant programmes:
Sussex Lund, Farming and Protected Landscapes and National Grid Landscape Enhancement Initiative

- Regenerative farming advocacy and demonstration sites

- Deer management initiative

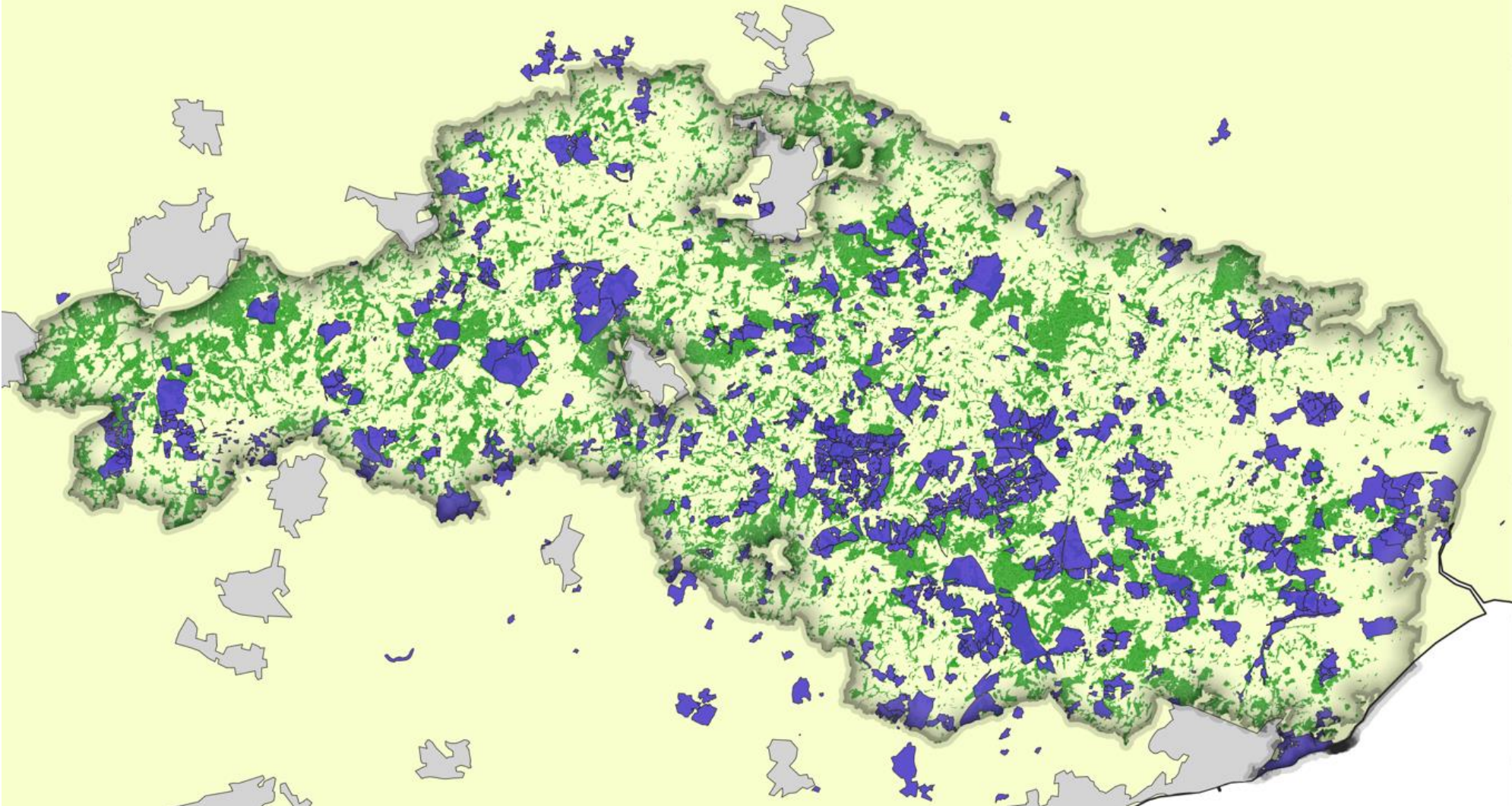
- High Weald Heroes Education Programme

- High Weald Walks Festival

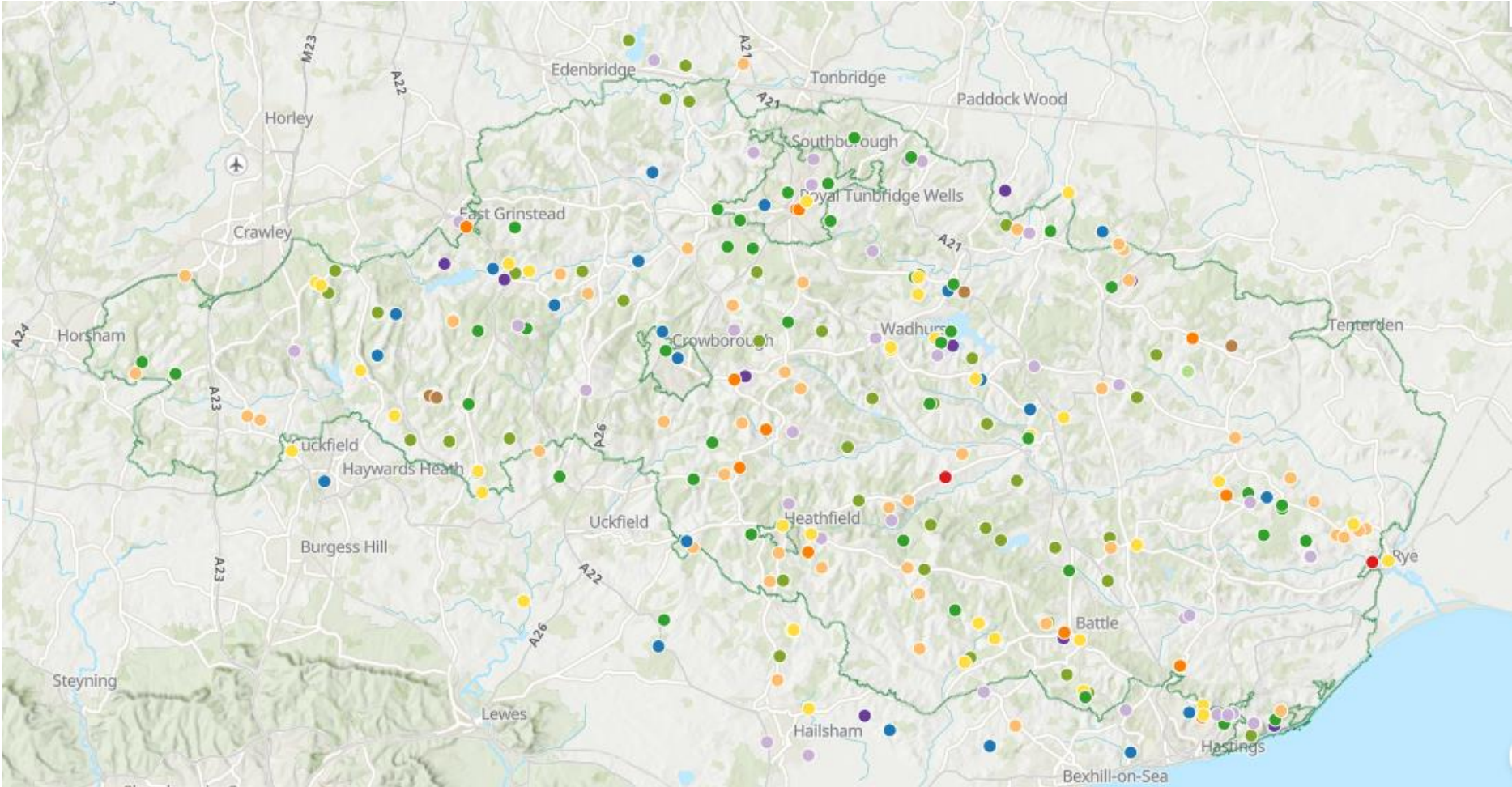
- Access for all projects



Land management advice



Grant awards



AONBs and development

- Responsibility for decision making remains with the Local Authority, but CROW Act S85 duty of regard
- “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” (National Planning Policy Framework para 176)
- Presumption against major development (NPPF para 177)
- Statutory AONB Management Plan 'a material consideration'



Glover Review of National Parks and AONBs

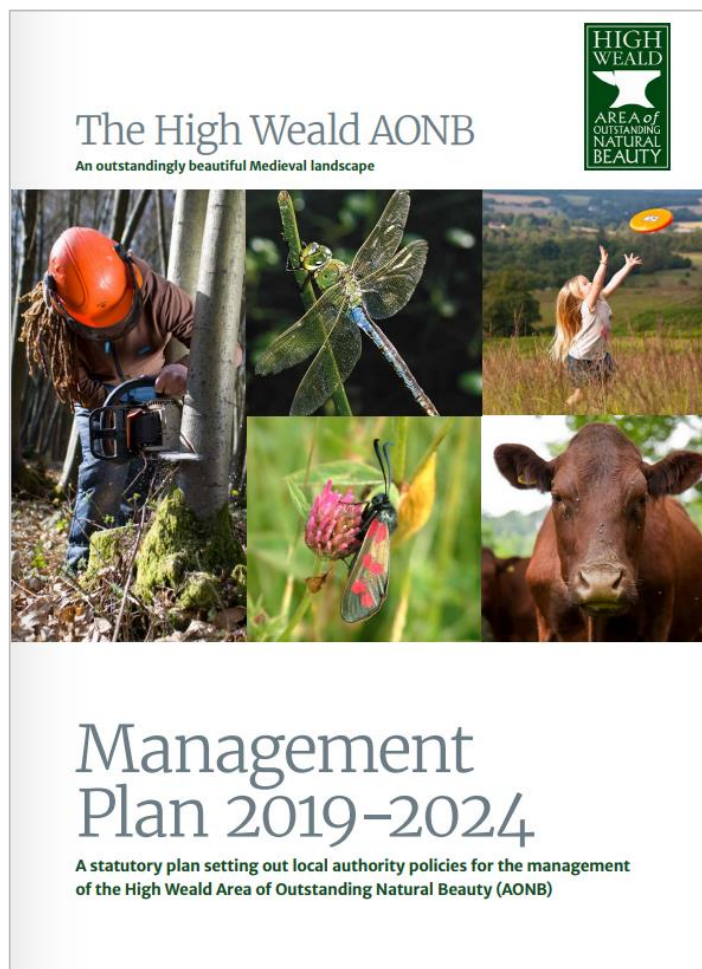
“There are things we can do to make a successful system even better.”

“National landscapes are a “positive force for the nation’s wellbeing.”

“They should be exemplars of the very best, improving not degrading. They should look and feel special.”



AONB Management Plan (2019-2024)



- Statutory, reviewed every 5 years
- Informed by widespread consultation
- Adopted by the area's 15 local authorities
- Sets out what makes the area special and objectives and actions

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

Proposed actions include: Support existing agricultural infrastructure, food processing facilities and local farmers' markets; and choose local food and support local food growers through procurement policies.

Net zero

Nature recovery

Health and well being

Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI)

Rural economy

Community environmental action

AONB Management Plan – relevant to other national and local objectives

* Management for multiple
objectives

High Weald AONB Partnership Budget 2023-24

£318,100 from Defra, tied to delivery of core functions

£112,800 from 15 local authority partners for core functions

£999,300 Farming in Protected Landscapes grant programme (to 31 March 2025)

£185,000 Sussex Lund grant programme (ongoing)

£124,300 other sources (around 20 others overall)

Total turnover £1,739,500



Partnership members:



Act as advocates for the AONB designation, the area's special qualities and actions that meet management plan objectives



Provide a voice for local people



Bring information and expertise



Act collectively in support of AONB purposes, as well as representing individual interests



Enable individual organisation's powers and resources to be used to meet AONB management plan objectives



More information and to keep in touch

www.highweald.org

01424 723011

www.twitter.com/highweald

www.facebook.com/highwealdaonb



High Weald Officer Steering Group



Notes of a meeting of the High Weald Officer Steering Group held on 12 October 2023 at Acorn Tourism

Samantha Nicholas
Clerk to the High Weald AONB
Joint Advisory Committee

PRESENT:

Jennifer Hollingum	Mid Sussex DC (Chairman)
Mark Daly	Horsham DC (Vice-Chairman)
Alan Sime	Ashford BC
Sophie Gilbert	Crawley BC
Virginia Pullen	East Sussex CC
Vivienne Riddle	Sevenoaks DC
David Scully	Tunbridge Wells BC
Natalie Bumpus	Wealden DC
Chris Walker	Kent CC

High Weald Unit:

Jason Lavender	AONB Joint Director
Gerry Sherwin	AONB Business Manager
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>
8.2	the officers would like to take forward two planning advice notes, Dark Skies and Soft Landscaping in Housing Developments including boundary treatments and two position statements Solar Farms and Farm Diversification	Unit
8.3	The 'Bats and Artificial Lighting at Night' ILP Guidance Note will be electronically circulated to the Officers	Unit
10.6	It was agreed that the revised SLA would be uploaded onto the Team webpage for comments and the budget consultation supporting documents would be recirculated to the officers.	Unit

1. Apologies

- 1.1. Apologies were received from Sally Marsh, David Greenwood, Julian Ling, Kerry Culbert, and Isabel Shaw and Jeff Pryah. Rob Cotter, Tandridge DC has left the organisation.
- 1.2. Simon Fathers, Access and Recreation officer, was unable attend the meeting so the agenda item 4. presentation on the project, and 9. legislative changes were deferred to February 2024 meeting.

2. Minutes of the meeting of 28 February 2023

- 2.1 The Minutes of 28 February 2023 were agreed to be an accurate account of the meeting.

3. Management Board Meeting held on 20 September 2023

- 3.1 Jennifer Hollingum updated the Group on the Management Board Meeting held on 20 September at Borde Hill Gardens:
 - All Members were invited to the meeting, due to the May election results, many members are new to the Joint Advisory Committee. All Members had also been invited to an online introduction to the AONB, and walk and talk with Jason Lavender, covering the key issues that the AONB faces.
 - The Members approved the draft High Weald Management Plan 2024 for public consultation. The consultation will run for six weeks and will close on 5 November 2023.
 - The Service Level Agreement process was discussed, and it was agreed that this would be led by the Management Board. Cllr Eleanor Kirby-Green to lead with input from the OSG.
 - The Management Board will be elected on 22 November 2023 and there are four positions vacant. The new Members were encouraged to apply for a position. To date we have three candidates. Jennifer encouraged the officers to contact their newly appointed Members.
 - A presentation on the National Landscape branding which was one of the outcomes from the Glover Review. The launch date is set for 22 November 2023, and this will be launched at the JAC meeting.
 - The Members were also keen to have presentations around Nature Recovery connectivity at the JAC meeting.

4. Planning matters affecting the AONB

- 4.1 Diane Russell informed the Group of the updates to the Levelling-up & Regeneration Bill and the National Planning Framework, which impact on the High Weald.
 - The Levelling-up Bill is anticipated to be put forward for Royal Assent on 7th November, and to come into effect in January. They will amend a few pieces of primary legislation, the major change to the CROW Act is from 'duty of regard to

the purpose of...’ to ‘duty to seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty, which is a stronger duty. Defra is in the process of developing guidance supporting these changes.

- Post-meeting update - The Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill received Royal Assent on 26th October 2023, and is now an Act of Parliament.
- The Management Plan monitoring and outcomes framework is also yet to be provided by DEFRA. These metrics will need to be incorporated into the Plan when released.

4.2 The officers’ feedback to the Group current planning matters updates:

- Horsham DC: launching the draft local plan consultation in December 2023.
- Ashford DC: call for sites process will start from 20 November. Cabinet approved the next stage of the Stodmarsh Lake planning application, actively working towards delivering new strategic wetlands within the borough as a means of providing nutrient mitigation, which makes up a significant part of the borough. This may put pressure on more sites in the AONB coming forward. Tenterden Neighbourhood Development Plan is consulting on the Reg 16 document. The objection count is quite high due to the allocation of sites within the Plan following the outcome of Stodmarsh.
- Sevenoaks BC: Reg 18 consultation in December with site allocations.
- TWBC: David Scully updated the officers on the Turnden inquiry. The Secretary of State’s decision to refuse Berkeley Homes application for 165 dwellings on land adjacent to Turnden, Hartley Road, Cranbrook, Kent, has now been quashed by consent, and the matter will return to the Secretary of State to reconsider.

4.3 Diane informed the Group that the National Association of AONBs had put in a joint response for the recent national Permitted Development consultations, setting out concerns about taking conversion of farm building in the AONB out of the planning process. It was understood that Rother DC had also put in a separate response based on these concerns.

5. Non Planning matters affecting the AONB

5.1 Wealden DC has started their sustainability appraisal. Jason Lavender requested that if officers are aware of consultations such as climate strategies which the AONB should be involved then please pass these through to the team.

5.2 Gerry informed the group that there are wider grant programmes such as the Rural Prosperity fund covering Rother and Wealden. The AONB team may be able to offer support on advice for specific applications, for example an applicant might wish to deer fence around a site, but the AONB advice would be to invest in deer stalking as this will have a better impact on the surrounding landscape.

- 5.3 Gerry also informed the Group that the AONB team had received funding through Defra's 'Test & Trails' for convening support. It was suggested that this could be used for the Nature Recovery Groups for resolving differences in approaches.
- 5.4 David Scully informed the group that Tunbridge Wells BC have started to develop their biodiversity strategy. All LAs need to consider what you can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity; agree policies and specific objectives based on your consideration; act to deliver your policies and achieve your objectives.
- 5.5 Horsham DC and East Sussex CC have employed ecology landscape officers to help with their Biodiversity Net Gain.

6. Local Nature Recovery Strategies and High Weald priorities

- 6.1 Sarah Brotherton presented to the Group slides from a wider suite of Nature Recovery strategic maps, these covered:
- Species diverse grassland - this uses the Natural England Living Habitats England data and highlights areas of grassland which may be of interest but are currently surveyed, and may be at threat from development such as grassland either side of Tunbridge Wells.
 - Water quality analysis map shows that the High Weald water quality is as poor as other areas, however, there are significantly more storm overflow sewage spillages in the High Weald compared to all other AONBs, over 3,000 within 2022. It also looks at the benefits of flood measurements such as Woody Leaky Dams.
 - High Weald Hedges: This slide highlighted that due to the more intensive farming landscape at the eastern end, many of the hedges had been removed. Whereas the western and central areas have not lost hedges, but many are not managed appropriately. The AONB has also carried out work at a Parish level to show lost hedgerows.
 - Analysis was carried out on the additional amount of habitat that could be created from wilder boundaries along traditional boundaries. Analysis showing an extra metre around hedges and woodland gives an additional 42 km² of prime scrub and tall grass habitat.
 - Deer impact assessments across the High Weald; highlighting the two project areas of Ashdown Forest and Bayham Road area in Kent. Deer is the biggest threat to tree planting and woodlands due to the extreme numbers; they are doing extensive damage to the understorey. The High Weald has also used drone technology to assess fallow deer numbers in both project areas.
 - Species recovery. Two years ago, external NGOs were asked what their priority species for the High Weald where. This work has recently been picked back up, and the High Weald Unit is now putting forward their species considered important, and that could be championed for the AONB.
- 6.2 Sarah was thanked for her presentation, slides are appended, and the officers were encouraged to contact Sarah Brotherton sarah.brotherton@highweald.org, if they require more information.

7. AONB programmes

7.1 Gerry and Diane updated the following programmes which the AONB team manage:

- Landscape management advice
- Community outreach and access
- Policy, planning and consultations.

7.2 Gerry informed the Group of the following land management programmes:

- Farming in Protected Landscapes supports a wide range of Farming initiatives to improved biodiversity on their land. This year we have allocated grants to 31 projects and this year £500,000 is planned to be allocated which is lower than the amount allocated to us. However, this money will be redistributed amongst other Parks and AONBs. Due to having many smaller landowners which all take the same time to scope the projects it has been harder to achieve the level of grants in comparison to other AONBs.
- The Unit are currently working with The Royal Countryside Programme to have education events at local farms to build better connections with the farming community. 40 landowners attended to a launch meeting in October 2023.
- Sussex Lund grant programme has recently closed; 37 applications have been received supporting £220,000 grant. The grant panel is in December 2023, and offer letters will be sent out for January 2024. One of the projects, Greening Chiddingly is landscape led across 6 Farms.

7.3 Chris Walker Kent CC enquired about FiPL supporting the Kent explore programme. Gerry confirmed that if they can engage with landowners and habitat enhancement it could be a possibility.

7.1 Gerry discussed the community outreach programmes including:

- The High Weald Walking Festival which is managed in partnership with five Ramblers groups was highly successful this year. 30 guided walks were put on the website, these were a mixture of long and short walks including a Pilgrimage walk in Rye area and walk around Worth Abbey grounds.
- Access project, which is now being managed by Simon Fathers, was 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, including 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 and Kent High Weald Project – accessible paths around Cinderhill.
- Dean Morrison project officer for Sussex Go Flow (Cuckmere & Combe), focussing on natural flood management, finishes in December. The Environment Agency is keen to extend the project for another year or two, and the AONB is also applying for a Natural Flood Management grant to carry out similar projects across the whole of the High Weald.

- 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 the second in a series of workshops on local history events that is shaped by the landscape.

7.2 Diane informed the Group of the latest consultations and policies AONB is involved, and highlighted the value of early informal discussion on emerging local plan policies and site allocations in advance of formal consultation responses; this has recently worked well with Hastings and Mid-Sussex planning policy teams. There was a discussion on the increase in consultations such as Gatwick Runway, Ashdown Forest Nature Recovery proposal and Southeast and Southern Water.

8. Planning advice notes:

- 8.1 Diane led a discussion on which topics the Group may wish to pursue to build on a suite of planning guidance to sit alongside the Management Plan, and focussed primarily at a development management audience. Earlier in the year the group had a presentation from Dan Oakley on Dark Skies policies, and it was agreed that further guidance on this matter should be taken forward, along with focussed guidance regarding soft landscaping in housing developments (expanding the points on this in the Housing Design Guide) and potentially including boundary treatments (with reference to close-board fencing). Also, the potential to develop 'position statements' on matters such as solar farms in the AONB and issues around farm diversification such as vineyards and associated infrastructure.
- 8.2 The release of the 'Bats and Artificial Lighting at Night' ILP Guidance Note will be included in this guidance. The latest guidance will be circulated by email to the OSG.
- 8.3 ACTION: the officers would like to take forward two planning advice notes, Dark Skies and Soft Landscaping in Housing Developments including boundary treatments and two position statements Solar Farms and Farm Diversification.**
- 8.4 ACTION: The 'Bats and Artificial Lighting at Night' ILP Guidance Note will be electronically circulated to the Officers.**

9. Training for Local Authority officers and Members

- 9.1 The AONB team offered the local authorities the opportunity to deliver Management Plan training sessions at each of the local authorities for officers and Members if required, and subject to resources, after the new Plan is published.
- 9.2 Subject to sufficient take-up, the AONB team will organise a field training course in June 2023 to increase wider information on topics. It was agreed that the team would circulate to the OSG info regarding other training events in the AONB which might benefit the officers.

10. Service Level Agreement (SLA) update

10.1 Jason Lavender took the Group through the background to the Service Level Agreement:

- Pre 2008 there was a Memorandum of Understanding, in 2008 NE wanted to make a stronger binding document which was resisted by the Local Authorities. The AONBs then moved from NE to Defra and the decision was made that agreements were not required. In 2014 the OSG requested that an agreement was produced between ESCC and each local authority outlining the 5-year budget and the scope of work. 13 Local Authorities signed up to this agreement. This was then updated in 2019 and 9 LAs signed the document.

10.2 Gerry informed the Group that East Sussex CC require an agreement so that they can managed budget setting and the officers agreed that they would like to continue with this process.

10.3 Jason distributed a hard copy of the changes in red to the SLA informed the Groups that the new agreement would reflect the current changes to the budget requests approved by the JAC and this would also include an inflationary charge. It also reflects the changes in workload.

10.4 David Scully requested that the agreement had a dispute resolution clause. Gerry confirmed that she would look at clauses to add to the document.

10.6 **It was agreed that the revised SLA would be uploaded onto the Team webpage for comments and the budget consultation supporting documents would be recirculated to the officers.**

11. Additional Items for the JAC to be held on 22 November 2023

- 11.1 Additional items for the JAC agenda:
- Service Level Agreement update
 - National Planning Strategy
 - Nature Recovery connectivity

12. A.O.B

12.1 There will be two future meetings online, one in January 2024 to feedback Management Plan updates from the consultation and the next OSG Meeting will be held in February 2024.

Agenda Item: 9

Committee:	High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee
Date:	22 November 2023
Title of Report:	Draft Revenue Budget 2024/25
By:	Treasurer to the Joint Advisory Committee
Purpose:	To consider the draft Revenue Budget 2024/25 and agree it as a basis for consultation with contributing bodies

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Joint Advisory Committee is recommended to approve:

1. the draft budget for 2024/25; and
 2. the commencement of budget consultation with the local authorities and Defra.
-

1. FINANCIAL APPRAISAL

- 1.1. A draft budget for 2024/25 is attached in Appendix A. It is recommended that the draft budget be approved as a basis for consultation with contributing bodies/authorities.
- 1.2. The draft budget recommends an inflationary increase of 3% in local authority contributions to achieve a balanced core budget for 2024/25 and the next three years.
- 1.3. There are some key financial issues and risks which are detailed in this report.
- 1.4. Following formal consultation with contributing bodies/authorities, a final budget for 2024/25 will be presented to the Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) for approval at its March 2024 meeting.

2. CONTEXT

- 2.1. The draft budget should be considered within the context of the new Service Level Agreement.
- 2.2. It should be noted that local authority contributions in the region of £153,000 in 2024/25 are likely to generate additional funds for delivery of statutory purposes and AONB Management plan delivery of at least £1 million.

High Weald JAC budget 2023/24

- 2.3. The forecast outturn for 2023/24 is a balanced budget.
- 2.4. The agreed local government national pay award for 2023/24 is higher than forecast however this is offset by savings from the vacant land management post.
- 2.5. The forecast reserve at 31 March 2024 is £229,900.

3. FINANCIAL ISSUES

- 3.1. A review of the JAC budget was undertaken in 2022/23 prompted by: the recognition that contributions to the Partnership's core budget had been static for 20 years i.e. were the same in 2022/23 as in 2001/02; the increasing demands on the AONB Partnership's service; and long term financial challenges (which impact staff retention and recruitment).
- 3.2. The Management Board determined that local authorities should be asked to consider an uplift in their contributions. Eleven authorities were able to increase their contributions, eight increased to the level requested. Three increased their contributions but at a lesser amount than requested. Four authorities were unable to commit additional funding for 2023/24 but advised they would consider an increase as part of the SLA renewal which is currently out for consultation.
- 3.3. A draft budget is presented to the JAC for consideration.
- 3.4. Appendix A shows the Core Budget, Appendix B shows an indicative Project Budget and Appendix C shows the indicative 5-year budget that was presented to the JAC in March 2023. A balanced budget for 2024/25 is presented.
- 3.5. The draft budget assumes an allocation of the Defra (single pot) contribution between core and projects of 85% to core and 15% to projects.
- 3.6. The draft budget assumes that four more local authorities are able to increase their contributions as per the 2023/24 request.

Core budget – expenditure

Summary

- 3.7. Inflation has been applied at rate of 3% for staff and 3% for all other costs. It should be noted however the CPI and RPI remain higher and this may have an impact on costs.
- 3.8. The budget is a balanced budget.

Staff costs

- 3.9. The draft budget allows the AONB Partnership to sustain a team of 5.8 FTE with specialisms that allow delivery of a core service: Director 1FTE; Business Manager 0.8FTE; Senior Adviser (Planning and Design) 1FTE, Landscape Officer (Research, evidence and guidance) 0.6FTE; Land Management Adviser 1FTE, Communications Officer 0.6FTE, Team Support Officer/JAC clerk 0.8FTE; and a small budget for finance support.
- 3.10. Staff costs allow for a pay award of 3% amounting to £7,167, travel costs of £2,350 and a training budget of £412 per person.
- 3.11. The budget assumes contributions to the East Sussex Pension Fund of 19.7% in 2024/25.

Accommodation/office equipment

- 3.12. The budget covers the cost of office rent and services, running costs, supplies and software licences. An inflationary increase of 3% has been assumed.

Partnership running costs and support services

- 3.13. Partnership running costs includes the National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (NAAONB) membership fee and the costs associated with hosting JAC meetings, representing the partnership at regional and national events, and producing the annual review. An inflationary increase of 3% has been assumed.
- 3.14. Support service costs is an increased budget that includes ESCC IT, personnel and financial support and the annual lump sum contribution of £4,400 into the ESCC pension scheme. An inflationary increase of 3% has been assumed.

Core budget – income

Summary

- 3.15. The draft budget shows an inflationary increase of 3% on all local authority contributions. Local Authority contributions are rounded for presentation on Appendix A. Actual contributions are detailed in the five year plan at Appendix C.

Defra

- 3.16. The 2024/25 core contribution is £270,600, the same contribution as 2023/24.

Local Authority contributions

- 3.17. The draft budget assumes an inflationary increase of 3% to the core contributions of local authorities for 2024/25.

- 3.18. It assumes that the remaining local authorities that did not uplift their contribution will be able to increase their contributions from 2024/25 in line with the 2023/24 request.

Other contributions

- 3.19. The draft budget assumes other contributions to the core budget of £7,200 from charges to Self-funding projects for management, administration, and office costs.

Core budget - reserves

- 3.20. The JAC reserve at 31 March 2024 are estimated to be £229,900.

Self-Funding Projects

- 3.21. The indicative Self-funding projects budget is attached at Appendix B. The Partnership's project budget is presented as five programmes: Community Outreach (education, access, and health and well-being); Management Plan (research, evidence, consultation, and production); Landscape Enhancement (farming, nature recovery, climate change and flood management); the Farming in Protected Landscapes grant programme and Project Development.
- 3.22. The project budget allows for 5.9FTE: Land Management project officers (2.7 FTE), Deer co-ordinator (0.6FTE), Community engagement officer (1FTE), Senior Administrator (1FTE) and an Education officer (0.6FTE).
- 3.23. Local authority contributions are those made in prior years through the Project Enabling Fund or to specific projects, for example High Weald Heroes Education Programme.
- 3.24. The budget reflects the Committee's developing role in managing grant programmes on behalf of others and includes indicative expenditure under the Sussex Lund and the Farming in Protected Landscapes grant programmes.
- 3.25. Most grant awards are paid retrospectively on project completion. The self-funding projects budget and outturn is therefore only indicative as grantees' project completion dates can be unpredictable.
- 3.26. The Defra single pot grant contribution allocated to Partnership Projects is £47,530 and the total Defra funding for other self-funding projects is £334,800 (excluding contributions to the Farming in Protected Landscape Programme).

4. FINANCIAL ISSUES 2025/26 AND BEYOND

- 4.1. A balanced position has been achieved for 2024/25 and another three years through the increased contributions from Defra in 2022/23 and the increased contributions from local authorities in 2023/24 and 2024/25 (proposed).

- 4.2. The increased contribution from Defra is conditional on match funding equivalent to 25% of the core funding in cash terms being secured from local authorities, such that Defra single pot funding does not exceed 75% of the total Defra and local authority contribution.
- 4.3. The JAC needs to maintain a core team with sufficient capacity to carry out its core functions and realise external investment opportunities.
- 4.4. The JAC needs to retain a minimum reserve of £95,000 to meet redundancy costs.

5. RISKS

- 5.1. The risks and financial implication that the JAC will wish to note are that the core budget for 2024/25 assumes that:
 - Defra maintains its single pot funding to the AONB Partnerships in 2024/2025 as per their funding settlement advice of 1 April 2022.
 - All local authorities can increase their contributions by 3%.
 - Four local authorities will be able to offer an uplift in their core contributions in 2024/25 as per the request in 2023/24.
 - There will be no changes to salary-related assumptions that increase costs.
- 5.2. If local authorities are unable to increase their contributions in-line with inflation, additional income will need to be found or savings will need to be found from staffing or premises costs which may impact on the Unit's ability to deliver the service.
- 5.3. The JAC continues to consider ways of reducing costs or increasing income. An office downsize remains an option for reducing costs. Redundancies would mean difficult decisions about the scope of the Partnership's work.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1. Provided there are no significant changes in the assumptions that underpin the budget a balanced core budget for 2024/25 and a further three years is presented.
- 6.2. The draft budget for Self-financing projects assumes operation of five programmes in 2024/25. The scale of these programme is significant. Maintaining a sustainable core budget ensures the Partnership has the capacity to set up and run such programmes.
- 6.3. Support for the draft budget will provide the JAC with the capacity to deliver its key core functions in 2024/25.



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

HIGH WEALD AONB JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

FORECAST OUTTURN for 2023/24, PROPOSED BUDGET for 2024/25 AND INDICATIVE BUDGET 2025/26

Appendix A

2022/23		2023/24		2024/25				2025/26
Outturn	Core Budget	Budget	Forecast	Original Budget	Inflation	Budget Pressures	Other	Indicative Budget
£'000		£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
	Expenditure							
265.3	Staff costs	314.4	314.4	314.4	9.4	0.0	0.0	333.7
32.8	Accommodation/office equipment	35.3	35.3	35.3	1.1	0.0	0.0	37.5
4.7	Partnership running costs	7.0	7.0	7.0	0.2	0.0	0.0	7.4
31.7	Support services	32.7	32.7	32.7	0.9	0.0	0.0	34.6
334.5	Total Core Expenditure	389.4	389.4	389.4	11.6	0.0	0.0	413.2
	Income							
(249.3)	Defra	(270.6)	(270.6)	(270.6)	0.0	0.0	0.0	(278.7)
(22.4)	East Sussex County Council	(27.4)	(27.4)	(27.4)	(0.8)	0.0	0.0	(29.0)
(9.0)	Kent County Council	(14.0)	(14.0)	(14.0)	(0.4)	0.0	0.0	(14.9)
(9.3)	West Sussex County Council	(14.3)	(14.3)	(14.3)	(0.4)	0.0	0.0	(15.2)
(2.9)	Surrey County Council	(3.0)	(3.0)	(3.0)	(0.1)	0.0	0.0	(3.2)
(7.2)	Wealden District	(9.7)	(9.7)	(9.7)	(0.3)	0.0	0.0	(10.3)
(7.2)	Rother District Council	(9.7)	(9.7)	(9.7)	(0.3)	0.0	0.0	(10.3)
(5.6)	Mid Sussex District Council	(8.1)	(8.1)	(8.1)	(0.2)	0.0	0.0	(8.6)
(6.7)	Tunbridge Wells Borough Council	(6.7)	(6.7)	(6.7)	(0.2)	0.0	(2.0)	(9.2)
(4.7)	Horsham District Council	(5.0)	(5.0)	(5.0)	(0.2)	0.0	0.0	(5.3)
(3.6)	Sevenoaks District Council	(6.1)	(6.1)	(6.1)	(0.2)	0.0	0.0	(6.5)
(0.8)	Ashford Borough Council	(0.8)	(0.8)	(0.8)	0.0	0.0	(2.8)	(3.7)
(1.5)	Hastings Borough Council	(4.0)	(4.0)	(4.0)	(0.1)	0.0	0.0	(4.2)
(2.2)	Tandridge District Council	(2.2)	(2.2)	(2.2)	(0.1)	0.0	0.0	(2.3)
(0.3)	Crawley Borough Council	(0.3)	(0.3)	(0.3)	0.0	0.0	(2.3)	(2.7)
(0.6)	Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council	(1.5)	(1.5)	(1.5)	0.0	0.0	0.0	(1.6)
(7.9)	Other income	(6.0)	(6.0)	(6.0)	0.0	0.0	(1.2)	(7.5)
(341.1)	Total Core Income	(389.4)	(389.4)	(389.4)	(3.3)	0.0	(8.3)	(413.2)
6.6	Surplus/(deficit) transfer to/(from) reserves	0.0	0.0	0.0	(8.3)	0.0	8.3	0.0
0.0	Net Core Budget	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	Self Funding Projects							
	See Appendix C for detail							
874.1	JAC expenditure on self-funded projects	1,350.1	1,260.2	1,350.1			2,191.0	527.9
(68.9)	Defra contribution to self-funded projects (Excluding FiPL)	(47.5)	(72.9)	(47.5)			(334.8)	(44.7)
(545.3)	Defra contribution to FiPL Project	(999.3)	(844.3)	(999.3)			(1,459.6)	0.0
0.0	Local authorities contributions	(42.3)	(32.6)	(42.3)			(29.8)	(75.3)
(259.9)	Other contributions to self-funded projects	(261.0)	(310.5)	(261.0)			(366.8)	(407.9)
0.0	Net Self-Funded Project Budget	(0.0)	(0.0)	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	Total High Weald JAC							
1,215.3	Total core and project expenditure	1,739.5	1,649.5	1,739.5	11.6	0.0	0.0	941.1
(1,215.3)	Total core and project income	(1,739.5)	(1,649.7)	(1,739.5)	(3.3)	0.0	(8.3)	(941.1)
0.0	Total High Weald JAC Budget	0.0	0.2	0.0	(8.3)	0.0	8.3	0.0

Defra Funding	2023/24	2024/25
	£000	£000
Defra funding on core budget	(270.6)	(270.6)
Defra funding on projects budget	(47.5)	(334.8)
Defra contribution to FiPL Project	(844.3)	(1,459.6)
Total Defra Funding	(1,162.4)	(2,065.0)

Reserves	£000
Reserves at 31 March 2022	223.3
Transfer to/(from) reserves 2022/23	6.6
Reserves at 31 March 2023	229.9
Transfer to/(from) reserves 2023/24	0.0
Reserves at 31 March 2024	229.9
Transfer to/(from) reserves 2024/25	0.0
Reserves at 31 March 2025	229.9

HIGH WEALD AONB JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE
SELF-FUNDING PROJECTS OUTTURN for 2023/24 and INDICATIVE BUDGET 2024/25 and 2025/26

Appendix B

2022/23 Outturn £'000	Budget 2023/24			Forecast 2023/24			Indicative Budget 2024/25			Indicative Budget 2025/26		
	Exp £'000	Income £'000	Net £'000	Exp £'000	Income £'000	Net £'000	Exp £'000	Income £'000	Net £'000	Exp £'000	Income £'000	Net £'000
	1 Community Outreach/Access for All											
0.4 (0.4)	JAC expenditure											
0.0	20.8	(14.0)		39.9	(19.3)		259.3	(233.0)		11.7	(7.3)	
0.0		(6.0)			(18.9)			(25.9)			(4.0)	
0.0		(0.8)			(1.7)			(0.4)			(0.4)	
0.0	Total Community Outreach		0.0	0.0		0.0	(0.0)		0.0	0.0		0.0
	High Weald Heroes											
26.2 (26.2)	JAC expenditure											
0.0	28.9	(14.5)		32.5	(14.6)		29.7	(22.0)		30.6	(22.0)	
0.0		(14.4)			(13.8)			(3.9)			(8.6)	
0.0		0.0			(4.1)			(3.8)			0.0	
(0.0)	Total High Weald Heroes		0.0	0.0		0.0	0.0		0.0	0.0		0.0
	2 Management Plan Evidence and Guidance											
5.7 (5.7)	JAC expenditure											
0.0	25.0	(12.0)		20.1	(12.0)		14.0	(7.0)		14.0	(7.0)	
0.0		(13.0)			(8.1)			(7.0)			(7.0)	
0.0	Total Management Plan Evidence and Guidance		0.0	0.0		0.0	0.0		0.0	0.0		0.0
	3 Landscape Enhancement*											
296.6 (36.7)	JAC expenditure											
(32.5)	276.1	(7.0)		303.4	(7.0)		363.4	(7.8)		426.7	(8.4)	
0.0		(14.1)			0.0			0.0			0.0	
0.0		(21.9)			0.0			0.0			(62.7)	
(0.4)		(47.4)			(69.7)			(20.6)			(20.6)	
0.0		0.0			0.0			0.0			0.0	
(84.9)		(0.7)			(41.7)			0.0			0.0	
(142.1)		(185.0)			(185.0)			(335.0)			(335.0)	
(0.0)	Total Landscape Enhancement		0.0	0.0		0.0	0.0		0.0	0.0		0.0
	4 Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme											
545.3 (545.3)	JAC expenditure											
0.0	999.3	(999.3)		844.3	(844.3)		1,459.6	(1,459.6)		0.0	0.0	
0.0	Total Project Development		0.0	0.0		0.0	0.0		0.0	0.0		0.0
	5 Project Development											
0.0	JAC expenditure											
0.0	0.0	0.0		20.0	(20.0)		65.0	(65.0)		45.0	0.0	
0.0		0.0			0.0			0.0			(45.0)	
0.0		0.0			0.0			0.0			0.0	
0.0	Total Project Development		0.0	0.0		0.0	0.0		0.0	0.0		0.0
874.1 (614.3)	JAC expenditure (to Appendix B)											
0.0	1,350.0	(1,046.7)		1,260.2	(917.1)		2,191.0	(1,794.4)		528.0	(44.7)	
(259.9)		(42.3)			(32.6)			(29.8)			(75.3)	
-0.1		(261.0)			(310.5)			(366.8)			(408.0)	
	TOTAL JAC expenditure/income		0.0	0.0		0.0	0.0		0.0	0.0		0.0
	1,350.0	(1,350.0)	0.0	1,260.2	(1,260.2)	0.0	2,191.0	(2,191.0)	0.0	528.0	(528.0)	0.0

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

Appendix C

High Weald AONB Five Year Plan

	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28
	£	£	£	£	£
<u>Expenditure</u>					
Staff costs	314,400	323,800	333,500	340,200	347,000
Accommodation/office equipment	35,300	36,400	37,500	38,300	39,100
Partnership running costs	7,000	7,200	7,400	7,500	7,700
Support Services	32,700	33,600	34,700	35,400	36,100
Total Core Expenditure	389,400	401,000	413,100	421,400	429,900
<u>Income</u>					
Defra	270,600	270,600	278,700	284,300	290,000
East Sussex County Council	27,400	28,222	29,069	29,941	30,839
Kent County Council	14,000	14,420	14,853	15,299	15,758
West Sussex County Council	14,300	14,729	15,171	15,626	16,095
Surrey County Council	3,000	3,090	3,183	3,278	3,376
Wealden District	9,700	9,991	10,291	10,600	10,918
Rother District Council	9,700	9,991	10,291	10,600	10,918
Mid Sussex District Council	8,100	8,343	8,593	8,851	9,117
Tunbridge Wells Borough Council	6,700	8,901	9,168	9,443	9,726
Horsham District Council	5,000	5,150	5,305	5,464	5,628
Sevenoaks District Council	6,100	6,283	6,471	6,665	6,865
Ashford Borough Council	800	3,624	3,733	3,845	3,960
Hastings Borough Council	4,000	4,120	4,244	4,371	4,502
Tandridge District Council	2,200	2,266	2,334	2,404	2,476
Crawley Borough Council	300	2,609	2,687	2,768	2,851
Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council	1,500	1,545	1,591	1,639	1,688
Other Income	6,000	7,200	7,500	7,700	7,800
Total Core Income	389,400	401,084	413,184	422,794	432,517
(Deficit)/Surplus	-	84	84	1,394	2,617
Reserves	229,879	229,963	230,047	231,441	234,058

The table is not rounded to show the actual uplifted LA contributions.

Agenda item: 11

Committee: High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee
Date: 22 November 2023
Title of Report: **Levelling-Up and Regeneration Act 2023 - update**
By: AONB Planning & Design Advisor

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Joint Advisory Committee is recommended to

- a) note the report, and
 - b) promote awareness of the Levelling-Up and Regeneration Act 2023 (with regard to those sections that affect AONBs and the revised duties of public bodies) within their own organisations.
-

1.0 Background

- 1.1 The Levelling-Up and Regeneration Act 2023 passed into law on 26th October 2023. Under the Department for Levelling-up, Housing and Communities, the Act covers a range of topics, including local democracy; town and country planning; regeneration; the environment and heritage; amongst others.
- 1.2 Section 245 of the Act relates to Protected Landscapes. With regard to Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Section 245 (5) to (10) amends the Countryside and Rights of Way CROW Act in a number of ways.

2.0 Section 245 of the Levelling-Up and Regeneration Act 2023 as applicable to the High Weald AONB

- 2.1 Most significantly, 245 (6)(a) amends section 85 of the CROW Act regarding the general duties of public bodies etc by inserting the following text:

“(A1) In exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in an area of outstanding natural beauty in England, a relevant authority other than a devolved Welsh authority must seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty.” [my underlining]

This is considered to represent a strengthening of the previous section 85 duty, which set out that *“a relevant authority shall have regard to the purpose....”* [my underlining]
- 2.2 For clarity, ‘relevant authorities’ for the purposes of this section includes any Minister of the Crown, any public body, (including a county council, county borough council, district council, parish council) any statutory undertaker, and any person holding public office.
- 2.3 Section 245 (6)(c) sets out that:

“(1A) The Secretary of State may by regulations make provision about how a relevant authority is to comply with the duty under subsection (A1) (including provision about things that the authority may, must or must not do to comply with the duty).”

- 2.4 Section 245 (8) relates to supplementary provisions relating to management plans, and sets out that:
“(2A) The Secretary of State may by regulations make provision—
(a) requiring a plan under section 89 relating to an area of outstanding natural beauty in England to contribute to the meeting of any target set under Chapter 1 of Part 1 of the Environment Act 2021;
(b) setting out how such a plan must contribute to the meeting of such targets;
(c) setting out how a plan under section 89 relating to an area of outstanding natural beauty in England must further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of that area.”
- 2.5 Section 245 (9) sets out that:
“90A Duty of public bodies etc in relation to management plans
(1) The Secretary of State may by regulations make provision—
(a) requiring a relevant authority other than a devolved Welsh authority to contribute to the preparation, implementation or review of a plan under section 89 relating to an area of outstanding natural beauty in England;
(b) setting out how such a relevant authority may or must do so.”
- 2.6 Section 245 (10) explains that:
“91A Regulations under Part 4
(1) A power to make regulations under this Part—
(a) is exercisable by statutory instrument;
(b) includes power to make different provision for different purposes or different areas;
(c) includes power to make consequential, incidental, supplementary, transitional, transitory or saving provision.
(2) Regulations under this Part are to be made by statutory instrument.
(3) A statutory instrument containing regulations under this Part is subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament.”
- 2.7 Section 255 of the act confirms that section 245 comes into force two months after the Act was passed, i.e. on 26th December 2023.
- 2.8 The full text of the Levelling-Up and Regeneration Act 2023 is available here: [Levelling-up and Regeneration Act \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://legislation.gov.uk). For ease of reference, the full section 245 starts on page 295 of the Act.

3.0 Implications of the amendments to Countryside and Rights of Way Act

- 3.1 We are currently awaiting interim guidance from DEFRA regarding the revised duty for ‘Relevant Authorities’. However, it is clear that this revised duty, that is to *“seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty”* will have implications across a range of local authority activities, including:
- Planning; planning policy, site allocations, development management, and neighbourhood planning.
 - Minerals and Waste planning
 - Highways schemes; improvement works, maintenance of the historic public realm, street lighting, PROW matters
 - Climate Change strategies; approach and implementation
 - Local Nature Recovery Schemes and Biodiversity Net Gain deployment
 - Economic Development Strategies, including tourism and the visitor economy

Also activities by other relevant authorities, including for example

- Water management strategies
- Other utilities infrastructure delivery
- Forestry management strategies
- National Highway Schemes
- National Infrastructure Projects
- Implementation of grants schemes including Environmental Land Management schemes

3.2 We will share and discuss with the OSG any guidance received from DEFRA, with a view to providing a further update to the JAC in March 2023.

4.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

4.1 The Levelling-Up and Regeneration Act 2023 passed into law on 26th October 2023. Section 245 (5) to (10) of the Act amends the Countryside and Rights of Way CROW Act in a number of ways, including with regard to duties of public bodies in AONBs.

4.2 The Joint Advisory Committee is recommended to

- a) note the report, and
- b) promote awareness of the Levelling-Up and Regeneration Act 2023 (with regard to those sections that affect AONBs and the revised duties of public bodies) within their own organisations.

Contact: Diane Russell, Planning & Design Advisor Diane.Russell@highweald.org

Agenda Item: 12

Committee: High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee

Date: 22nd November 2023

Title of Report: Risk Management

By: AONB Director

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 COVID-19 remains a risk to people's health, and we will continue to ensure the staff and those we work with are kept as safe as possible.
- 2.2 COVID-19 has disrupted both our business planning and working arrangements since the start of 2020, and this disruption will continue to some extent. Inevitably this will have an impact to varying degrees 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. Local authority contributions have not increased since 2001 but since 2010 most of the local authority partners on the High Weald AONB partnership have maintained their contributions to the core budget (without an increase in line with inflation), and the pressure on local authority budgets remains severe.

- 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 2022 to impose further public spending cuts and make decisions of "eye-watering difficulty" have had consequences for the funding and support provided by government and local authorities, and all signs suggest this will continue.
- 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. Should the core team decline to fewer than four Full Time Equivalents maintaining the current work demands will be even more difficult (if not impossible) than it is today.
- 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 and other things but not provide adequate, commensurate, and sustained resources. As reported at previous JAC meetings and for several years now, the government's intentions on a stable and adequate funding settlement for the sector remain 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, forestry, nature recovery, climate change and flood management); and Farming in Protected Landscapes grant programme. 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 Recent 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 place a significant strain on 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 on fixed-term contracts

2.10 Several of the current AONB team staff are employed on fixed-term contracts working on a range of high-profile time limited projects and national schemes funded by a range of external organisations. They also support and benefit the AONB Unit's wider work and remit. These contracts are due to come to an end in March 2025 and this will result in the loss of a considerable amount of expertise, experience, and knowledge after this date if not before given those affected will be actively seeking alternative employment. This presents a very significant risk to the work of the AONB Unit and our ability meeting the current and future demands placed on the team, and will severely hamper our efforts to take advantage of any potential opportunities to develop and run future projects.

Staff succession planning

2.11 A number of the AONB Unit staff are approaching the end of their careers and staff succession planning will be an important issue in a few years' time. The recruitment and retention of younger people and those with the relevant skills and experience is increasingly difficult and there is a risk this will adversely affect the work of the AONB Unit.

3.0 Risk mitigation

COVID-19

- 3.1 We continue to monitor the situation and have established appropriate practices 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, 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 core 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. In recognition of this, the AONB Management Board last year asked the local authorities for a flat rate increase to their contributions to the AONB Partnership core budget and most but not all local authorities have agreed to this request.
- 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 several 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 the current and inadequate resources made 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 need to be challenged. Asking the AONB partnership to do more with less is no longer a viable option.

Staff on fixed-term contracts

- 3.8 Adequately mitigating the risks associated with the established and increasing use of staff on short-term fixed contracts is not straight forward given a general preference among funding bodies and central government of focusing on short-term objectives using time-limited projects and initiatives. In the absence of an adequate and long-term funding settlement offering greater permanent employment opportunities, it remains inevitable we will continue to lose talented and experienced staff members.
- 3.9 While some short-term projects may be extended for a period this only postpones the loss of the staff member and while it may be possible to re-allocate a limited proportion of their work to the remaining staff, this is a far from satisfactory solution and the risk to the work of the AONB Unit remains.

Staff succession planning

- 3.10 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 what's left of 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.

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Appendix A High Weald JAC Key Risks 22.11.23

Sponsor: Sally Marsh/Jason Lavender

Author: Jason Lavender

Date: November 2023 - March 2024

Risk Log

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

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

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

Unit ref	Risk no	Risk What can go wrong	Root Causes How it can go wrong	Owner	Inherent Risk			Controls / Mitigating Actions Preventative & reactive control measures	Control Owner	Residual Risk			
					Likelihood	Consequence	Matrix Zone			Control Rating	Likelihood	Consequence	Matrix Zone
		Format: EVENT leading to CONSEQUENCE resulting in EFFECT ON PROJECT OBJECTIVES			Likelihood	Consequence	Matrix Zone		Control Rating	Likelihood	Consequence	Matrix Zone	
	1	Infection by COVID-19 and subsequent illness.	AONB staff and those we work with falling ill as a result of COVID-19.	AONB Director	4	1	Amber	Follow government and ESCC guidance and also set up and maintain a variety of measures to ensure the AONB Unit staff and those we work with are as safe as possible.	AONB Director	2	4	1	Amber

	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	1	Green	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.	AONB Director	2	3	1	Green
	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	2	3	Amber	Consult with the grant recipients and third party funders, review and change timescales, offer technical advice and moral support.	AONB Director	2	2	2	Green
	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	Amber	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 and fixed-term projects. A reduction or loss of national and local government political and financial support to the AONB partnerships. Loss of staff with subsequent failure to meet the work demands and expectations placed on the AONB Unit.	Adverse affect to the AONB core and project 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 with supportive High Weald MPs.	AONB Director	3	4	4	Red