

High Weald Joint Advisory Committee



Agenda

High Weald JAC Meeting

Wednesday 27 November 2024, 10.30am

Roebuck Hotel Wych Cross, Forest Row RH18 5JL followed by a facilitated workshop and working lunch

1. Apologies
2. Members' Interests

Members and officers are invited to make any declarations of any interest that they may have in relation to items on the agenda and are reminded to make any declaration at any stage during the meeting if it then becomes apparent that this may be required when a particular item or issue is considered.
3. Urgent matters

Members are asked to raise any urgent matters at this stage and not at the end of the meeting. The Chairman will decide whether the JAC should discuss any items so raised but asks members to give him prior notification of such matters unless urgency prevents it.
4. Minutes of the JAC meeting

To consider the minutes of the last meeting of the JAC held on 27 March 2024 (page 2)
5. Minutes of the Management Board Meeting

To note the matters arising from the Management Board meeting held on 15 October 2024 (page 8)
6. Minutes of the Officer Steering Group

To note the minutes of the last meeting of the OSG held on 1 October 2024, Microsoft Teams (page 13)
7. Revenue Budget for 2025/26

To consider and approve a report by the Treasurer on the draft Revenue Budget 2025/26 (page 21) Appendix A budget forecast; Appendix B Self-funded projects; and Appendix C 5-year budget forecast and to sign off the budget consultation for 2025/2026.
8. Risk Management

To consider a report by the NL Co-Director on risk management (page 27); Appendix A: High Weald JAC - Key Risks
9. National Landscapes update

To consider a presentation by the NL Co-Director on national direction for the National Landscapes.
10. Any other business

To: ALL MEMBERS OF THE HIGH WEALD JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Samantha Nicholas

Clerk to the High Weald JAC, Woodland Enterprise Centre, Flimwell, East Sussex TN5 7PR

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Agenda item: 4

High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee

Minutes of Meeting



27 March 2024 Merriments Gardens Hawkhurst Road East Sussex, followed by lunch

Samantha Nicholas

Clerk to the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee

Woodland Enterprise Centre, Flimwell, East Sussex TN5 7PR

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Members present:

Cllr P Bradbury	West Sussex County Council (JAC Chair)
Cllr Mrs E Kirby-Green	East Sussex County Council (JAC Vice-Chair)
Cllr Mr A Pickering	Ashford Borough Council
Cllr Mr N Williams	Sevenoaks District Council
Cllr Mrs L Carvalho	Mid-Sussex District Council
Cllr Sir Nicholas White	Tandridge District Council
Cllr Ms J Hilton	Hastings Borough Council
Cllr Mr S Raby	Horsham District Council
Cllr Mr B Drayson	Rother District Council
Cllr Mrs N Warne	Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
Cllr Mr A Wilson	Wealden District Council
Mrs G Davison	Community Cooptee
Mr M Woodcock	Forestry Commission

Officers:

Mr J Lavender	HWNL Co-Director
Mrs S Marsh	HWNL Co-Director
Ms D Russell	HWNL Planning & Design Advisor
Ms S Brotherton	HWNL Landscape Officer
Mr A Fowler	Finance Manager, East Sussex County Council
Ms J Hollingum	OSG Chair, Mid-Sussex District Council
Mr M Davison	OSG Hastings Borough Council
Mr A Sime	OSG Ashford Borough Council
Ms K Boorman	OSG Kent County Council
Ms S Davies	Natural England (Sussex & Kent team), Principal Adviser, Partnerships
Ms H Lee	Natural England (Sussex & Kent team), Sustainable Development Lead Advisor
Ms L Neale	Natural England (Sussex & Kent team), LNRP Lead Advisor

1. Apologies

- 1.1 Apologies for absence were received from Ms J Hull, Forestry Commission, L Charman, CLA, G Sherwin, HWNL and S Tidy (cooptee).

2. Members Interests

- 2.1 No declarations of interest were raised by the Members.

3. Urgent Matters

- 3.1. No urgent matters were raised.

5 Minutes of the JAC Meeting

- 5.1 **RESOLVED** to note the minutes of the JAC meeting held on 22 March 2023

6 Minutes of the Management Board Meeting

- 6.1 **RESOLVED** to note the minutes of the Management Board meeting held on 12 March 2024

7 Minutes of the Officer Steering Group (OSG)

- 7.1 Jennifer Hollingum informed the Members that that the last OSG meeting was focussed on the Management Plan and all the officers had inputted into this process.

- 7.2 **RESOLVED** to note the minutes of the OSG meeting held on 14 February 2024

8 Revenue Budget for 2024/25 and to approve the reserves policy

- 8.1 The Committee considered a report from Andy Fowler, from the ESCC Treasurer. The report presented a budget position for 2024/25:

- 8.2 Appendix A showed that in 2023/24 there was residual funding in the reserves budget £5300. In 2024/25 the budget has been balanced with a 3% uplift for inflation. Majority of LAs have agreed an increase in funding some in full and others partially dependent on their financial situations.

- 8.3 Appendix B the project budget which is supported by 43k from Defra has budgets for 24/25:

- 219 K for Access for All
- 85k for Defra Test and Trails convening fund
- 30000 K for a new capital grants budget. The team are waiting for criteria guidance.
- Appendix C outlines a 5-year budget reflecting the 3% uplift.
- Appendix D is a reserve policy outlining the additional areas that the reserves can be used for to support the work of the team such as Cyclical maintenance and Continuity of staff.

- 8.4 The Members welcomed the fact that this budget has been balanced under the current financial climate. A discussion took place around use of the convening grant; Members were informed that the team have always facilitated projects, and this will support further activities especially with the launch of the Management Plan 2024.

8.5 It was also highlighted that that many of these grants will end in March 2025, hence the steep change in the decline in the budget for 25/26. Within this period the team will be looking to engage in other grant programmes.

8.6 It was noted that the Chair requested Jennifer Hollingum pass on his immense gratitude for all the officers had contributed to the increase in their contributions.

8.7 **RESOLVED to approve:**

1. **the draft budget for 2024/25;**
2. **the commencement of budget consultation with the local authorities and Defra; and**
3. **the reserve policy**

9 High Weald Management Plan 2024-2029

9.1 The Committee considered a report by Sally Marsh regarding the AONB Management Plan review 2024 – 2029, which presented the final plan to Members for approval. Sally first thanked Sarah Brotherton and Diane Russell for managing the project which has taken over two years to deliver, and then took Members through the steps to sign-off and the adoption of the Management Plan:

- This Plan is the first edition of a new 20-year strategy, with a five year implementation plan.
- The review had needed to take account of the current and future major challenges/issues of biodiversity crisis, climate change, fairer access to nature, and development pressure, along with the forthcoming National Guidance for AONB Management Plans, currently in preparation by NE, which is anticipated to require Plans to address these issues. Therefore, while the character components and management policy objectives had remained broadly appropriate, the range of character components had broadened, to include Dark Skies and Aesthetic & Perceptual Qualities. Meanwhile other aspects of the Plan had needed a more substantive re-consideration, including the inclusion of cross cutting themes including nature recovery (including the 30x30 commitment) and climate change. The report set out the full content of the Plan.
- The monitoring section is smaller than usual as NE has not yet released guidance regarding the application of the recently published Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework, which sets targets at a national level. The team intends to produce a Monitoring Addendum to the Plan, once information regarding the application of this at an individual NL level has been released by NE.
- The Management Plan had gone through an extensive process of engagement and consultation with the public and with the OSG in 2022 and 2023 and had evolved as a result of reviewing the feedback received during that process. Regular updates had been provided during this time to the JAC. A formal public consultation had been held in autumn 2023, attracting responses from 175

organisations and individuals, including Local Authorities, other Section 85 public bodies, Parish Councils and other organisations.

- Once the JAC approved the final plan, it would be sent to the Local Authorities for them to formally adopt, in accordance with s89 of the CRoW Act. It is intended all the LAs will adopt the Plan by the end the of June 2024.
- 9.2 Sally also clarified that AONBs nationally have been through a rebranding process to be known as ‘National Landscapes’, however their legal status remains AONBs, and the Management Plan is still legally required to be titled the AONB Management Plan.
- 9.3 A discussion took place on how the Plan will be actioned and it was explained that this Plan requires distribution and promotion through all the departments within LAs as well as other s85 ‘relevant authorities’. The Plan should be considered within all LAs’ strategies, not only Local Plans, but also for example climate change strategies, economic development strategies, grounds maintenance practices, highways plans. The OSG representatives should be setting up meetings within their LAs to enable this, which the NL team will look to support where possible.
- 9.4 Sally reminded Members that the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act (2023) amended section 85 of the CRoW Act, created a new duty on relevant authorities to ‘seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area’ when discharging their functions in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (now known as National Landscapes). The new duty replaces the previous requirement for relevant authorities to ‘have regard’ to the purpose of AONBs and is intended as a more proactive and strengthened requirement. The Committee had received a report regarding this in November 2023. This means that the Plan should be at the heart of any development plan within the LAs.
- 9.5 **RESOLVED to agree the final Management Plan 2024-2029 (subject to minor editorial and presentational amendments post proof-reading) and its supporting papers and recommend that individual local authorities formally adopt the Plan by the end of June 2024.**

10. Dark Skies Planning Advice Note

- 10.1 The Committee considered a report by Diane Russell on the production of a High Weald NL Dark Skies Planning Advice Note (technical guidance). This guidance is envisaged to be the first in a suite of planning guidance developed to sit alongside and support the Management Plan and had been requested by the OSG to assist and support planning officers. The purpose of the guidance will be to provide focussed and useable advice on High Weald Dark Skies conservation and management to those involved in the planning process, including to Local Planning Authorities’ planning teams, Highways Authorities, Neighbourhood Plan groups and developers.
- 10.2 A specialist consultant had been commissioned to develop the guidance, which was based on existing guidance for the SDNPA, with input from officers on High Weald context and issues. A webinar workshop had been held in March 2024 to present the

draft guidance, attended by the OSG and over 40 planning officers from the various LPAs in the High Weald. This workshop took the officers through the key areas of the technical guidance and there was also a training session on what to look for in lighting plans. The LAs have been given four weeks to provide feedback on the draft guidance to the team, and it is intended to present the final plan to the Management Board in June for sign-off, as the officers are keen to be able to use the guidance as soon as possible.

10.3 Members welcomed the production of this guidance as a positive step, and requested the current draft be circulated to the JAC for information.

10.4 Samantha Nicholas also informed the Members of the work with local Parishes and community groups to move towards International dark skies communities and supporting all Parishes to put in place dark skies policies.

10.5 Jason Lavender thanked Samantha for her progressive work with Dark Skies and local communities to engage in making a difference from the ground up.

10.6 RESOLVED to delegate to the Management Board the responsibility to consider and approve the final version of the HW AONB Dark Skies Planning Advice Note, and to promote, within their LPAs, the awareness and use of the HW AONB Dark Skies Planning Advice Note, once approved by Management Board.

11 Risk Assessment

11.1 The Committee considered a report by Jason Lavender on risk management. Jason highlighted the key areas that were in the report:

- The budget although balanced is subject to funding being reduced by Defra or the LAs dependent on their financial outlooks. Self-funded projects are 1:4 rates but many of the grants end in March 2025 or are for only one year.
- Jason thanked Defra for providing additional funding, but these are only for capital expenditure and not core staffing. It was noted that funds for FiPL and capital funding may not be able to be fully utilised.
- Staff on fixed term contracts, p 3.7, was discussed as mitigation against immediate risks associated with the final year of the FiPL. It was recommended the Members agree to use the budget reserves if needed to extend staff contracts.
- The Members also agreed that the budget reserves should be utilised to increase (reinstate) the current Joint Directors position from 1 to 1.2 FTE.

11.2 **RESOLVED to:**

- **Agree to the use of the budget reserves, if needed, to extend the contracts of the two members of staff working on the Farming in Protected Landscapes grant programme. To support the additional funding to increase the joint Directors position from 1 to 1.2 fte.**
- **Request that the Management Board continues to work with the National Landscape Unit to consider the risks and identify measures and options to manage and mitigate the effect of these risks.**

13. High Weald Work Plan 2024 -2025

13.1 Jason Lavender informed the Members this programme focuses on work with national and local decision makers, for example Defra and DLUC, arms-length bodies (ALBs) such as NE, EA, and FC; local authority members and officers and statutory undertakers. the NL Partnership continues to deliver a broad work programme that ensures engagement with all key stakeholders. These include:

- The Convening Trial Fund which is about bringing people together to share knowledge and find solutions to issues lies at the core of the National Landscape Partnership. Additional financial support from Defra for 2024/25 will allow us to scale up this role. The team plan to run a series of events to enable collaboration and behaviour change that will assist with management delivery and achievement of the protected landscape targets and outcomes framework.
- The team manages several community engagement programmes such as Walking Festival 7th year in September; Dark Skies Festival, a three-year grant programme has been secured, and the on-going High Weald Heroes programme which has been facilitating projects with historic England.
- Natural Flood Management programme has been extended for a further three years.
- Sussex Lund has been rebranded as High Weald Nature and Community grant and has expanded to look at landscape scale projects and develop green to greener and grey to green projects.

13.2 **RESOLVED** to promote the Partnership's planned activities for 2024/25 within their LPAs and communities, encouraging participation in activities that deliver the management plan.

14 A.O.B.

14.2 Matthew Woodcock, Forestry Commission, informed the Members of the extensive issue with Ash die-back and requested that they ensure proactive plans are set in action. Matthew also informed the Members about the increased funding to support local deer larders which could be placed on local authority sites. Cllr Warne informed the Members of Steve Walker's (Natural England), work with Fairshare in actively working with procurement managers to set up contracts to provide venison.

14.3 Next JAC Meeting will be held in November 2024, date, and venue to be decided.

15 Presentation from Natural England's Sustainable development team

15.1 The meeting concluded with a presentation from the NE Sussex & Kent Team, outlining the work with National Landscapes and Parks, and the local authority Nature Recovery partnerships. Presentation is appended.

Agenda item: 5

**HIGH WEALD JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Management Board**



**High Weald
National
Landscape**

Minutes

Tuesday 15 October, 10.30am

Acorn Tourism, Hastings Road, East Sussex, TN5 7PR

Samantha Nicholas
Clerk to the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee

Present: Members:

Cllr P Bradbury	West Sussex County Council (Chair)
Cllr Mrs E Kirby-Green	East Sussex County Council (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Mrs L Carvalho	Mid-Sussex District Council
Cllr Sir N White	Tandridge District Council

Also Present:

Jennifer Hollingum	OSG Chair
Sally Marsh	NL Director (job-share)
Gerry Sherwin	NL Business Manager
Diane Russell	NL Planning and Design Advisor

Actions

Paragraph 15 **An update on the National Targets will be presented to the next JAC meeting.**

Paragraph 17 **When published by the NLA, the S85 LPA guidance document will circulate to Members and officers.**

Paragraph 22 **It was agreed that Sally Marsh would circulate an outline of facilitated workshop to the Members, signed by the Chair**

Apologies

1. Apologies were received from: Jason Lavender, Sylvia Tidy and Cllr Williams, Sevenoaks DC

Members' Interests

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

Minutes of the meeting from 12 March 2024

3. The minutes for 12 March 2024 were agreed to be an accurate record.

High Weald Grant Funds.

4. Gerry Sherwin took the panel through the grant programmes the team are currently managing:

- Sussex Lund has been rebranded the High Weald Nature and Community Fund, with criteria of connecting and engaging nature deprived groups as well as landscape improvement. The panel was delighted with the range of projects put forward and recommended grants for 31 projects with 12 partial grants. Total of £289,000 was awarded. This included two fellowships for research: Nigel Akehurst researching regenerative agriculture and Isabella Goggin researching cultural textiles associated with High Weald.
 - Farming in Protected Landscape has committed £754,000 but should commit a further £118k for around 22 projects. There is £87k uncommitted but there are projects that should be able to absorb this if they can meet the time constraints, with completion 31 March 2024.
 - Access for All is continuing to support changing to accessibility gates managed through the LA's Public Rights of Way teams. There is additional support of Ashdown Forest for an accessible boardwalk to a well-known viewpoint.
5. Sally Marsh took the Members through the additional Defra funded Management Plan Implementation Fund. There has been allocated £150,000 revenue funding and £150,000 of capital funding, to be spent by end of March 2025. This fund has been allocated to support building capacity to implement the Management Plan objectives including:
- A series of Affordable Housing research has been commissioned. This included research from the Rural Planning project. A subgroup from the OSG with housing officers will be looking into the key barriers and recommendations regarding affordable housing delivery in rural areas.
 - A consultant has been commissioned to support the interpretation of the climate data that is emerging from Defra.
 - Rights of ways and settlement work consultants have also been commissioned.
6. Sally explained that the timing constriction made the capital fund harder to allocate. Around £40k has been allocated towards rural workers equipment, which cannot be funded through the other grants programmes. However, it would be useful to have feedback from the local authorities if they may have any specific projects that could be supported by this. Jennifer Hollingum suggested this information should be aimed at the Economic and Development teams.
7. A discussion took place on how we may use these funds to support the corridor between High Weald and Surrey Hills, developing an evidence base to support expanding green corridors, using the example of Staffhurst Wood. Sally confirmed that they are in discussion with Surrey Hills around this potential project.

Risk Management and staffing update

8. Gerry Sherwin informed the Members of the staff changes and associated risks:
- Simon Fathers left for a full-time job in East Sussex, but a 6-month contract has been secured for a Community Engagement officer. Lucy Bowyer has been taken on to fulfil this role. Lucy previously worked for Rye Harbour Nature Reserve as an engagement officer.
 - Sandy Williamson who has been managing the Deer Project for three years is moving to Scotland. Sandy is being replaced with Mark Smith who has been

working alongside Sandy during this period. His background is in project manager, and he is also as a deer stalker.

- Defra has extended the funding for a land manager position after FiPI has closed. The contractual terms associated with the funding is not yet known. This should mitigate risk of losing a key officer within the landscape team for a further two years.
- Several contract staff have been taken on to support the workload, including Fiona McGuire to support communications around social media and website; Caroline Lingham to support Quality assurance for FiPI contracts; Peter Matthews for QGIS support the Management Plan addendum and metrics; Lisa Stevens to support the increasing demand from schools for High Weald Heroes workshops and Welly Walks; and Stephanie Mason will continue to manage the Royal Countryside Trust work with landowners.

National Landscape (NL) updates

9. Sally Marsh informed the Members of the new national mandated targets for NLs additional work that is required on the Management Plan Monitoring Addendum in this regard.
10. The mandated targets for National Landscapes have been driven by the Environment Improvement Plan. 10 targets have been set for the National Landscapes which will be mandated but not legislative, 3 of which will be apportioned to each NL:
 - Restoring and creating wildlife habitats. Targets of 11.5 k hectares by 2042
 - Restoring Peatland, which is very rare in High Weald with a target of 14 hectares by 2050
 - Increased tree canopy/woodland cover 3% increase by 2050 (which Sally described would be the equivalent of around the size of Bedgebury Pinetum every 4 years)
 - There are also other targets around habitat condition (including SSSIs), land management, greenhouse gas emissions, access, and heritage-at-risk
11. Sally explained that these are landscape targets, and the High Weald Teams role will be to act as a convening role to support the partners and landowners to achieve. The team are currently in the process of negotiating these targets with Defra. The targets will form a Monitoring Addendum to the Management Plan that is required to be delivered in Summer 2025.
12. A discussion took place around the concern that the targets do not represent the range of natural beauty of the AONB as identified in the Management Plan Statement of Significance; they are not character component linked, and do not refer to other important areas such as dark skies, tranquillity, settlement pattern, and to grasslands, and soil health. There were discussions around:
 - pursuance of some of the targets could result in changes to landscape character that could adversely affect the character of the High Weald.
 - the targets being focussed on new sites and not necessarily on retaining and improving the current habitat,
 - the lack of clarity regarding the monitoring of these type of targets and whether Biodiversity Net Gain will be part of the wildlife creating habitats.

13. The timetable for the target's framework was discussed and it was agreed that it may require an additional Management Board meeting before the March JAC.
14. In addition, Sally advised that the National Adaptation Programme sets the actions that government and others will take to adapt to the impacts of climate change in the UK. The NAP3 sets out the key actions for 2023 to 2028. National Landscapes will need to develop a Climate Adaption Plan by 2027.
15. **Action: An update on the National Targets will be presented to the next JAC meeting.**
16. Diane Russell informed the group that she has been part of a National Landscapes Association working group developing a short guidance document on the impacts on the changes to S85 strengthened duty for Relevant Authorities and how to interpret this for planning decisions. She explained that the importance is on the duty of the decision maker not necessarily on the developer.
17. **Action: when published by the NLA, the S85 LPA guidance document will circulate to Members and officers.**

High Weald National Landscape programmes

18. Gerry Sherwin updated the Members on the Defra Test & Trial fund convening fund. The High Weald was chosen to lead this as it has a complex administrative set up, with 15 Local Authorities. Lucy Bowyer is in position to help with the development and running of these events. There will be a suite of events for landowners as well as a Deer Conference on 1 February 2024. The team are also developing a Heritage lottery bid to connect people to local heritage.
19. The fund is mainly focussed on landowners, it also can be used to enable JAC to think about the future and what frameworks need to be developed. Sally Marsh informed the group that they have contracted Future Nature to facilitate two workshops with the JAC Partnership. Howard Davies and Richard Clarke were both previously officers of the central National Landscape Association team and have many years of experience in facilitating. They will use a best practice process through IUCN which supports the partnership to build capacity to meet future challenges.
20. There was an update on other work programmes the Team are managing:
 - The Natural Flood Management programme has been extended by further 3 years with Dean Morrison. This works with communities and landowners around leaky dams and other natural flood protection methods.
 - Nature Calling arts project is being developed with the support of the central National Landscape team.
 - High Weald Walking Festival 2024 was very successful, with over 600 attendees and 8,000 hits on the website.
 - The Wild about Dark Skies Festival is running from 28 October to 10 November 2024 with around 16 events on our website. Samantha Nicholas also asked for members to speak with Parishes if they want to run an event for 2025 or 2026

as the majority events are around Burwash, Battle, Crowhurst, Wadhurst, Ticehurst, Dallington, Warbleton, Brightling and Dormansland.

- The Deer Management project has been involved with marketing wild venison and has a contract with Country Feed Trust that supports local food banks.

21. Diane Russell informed the Members of key Planning updates.:

- We had contributed to the central National Landscape Association (NLA) response on the recent government consultation on amendments to the NPPF. A key concern was around the new housing numbers. A discussion took place on and lack of recognition of protected areas and that non protected areas are under pressure to take numbers for adjoining landscapes.
- Diane had attended a Kent CC workshop for the development of the Kent Design Guide. Diane had been working collaboratively with her counterpart at the Kent Downs National Landscape to draft a 'National Landscape (NL)' page for the Guide.
- Diane had also worked with the Kent Downs NL on developing joint Local Plan policy wording and supporting text for those LAs in both NLs.
- The OSG are continuing working on several guidance notes. The Dark Skies Planning Technical Advice Note, has been distributed to LPAs and is on our website, and has been adopted by some LAs.
- A subgroup (made up of the OSG Chair (planning policy officer), ESCC County Landscape Architect, Tunbridge Wells BC Landscape officer and Rother DC Major Sites officer) has been working on the Soft Landscaping in Housing Developments Planning Technical Advice Note, with a view to a draft being available in the new year. The OSG also has a subgroup for affordable housing matters.
- The team is working on a Position Statement for solar farms in the High Weald.

22. ACTION: Sally Marsh will send an email outlining the facilitated JAC Partnership workshop, to be circulated from the Chair.

Agenda items for the High Weald JAC meeting (Wednesday 27 November 2024)

23. Shortened main meeting covering National Landscape Targets and sign off the budget consultation.
24. This will be followed by a facilitation workshop on how the partnership meets the future objectives

A.O.B

25. The JAC Meeting is to be held on 27 November 2024 at Roebuck Hotel Forest Row.

Agenda item:6

High Weald Joint Advisory Committee Officer Steering Group



High Weald
National
Landscape

Notes of a meeting of the High Weald Officer Steering Group held on online Microsoft teams Tuesday 1 October 10.30am.

Samantha Nicholas
Clerk to the High Weald JAC
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 Greenwood	Surrey CC
David Chambers	Rother DC
Julian Ling	Tonbridge & Malling BC
David Scully	Tunbridge Wells BC
Craig Steenhoff	Wealden DC
Tom Jones	Tandridge DC

Guests:

Graeme Quinnell	Rother DC
Helen Blackith	Mid Sussex DC

High Weald Unit:

Jason Lavender	HWNL Joint Director
Sally Marsh	HWNL Joint Director
Diane Russell	HWNL Planning & Design Advisor
Sarah Brotherton	HWNL Research Officer
Sascha Wardley	The Rural Planning Practice

Summary of Actions:

<u>Pt</u>	<u>Information</u>	<u>To be actioned by</u>
3.7	Affordable Housing Research presentation and report to be circulated	DR
	OSG affordable housing working group to be set up	DR
7.2	David Scully to circulate examples of battery installation applications	DS

1. Apologies

- 1.1 Apologies were received from Sarah Holmes, Tunbridge Wells BC, Kerry Culbert, Hastings BC.

2 Affordable Housing Research

- 2.1 Sally Marsh informed the OSG that an additional fund provided by Defra is being used in part to undertake research and provide evidence for the future revisions of the AONB Management Plan.
- 2.2 Sally explained that the Unit has commissioned three small research contracts as a result, looking at:
- affordable housing policies for rural workers within HW National Landscape
 - the historical precedent for low-cost rural worker housing, particularly in the High Weald, e.g. estate cottages, alms houses and small wayside dwellings that have supported rural workers in the past
 - updating the 2009 rural workers' housing survey to understand the needs of rural workers in terms of their housing and workspace needs
- 2.3 Sally said a small working group would be set up as part of the OSG to look at affordable housing with the intention that the research findings will help inform the working group over the next year.
- 2.4 Sally also mentioned some of this Defra funding would be used for a review of the NL partnership to ensure it is able to meet the future expectations and demands resulting from the AONB Management Plan and placed on the partnership and others

3 Affordable Housing Research - presentation

- 3.1 Sascha Wardley (The Rural Planning Partnership) gave a presentation on her research on the mechanisms that have an impact on the ability to deliver affordable housing, including planning policies and government funding streams, and the potential policies and strategic approaches which might support affordable housing in smaller developments with the High Weald landscape.
- 3.2 Diane Russell informed the OSG that this research is the corner stone for the working group allowing the group to explore these issues in more depth. The working group would draw on the expertise of the affordable housing officers within the member local authorities and the OSG more generally. Sascha's research and any other relevant information will be uploaded to the OSG Teams page and any feedback and further thoughts from the OSG would be welcomed.

There followed general discussion about the report and on the wider points about affordable housing delivery. Craig Steenhoff, (Wealden DC) asked how this report's findings can be fed into the Local Plan process. There was then a discussion on the complexity of the Local Plan process and particularly the different timescales each local authority is working to but the intention is the report findings and the OSG working group's further work on this would be used by local authorities to support policy development.

- 3.3 Helen Blackith (Mid Sussex DC) raised the key issues that housing associations are generally unwilling to get involved with planning applications for fewer than 50 units along with the lack of registered provider (RPS) grants in section 106 schemes. One solution may be for the government to fund smaller schemes and set aside grants for these smaller schemes.
- 3.4 Graeme Quinnell (Rother DC) informed the group that the 'Developers East Sussex' group is lobbying Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to make changes to section 106 schemes.
- 3.5 Issues around multiplier for land value adversely affecting viability with developments was discussed by the group. It was agreed that the OSG working group could look more into this matter and Sascha Wardley (The Rural Planning Practice) suggested that they could look at planning viability assessments. David Scully (Tunbridge Wells BC) offered a live example for the group to use as a case study.

3.6 Actions:

- **Circulate the Affordable Housing report and the presentation to the OSG when it's available.**
- **Set up the OSG affordable housing working group**

4 Minutes of the meeting 14 February 2024

- 4.1 The Minutes of 14 February 2024 were agreed to be an accurate account of the meeting.
- 4.2 Diane Russell (High Weald Unit) informed the group that notification to Secretary of State for the Management Plan has been delayed as we are waiting for Wealden DC to adopt the Management Plan. James Webster (WDC Planning Policy Manager) is progressing this and it should be adopted in the next few weeks.
- 4.3 Jason Lavender (High Weald Unit) confirmed that the Service Level Agreement will be circulated once all local authorities have confirmed the adoption of the AONB Management Plan

5. Legislative and policy update

5.1 Diane asked how the local authorities had responded to the NPPF consultation while confirming the National Landscapes Association (NLA) had put in a response following consultation with all National Landscape teams and it raised the risk that the housing formulae will potentially lead to increased numbers for LPAs within National Landscapes. The NLA has also been looking at the new energy policy in the NPPF as there is a concern with the wording being too inflexible.

- David Scully (Tunbridge Wells BC) informed the OSG that they have had two large applications for solar farms which are yet to be determined. At present they have agreed four solar applications in the Low Weald and some smaller battery schemes with the High Weald National Landscape.
- Craig Steenhoff (Wealden DC) informed the group that Wealden DC response to the NPPF consultation is on their website, and they have focussed on the increase in provisional housing numbers and calculation not considering constraints on land availability.

5.2 Sarah Brotherton (High Weald Unit) gave a brief overview on Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework (slides appended):

- A national requirement, based on government Environment Improvement Plan (EIP), there will be 10 targets within National Landscapes, and these are targets for the landscape as a whole and not for the National Landscape teams.
- These targets will be included in an addendum to the AONB Management Plan by the summer in 2025.
- The Climate Change Adaption Plan – this is a NAP3 requirement and will need to be included as part of the AONB Management Plan by 2028. At the moment more guidance is expected from NE/ Defra on this document but the High Weald team hopes to base it on the structure of the Management Plan and will be seeking to use the existing landscape components and align it with both the natural systems and the cross-cutting themes. The High Weald team is also consulting on this with the local authority Nature Recovery Network groups.

6. Planning and non-planning matters affecting the High Weald AONB

6.1 Officers gave updates on the progression of their Local Plans:

- Ashford BC– Reg 18 publication pushed back to second quarter of 2025
- Horsham DC - Reg 19 plan is with the inspector, submitted in June. Examination expected just before Christmas.
- Tunbridge Wells BC – one more day of examination scheduled, looking to publish early 2025
- Sevenoaks DC– Reg 19 Plan delayed to be reviewed under new NPPF.
- Rother DC – Reg 18 consultation completed this summer. Reg 19 likely to be 2026.
- Wealden DC –Reg 18 consultation completed. Waiting for new NPPF to review.

- Crawley BC – Local Plan going to Cabinet and Full Council for adoption shortly.
- Tandridge DC – Reg 18 version likely summer/autumn 2025.
- Mid Sussex DC – Reg 19 Plan submitted for examination in July. First set of hearings scheduled for October.

6.2 Diane requested that all the local authorities keep in touch with progress on Local Plans so that any requests for support from the High Weald team on the Local Plan can be worked into the busy timetable.

7. Progress on Advice Notes:

7.1 Diane updated the OSG on progress:

- **Dark skies technical guidance** - has now been published and sent to local authorities to upload on to their websites and to promote within their planning teams. Some local authorities have adopted it.
- **Soft landscaping in housing developments guidance** – Work on this was progressing, a small working group including Jennifer Hollingum, David Scully, David Chambers and Virginia Pullan had convened in the summer, and reviewed a first draft, with useful suggestions on scope and content. Diane is in the process of producing a draft document to circulate to the wider OSG.
- **Position statement of solar farms in the NL** - Work on this was at an early stage. David Scully highlighted the importance of covering matters such as alternatives to solar farms (as often this is not presented properly or in detail in the applications), battery storage, and proposals in the setting of the AONB. David will send examples of current applications. Diane referred to the rooftop solar research report by UCL Energy Institute and commissioned by CPRE last year.
- Biodiversity Net gain (BNG) in the High Weald guidance – work on this is at an early stage.

7.2 **Actions: David Scully to circulate examples of battery installation applications**

8. Update on High Weald National Landscape (HWNL) programmes

8.1 Jason Lavender gave a summary of a selection of the High Weald Unit's wide ranging work programme:

- **The Sussex Lund** grant has been rebranded to High Weald Nature and Community Fund. The focus has slightly widened to encourage more projects from community groups in general and from the neighbouring urban areas to tackle areas of nature deprivation. To date
 - 259 projects have been supported through this process; 79 are currently active and we have awarded £1.3 million worth of grants. £298,000 has been awarded this year.

- New for this year is the awarding of two research fellowship grants. One will be looking at ways to promote regenerative agriculture more widely among the farming and non-farming communities while also encouraging ways to shift the perception of farmers on regenerative agriculture. The second fellowship will be looking at whether ‘culturally and ecologically rich’ textiles derived from domesticated livestock farmed using environmentally responsible farming practices is a viable diversification option in the High Weald.

Examples of other projects receiving grants:

- The second phase of Greening Chiddingly has started on the border of the High Weald, which involves a group of farmers working together to create new ponds and restoring lost hedgerows.
 - Wild in the City, a Community Interest Company based in Crawley, have received funding to help connect local nature deprived groups to the High Weald
 - London Youth Group, again supporting nature deprived children and their visits to the High Weald.
 - Wild Groombridge, a project concentrating on grassland restoration and putting up bird boxes.
- **Farming in Protected Landscapes Fund (FIPL)** is ending in March 2025. This year we will have provided £960,000 towards a wide range of projects and although the future of FiPL is unknown at this stage, we hope to continue to work with farmers after this programme ends.
 - **The Royal Countryside Fund** (formerly known as the Prince’s Countryside Fund) is working with the High Weald Unit for the second time on providing business advice, support, and guidance for farmers in the High Weald.
 - **Sussex Flow, Cuckmere and Coombe.** This is the High Weald Unit’s natural flood management project run in conjunction with the Environment Agency and it has recently been extended for further three years and looks at flood management in specific areas and working with local community groups and farmers to install nature-based flood solutions such as coarse woody debris dams.
 - **Deer management programme** is continuing. The High Weald Unit’s Deer Management Coordinator Sandy Williamson is leaving in the New Year but will be replaced by Mark Smith. The programme has been very successful to date raising awareness of the issue and providing hands-on support and guidance to landowners and deerstalkers in the High Weald, and several of our approaches are now being adopted elsewhere in the country such as deer population surveys using flying drones and deer cull days. There has been a particular success in and around the Ashdown Forest area where deer management has been intensified, and this pilot scheme has had national recognition. The programme also supports marketing of venison and stalkers in the form of

training and supporting payments. A High Weald Deer conference is planned for January/February 2025 and the results of the deer management pilot projects will be presented.

- The High Weald team secured additional funding from Defra to support our the facilitation of the delivery of the AONB Management Plan along with additional events for landowners, community groups, and the wider High Weald partnership members.
- Our primary school education programme High Weald Heroes remains very successful focussing on welly walks to and from the schools and outdoor learning. Over 90 schools across and adjacent to the High Weald are participating.
- **High Weald Walking Festival 2024** run in conjunction with The Ramblers was again a great success with 600 participants attending a wide range of guided walks and over 8,000 hits were recorded on the Walking Festival's webpage. Particularly interesting was that many of the website interest came from Crawley and Horsham residents showing that the High Weald is considered a valuable resource by these residents, and the walks in the Worth Abbey area and western part of the High Weald were well attended.

8.2 Jason Lavender also gave an outline on future projects under development:

- The High Weald Unit is looking at ways to work more within the Arts sector and the potential of an arts project helping to engage with communities that have difficulty enjoying and engaging with the High Weald landscape. During the winter the High Weald team hope to begin developing a large funding bid to the Heritage Fund.
- The High Weald Unit has recently been working with a new initiative run by the Waterlife Recovery Trust looking to eradicate American mink from southeast England and building on the success of the work in the east of England. This work is in the early stages but should a coordinated approach across the southeast be achieved, the expectation is that mink could be removed within five years.
- As part of a move to raise the profile and recognition of grasslands in the Low and High Weald, Jason Lavender will be attending a Westminster reception on the value of grasslands, which has been organised by Plantlife. Nationally there is an increasing concern that grasslands are not valued, and they continue to face a range of threats from large housing development and new woodland creation schemes, threats that are ever present here in the High Weald.
- The second High Weald Dark Skies Festival will run from the 28 October until 10 November 2024. Samantha Nicholas (High Weald Unit) asked the OSG that should they know if any Parishes are keen to be involved in 2025 and 2026 to get in touch with her.

- 8.3 Some of the OSG members asked whether it would be possible to have details of this range of work the High Weald Unit does to help them promote the work to colleagues and Members within their respective local authorities. While this information is already presented in a variety of ways, Jason Lavender agreed to look at how this could be done in a way the OSG could readily use.
- 8.4 Both David Scully (Tunbridge Wells BC) and Mark Daly (OSG Vice Chair and Horsham DC) commended the High Weald team for their broad range of work that they are managing alongside the planning remit of their work.

9 Items for JAC

- 9.1 The meeting on the 27 November 2024 will be shorter than normal as external consultants will be running a workshop immediately after the meeting and involving the JAC. This workshop is the first of three opportunities designed to assess the preparedness of the JAC and High Weald team to deliver the transformational change required by the adopted AONB Management Plan 2024-2029, which is the first stage of a revised 20-year strategy.

10 A.O.B

- 10.1 David Scully (Tunbridge Wells BC) stated it was important to ensure any issues relating to grasslands in the High Weald and BNG should be highlighted. David has given the High Weald Unit some grassland guidance from another county, and this may provide a useful basis for any BNG guidance the High Weald team may produce.
- 10.2 Diane Russell (High Weald Unit) had attended a workshop to look at KCC Kent Design Guide and run by Design Southeast.
- 10.3 A request was made to the OSG to ensure their planning teams are kept informed about the AONB Management Plan and the Dark Skies PAN. Training for local authority officers will be organised but it is for the OSG members to make sure their colleagues are aware of the relevant documents. It was noted that the Tunbridge Wells BC website provided an excellent example of a website providing access to all High Weald partnership reports.
- 11. The next OSG meeting will be in February 2024, the exact date to be confirmed.**

Agenda Item: 7

Committee:	High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee
Date:	27 November 2024
Title of Report:	Draft Revenue Budget 2025/26
By:	Treasurer to the Joint Advisory Committee
Purpose:	To consider the draft Revenue Budget 2025/26 and agree it as a basis for consultation with contributing bodies

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Joint Advisory Committee is recommended to:

1. Approve the draft budget for 2025/26;
 2. Agree to the commencement of budget consultation with the local authorities and Defra; and
 3. Welcome Defra's commitment to retaining project officers employed for the Farming in Protected Landscape Programme.
-

1. FINANCIAL APPRAISAL

- 1.1. A draft budget for 2025/26 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 4.56% in local authority contributions and a contribution of £32,800 from self-funding projects to achieve a balanced core budget for 2025/26 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 2025/26 will be presented to the Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) for approval at its March 2025 meeting.

2. CONTEXT

- 2.1. The draft budget should be considered within the context of the Service Level Agreement 2024-2029.

- 2.2. It should be noted that local authority contributions in the region of £153,000 in 2025/26 are likely to generate additional funds for delivery of statutory purposes and AONB Management plan delivery of over £1 million.

High Weald JAC budget 2024/25

- 2.3. The forecast outturn for 2024/25 is a balanced budget.
- 2.4. The agreed local government national pay award for 2024/25 was higher than forecast and equates to an increase of 3.18% for High Weald Core staff. Increased costs have been offset by salary savings from vacant roles and a reduction in the core training budget.
- 2.5. The forecast reserve on 31 March 2025 is £235,000.

3. FINANCIAL ISSUES

- 3.1. A review of the JAC budget was undertaken in 2022/23 prompted by:
- recognition of static contributions to the Partnership's core budget for 20 years i.e. no overall increase in contributions since 2001/02
 - increased demands on the Partnership's services
 - the need for budget confidence to retain and recruit staff
 - an increasing budget deficit, despite significant savings.
- 3.2. Over 2023/24 and 2024/205 eleven authorities were able to increase their contributions: eight increased to the level requested and six increased their contributions but at a lesser amount than requested. Only one authority, Kent County Council, was unable to commit additional funding in 2024/25.
- 3.3. A draft 2025/26 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 an updated indicative 5-year budget. A balanced budget for 2025/26 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 local authorities can increase their contributions in line with inflation as proposed in the SLA.

Core budget – expenditure

Summary

- 3.7. Inflation has been applied at rate of 3% for salaries. This excludes the changes to national insurance rates and limits for which an additional pressure has been added.

All other costs have been inflated by 3%. It should be noted however the CPI is variable, 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 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% and increase in employer national insurance contributions of 2.0%. The costs include a small travel and training budget.

3.11. The budget assumes contributions to the East Sussex Pension Fund of 19.7% in 2025/26.

Accommodation/office equipment

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

Partnership running costs and support services

3.13. Partnership running costs includes the National Landscapes Association's 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 include 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 4.56% 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. Our three-year agreement with Defra ends on 31 March 2025. Defra are planning a one-year settlement for 2025/26 with a longer-term settlement from 2026/27. They

have provided no indication of their likely contribution for 25/26. A standstill budget has therefore been assumed. The 2025/26 core contribution is £270,600, the same contribution as 2024/25.

Local Authority contributions

- 3.17. The draft budget assumes an inflationary increase of 4.56% to the core contributions of all local authorities for 2025/26. an average of inflation on salaries and other costs. This is based on a 3% increase on pay and other costs plus the 2% increased rate and £4,096 lower limit for national insurance.
- 3.18. It is acknowledged that some authorities have already advised that there will be no inflationary uplift in their contribution. However, the High Weald Management Board would like those authorities to reconsider their decision.

Other contributions

- 3.19. The draft budget assumes significant other contributions to the core budget of £32,800 from charges to Self-funding projects for management, administration, and office costs.

Core budget - reserves

- 3.20. The JAC reserves on 31 March 2025 are estimated to be £235,000.

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); Grant Programmes; and Project Development.
- 3.22. The project budget allows for 5.4FTE: Land Management project officers (2.4 FTE), Deer co-ordinator (0.6FTE), Community engagement officer (0.6FTE), Senior administrator (1.2FTE) 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 role in managing grant programmes on behalf of others and includes indicative expenditure under the High Weald Nature and Community Fund (formerly Sussex Lund).

- 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, the same contribution as 2024/25. The contribution is enabling delivery of most of the Partnership's Self-funding projects.
- 3.27. However, Defra have committed an additional £123,600 for 2025/26 and £95,700 for 2026/27 to the Partnership' Self-funding projects to allow the officers employed in the Farming in Protected Landscape Programme to be retained. The programme officially ends on 31 March 2025, but a continuation is being considered by Defra.

4. FINANCIAL ISSUES 2026/27 AND BEYOND

- 4.1. A balanced position has been achieved for 2025/26 and another three years through inflationary contributions from local authorities and a contribution to the core budget from Self-funding projects on the assumption that a significant element of the core team's time is spent managing or delivering projects, particularly the High Weald Nature and Community Fund.
- 4.2. Defra contributions are conditional on match funding equivalent to 25% of 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 reserves policy (agreed at the 27 March 2024 meeting) sets out the purpose and justification for reserves of £235,000, including the need for a minimum reserve of £95,000 to meet redundancy costs.
- 4.5. The core budget allows for a job share director role and several part-time roles. If these roles become vacant, it may be necessary to make these roles full time to attract staff with the required expertise. The JAC reserves policy allows for use of the reserves in this eventuality, but a team restructure may also need to be considered.

5. RISKS

- 5.1. The risks and financial implication that the JAC will wish to note are that the core budget for 2025/26 assumes that:
 - Defra maintains its single pot funding to National Landscape Partnerships in 2025/26 at the same level as 2024/25
 - All local authorities can increase their contributions by inflation
 - There will be no changes to the salary-related assumptions that increase costs
 - The Partnerships' office remains exempt from business rates.

- 5.2. If local authorities are unable to increase their contributions in-line with inflation additional core staff time will need to be allocated to project delivery (which affects the team's core service) or savings will need to be found from staffing or premises costs.
- 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 2025/26, and a further year is presented.
- 6.2. The draft budget for Self-financing projects assumes operation of five programmes in 2025/26. 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 2025/26.



Jill Fisher -Treasurer to the High Weald National Landscape Joint Advisory Committee

HIGH WEALD AONB JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

FORECAST OUTTURN for 2024/25, PROPOSED BUDGET for 2025/26 AND INDICATIVE BUDGET 2026/27

Appendix A

2023/24		2024/25		2025/26				2026/27	
Outturn	Core Budget	Budget	Forecast	Original Budget	Inflation	Budget Pressures	Other	Budget	Indicative Budget
£'000		£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
	Expenditure								
323.8	Staff costs	323.8	323.8	323.8	9.7	3.6	6.9	344.0	354.3
31.2	Accommodation/office equipment	36.4	36.4	36.4	1.1	0.0	0.0	37.5	38.6
9.5	Partnership running costs	7.2	7.2	7.2	0.2	0.0	0.0	7.4	7.6
33.5	Support services	33.6	33.6	33.6	1.0	0.0	0.0	34.6	35.5
398.0	Total Core Expenditure	401.0	401.0	401.0	12.0	3.6	6.9	423.5	436.0
	Income								
(270.6)	Defra	(270.6)	(270.6)	(270.6)	0.0	0.0	0.0	(270.6)	(278.7)
(27.4)	East Sussex County Council	(28.2)	(28.2)	(28.2)	(1.3)	0.0	0.0	(29.5)	(30.4)
(14.0)	Kent County Council	(9.0)	(9.0)	(9.0)	(0.4)	0.0	0.0	(9.4)	(9.7)
(14.4)	West Sussex County Council	(14.7)	(14.7)	(14.7)	(0.7)	0.0	0.0	(15.4)	(15.9)
(3.0)	Surrey County Council	(3.1)	(3.1)	(3.1)	(0.1)	0.0	0.0	(3.2)	(3.3)
(9.7)	Wealden District	(10.0)	(10.0)	(10.0)	(0.5)	0.0	0.0	(10.5)	(10.8)
(9.7)	Rother District Council	(10.0)	(10.0)	(10.0)	(0.5)	0.0	0.0	(10.5)	(10.8)
(8.1)	Mid Sussex District Council	(8.3)	(8.3)	(8.3)	(0.4)	0.0	0.0	(8.7)	(9.0)
(6.7)	Tunbridge Wells Borough Council	(8.9)	(8.9)	(8.9)	(0.4)	0.0	0.0	(9.3)	(9.6)
(5.0)	Horsham District Council	(5.2)	(5.2)	(5.2)	(0.2)	0.0	0.0	(5.4)	(5.6)
(6.1)	Sevenoaks District Council	(6.3)	(6.3)	(6.3)	(0.3)	0.0	0.0	(6.6)	(6.8)
(0.8)	Ashford Borough Council	(1.6)	(1.6)	(1.6)	(0.1)	0.0	0.0	(1.7)	(1.8)
(4.0)	Hastings Borough Council	(4.1)	(4.1)	(4.1)	(0.2)	0.0	0.0	(4.3)	(4.4)
(2.2)	Tandridge District Council	(2.3)	(2.3)	(2.3)	(0.1)	0.0	0.0	(2.4)	(2.5)
(0.3)	Crawley Borough Council	(1.5)	(1.5)	(1.5)	(0.1)	0.0	0.0	(1.6)	(1.6)
(1.2)	Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council	(1.5)	(1.5)	(1.5)	(0.1)	0.0	0.0	(1.6)	(1.6)
(20.4)	Other income	(15.7)	(15.7)	(15.7)	(0.7)	0.0	(16.4)	(32.8)	(33.5)
(403.6)	Total Core Income	(401.0)	(401.0)	(401.0)	(6.1)	0.0	(16.4)	(423.5)	(436.0)
5.6	Surplus/(deficit) transfer to/(from) reserves	0.0	0.0	0.0	(5.9)	(3.6)	9.5	(0.0)	0.0
0.0	Net Core Budget	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	Self Funding Projects								
	See Appendix B for detail								
874.1	JAC expenditure on self-funded projects	1,360.0	1,789.2	1,801.7				710.6	724.8
(68.9)	Defra contribution to self-funded projects (Excluding FIPL)	(351.0)	(351.0)	(651.0)				(47.5)	(40.1)
(545.3)	Defra contribution to FIPL Project	(545.3)	(999.3)	(750.3)				(123.6)	(95.7)
0.0	Local authorities contributions	(38.2)	(10.6)	(38.3)				(128.0)	(164.4)
(259.9)	Other contributions to self-funded projects	(425.4)	(428.3)	(362.1)				(411.5)	(424.6)
0.0	Net Self-Funded Project Budget	0.0	(0.0)	(0.0)	0.0	0.0	0.0	(0.0)	0.0
	Total High Weald JAC								
1,277.7	Total core and project expenditure	1,761.0	2,190.2	2,202.7	12.0	3.6	6.9	1,134.1	1,160.8
(1,277.7)	Total core and project income	(1,761.0)	(2,190.2)	(2,202.7)	(6.1)	0.0	(16.4)	(1,134.1)	(1,160.8)
0.0	Total High Weald JAC Budget	(0.0)	0.0	0.0	(5.9)	(3.6)	9.5	0.0	(0.0)

Defra Funding	2024/25	2025/26
	£000	£000
Defra funding on core budget	(270.6)	(270.6)
Defra funding on projects budget	(351.0)	(47.5)
Defra contribution to FIPL Project	(545.3)	(123.6)
Total Defra Funding	(1,166.9)	(441.7)

Reserves	£000
Reserves at 31 March 2023	229.4
Transfer to/(from) reserves 2023/24	5.6
Reserves at 31 March 2024	235.0
Transfer to/(from) reserves 2024/25	0.0
Reserves at 31 March 2025	235.0
Transfer to/(from) reserves 2025/26	0.0
Reserves at 31 March 2026	235.0

HIGH WEALD AONB JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

SELF-FUNDING PROJECTS OUTTURN for 2023/24 and INDICATIVE BUDGET 2024/25, 2025/26 and 2026/27

Appendix B

2023/24 Outturn £'000	Budget 2024/25			Forecast 2024/25			Indicative Budget 2025/26			Indicative Budget 2026/27		
	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											
22.5	JAC expenditure			233.3			48.3			49.2		
(14.0)	Defra	(233.0)		(225.9)			(14.0)			(14.0)		
(8.2)	Local authorities	(23.6)		0.0			(26.9)			(27.8)		
(0.3)	Other	(0.4)		(7.4)			(7.4)			(7.4)		
(0.0)	Total Community Outreach and Access for All			0.0			0.0			0.0		
	High Weald Heroes											
32.9	JAC expenditure			29.4			30.3			30.6		
(14.5)	Defra	(18.0)		(25.1)			(18.0)			(18.0)		
(10.1)	Local authorities	(7.3)		(0.3)			(12.3)			(12.6)		
(8.3)	Other	(4.1)		(4.0)			0.0			0.0		
0.0	Total High Weald Heroes			(0.0)			0.0			0.0		
	2 Management Plan Evidence and Guidance											
17.8	JAC expenditure			8.9			19.2			17.0		
(12.0)	Defra	(7.0)		(7.0)			(9.2)			(7.0)		
(5.8)	Other	(7.0)		(1.9)			(10.0)			(10.0)		
0.0	Total Management Plan Evidence and Guidance			(4.0)			0.0			0.0		
	3 Landscape Enhancement*											
239.0	JAC expenditure			433.8			468.2			511.3		
(7.0)	Defra	(8.5)		(8.5)			(6.3)			(1.1)		
(4.5)	Environment Agency	(65.0)		(65.0)			(59.1)			(72.2)		
(1.3)	Local authorities	(7.3)		(10.3)			(67.8)			(103.0)		
(60.1)	Other	(13.9)		(15.0)			0.0			0.0		
0.0	Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund	0.0		0.0			0.0			0.0		
(36.8)	National Grid Grant programme	0.0		0.0			0.0			0.0		
(129.3)	High Weald Nature and Community Fund (Charities Aid Foundation)	(335.0)		(335.0)			(335.0)			(335.0)		
0.0	Total Landscape Enhancement			0.0			0.0			0.0		
	4 Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme (FIPL)											
671.8	JAC expenditure			999.3			123.6			95.7		
(671.8)	Defra	(545.3)		(999.3)			(123.6)			(95.7)		
0.0	Total Farming in Protected Landscapes			0.0			0.0			0.0		
	Management Plan Implementation Fund											
0.0	JAC expenditure			312.1			0.0			0.0		
0.0	Defra	0.0		(312.1)			0.0			0.0		
0.0	Total			0.0			0.0			0.0		
	5 Project Development											
2.7	JAC expenditure			84.5			21.0			21.0		
(2.7)	Defra	(84.5)		(84.5)			0.0			0.0		
0.0	Other	0.0		0.0			0.0			0.0		
0.0	Local authorities	0.0		0.0			(21.0)			(21.0)		
0.0	Total Project Development			0.0			0.0			0.0		
986.7	JAC expenditure (to Appendix a)			1,789.2			710.6			724.8		
(722.0)	Expenditure funded by Defra (to Appendix A)			(1,350.3)			(171.1)			(135.8)		
(19.6)	Expenditure funded by LAs (to Appendix A)			(10.6)			(128.0)			(164.4)		
(245.1)	Expenditure funded by Other (to Appendix A)			(428.3)			(411.5)			(424.6)		
0.0	TOTAL JAC expenditure/income			0.0			0.0			0.0		
	1,360.0	(896.3)	0.0	1,789.2	(1,350.3)	0.0	710.6	(171.1)	0.0	724.8	(135.8)	0.0
		(38.2)			(10.6)			(128.0)			(164.4)	
		(425.4)			(428.3)			(411.5)			(424.6)	
	1,360.0	(1,360.0)	0.0	1,789.2	(1,789.2)	0.0	710.6	(710.6)	0.0	724.8	(724.8)	0.0

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

High Weald AONB Five year budget plan

	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
Expenditure	£	£	£	£	£
Staff costs	323,800	344,000	354,320	364,950	375,900
Accommodation/office equipment	36,400	37,500	38,625	39,780	40,970
Partnership running costs	7,200	7,400	7,622	7,850	8,090
Support services	33,600	34,600	35,638	36,710	37,810
Total Core Expenditure	401,000	423,500	436,205	449,290	462,770
Income					
Defra	(270,600)	(270,600)	(278,718)	(287,080)	(295,692)
East Sussex County Council	(28,222)	(29,509)	(30,394)	(31,306)	(32,245)
Kent County Council	(9,000)	(9,410)	(9,692)	(9,983)	(10,282)
West Sussex County Council	(14,729)	(15,401)	(15,863)	(16,339)	(16,829)
Surrey County Council	(3,090)	(3,231)	(3,328)	(3,428)	(3,531)
Wealden District	(9,991)	(10,447)	(10,760)	(11,083)	(11,415)
Rother District Council	(9,991)	(10,447)	(10,760)	(11,083)	(11,415)
Mid Sussex District Council	(8,343)	(8,723)	(8,985)	(9,255)	(9,533)
Tunbridge Wells Borough Council	(8,900)	(9,306)	(9,585)	(9,873)	(10,169)
Horsham District Council	(5,150)	(5,385)	(5,547)	(5,713)	(5,884)
Sevenoaks District Council	(6,283)	(6,570)	(6,767)	(6,970)	(7,179)
Ashford Borough Council	(1,600)	(1,673)	(1,723)	(1,775)	(1,828)
Hastings Borough Council	(4,120)	(4,308)	(4,437)	(4,570)	(4,707)
Tandridge District Council	(2,266)	(2,369)	(2,440)	(2,513)	(2,588)
Crawley Borough Council	(1,500)	(1,568)	(1,615)	(1,663)	(1,713)
Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council	(1,545)	(1,615)	(1,663)	(1,713)	(1,764)
Other income	(15,670)	(32,938)	(33,928)	(34,943)	(35,996)
Total Core Income	(401,000)	(423,500)	(436,205)	(449,290)	(462,770)
Surplus/(deficit) transfer to/(from) reserves	0	0	0	0	0

Agenda Item: 8

Committee: High Weald Joint Advisory Committee

Date: 27 November 2024

Title of Report: Risk Management

By: National Landscape Director

RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are recommended to:

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

- 1.1 The JAC is a strong partnership supported by the High Weald National Landscape 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 success of the High Weald National Landscape Partnership remains the increasing constraints and demands placed on both the financial and personnel resources of the High Weald team.

2.0 Key risks for 2024/25

Government core budget funding settlement

- 2.1 Members will be aware that since 2010 the English National Landscape 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 National Landscapes Partnerships is only half the core funding provided to a single National Park Authority.
- 2.2 The current national financial context and its influence on the government's policies and priorities for our sector remain considerable and these will continue to have negative consequences for funding and support provided by government and local authorities.
- 2.3 Despite the recent general election, there is no sign the poor funding settlements the National Landscape Partnerships have suffered since 2010 will change given the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) faces a 2% cut to its budget for 2025-26. This cut is expected to be spread across the department, and National Landscape lead officers have been told not to expect any indication of next year's funding settlement until March 2025.

- 2.4 Clearly there remains a major risk to the core work of the High Weald National Landscape Partnership should the current funding situation continue or worsen, and should the government yet again choose not to re-instate an adequate, stable, and long-term funding settlement for National Landscape 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.
- 2.5 This will be exacerbated should the current government continue to require National Landscape Partnerships to undertake further duties as part of the last government's response to the Landscapes Review and other things but not provide adequate, commensurate, and sustained resources. The government's immediate and longer-term intentions on a stable and adequate funding settlement for the sector are unclear.

Local Authority annual financial contributions

- 2.6 Until 2023/24 local authority contributions to the work of the High Weald Partnership had not increased since 2001 although most of the 15 local authority partners had maintained the agreed contributions (without an increase in line with inflation) to the core budget since 2010 and under increasingly difficult financial circumstances.
- 2.7 In 2022 the JAC recognised this situation, if left to continue, would contribute to the increase in the shortfall of the High Weald Partnership's core budget leading to an increasing deficit over the next five years. The JAC agreed to review the local authorities' annual financial contributions and following this review, the JAC unanimously agreed to propose a set increase in annual contributions for each local authority and that these contributions will be in line with inflation from the start of 2024/2025.
- 2.8 To date 14 of the 15 local authorities have agreed to increase their annual contributions to the High Weald Partnership's core budget. This is a very considerable achievement by the local authorities given the severe budget constraints each is currently dealing with, and we fully appreciate the on-going commitment to the partnership and all the efforts Members and local authority officers have made.
- 2.9 However, it is important to note that local authority budgets and funding settlements will remain under severe pressure for some time to come and there is a major risk that some or all local authorities may not be able to maintain their current contributions to the work of the High Weald Partnership.

Self-funded projects

- 2.10 Every year the High Weald team secures and manages significant amounts of external funds to support residents, schools, farmers, community groups, visitors, and others with a range of projects throughout the National Landscape 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)
 - Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) grant programme
- 2.11 In addition, the team administers and manages grant programmes on behalf of others (e.g. Sussex Lund, National Grid), which also bring considerable benefits across the High Weald.

- 2.12 As with the core budget settlement, there is a major risk to the on-going management of these self-funding programmes and any associated grant budgets should the existing constraints on the financial and personnel resources of the High Weald team continue or worsen.
- 2.13 DEFRA's advocacy of and support for a greater investment in designated landscapes did result in a considerable but temporary increase in the budget allocation for capital projects for 2024/2025. While this additional investment was welcomed, it did not come with any commensurate funds to support the core team (which oversees the management of the funds and the scheme) and projects had to be sought and funds spent within a tight time frame applying further pressure on the already hard-pressed and under-resourced High Weald team.
- 2.14 Given this, Members need to be aware of the risk that the budget allocations for the final year (2024/2025) of the FiPL grant programme and the one-year DEFRA Capital Fund may not be fully spent despite significant effort, and any unspent funding would need to be returned to DEFRA for re-allocation elsewhere.

New and greater expectations and demands

- 2.15 Recent years have seen a greater pressure on the High Weald landscape along with several increasing and new expectations placed on the team. These extra and new demands requiring the High Weald team's attention continue to place a significant strain on the existing core work and remit of the team. New demands include:
- The considerable rise in the numbers and the scale of housing development applications (particularly for major developments) affecting the National Landscape. 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 National Landscape and their emerging climate change and nature recovery policies has resulted in an increasing demand for our advice and guidance
 - The transition to a new agri-environment scheme will require farmers to change their practices and demand is increasing for our guidance to help them achieve the multiple objectives the government now expects
 - 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 staff to implement the scheme's objectives and support farmers and land managers submit strong grant applications

Staff on fixed-term contracts

- 2.16 Several of the current High Weald team staff are employed on fixed-term contracts working on a range of high-profile time limited projects and national schemes (such as the Farming in Protected Landscapes) funded by a range of external organisations. They also support and benefit the core team's wider work and remit.
- 2.17 Inevitably when these contracts are approaching their end those affected will be actively seeking alternative employment before these projects and schemes end. When this happens, it represents an immediate major risk to the successful completion of the projects while also resulting in the loss of a considerable amount of expertise, experience, and knowledge from the team specifically and the High Weald as a whole.
- 2.18 More generally, the loss of these colleagues puts at risk the wider work of the High Weald team and our ability to meet current and future demands placed on the team, hampering our efforts to take advantage of any potential opportunities to develop and run future projects.

Finance and budget management support

- 2.19 Members will be aware that East Sussex County Council (ESCC) provide a finance and budget management service to the High Weald team and play a significant role in the preparation of the High Weald annual budget and associated papers for the JAC along with the collation and submission of the High Weald Partnership's annual financial claim to DEFRA. Owing to matters beyond its control, ESCC was not able to provide the necessary financial and budget support to the High Weald team since May 2023. Some of this work has been picked up by the High Weald team and this has put a considerable extra strain on our already limited time and resources and particularly during the run up to the end of the current financial year.
- 2.20 ESCC has recently been able to recruit an additional finance officer who will be providing finance and budget support and we expect the risks to the High Weald team to decline once the new recruit becomes familiar with our budget, work, and remit.

Staff succession planning

- 2.21 Several of the High Weald staff are approaching the end of their careers and staff succession planning is an important issue needing to be addressed. The recruitment and retention of younger people and those with the relevant skills and experience is increasingly difficult and, unless addressed, this will adversely affect the work of the team in the future.

3.0 Risk mitigation

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

- 3.1 The long-standing financial and resources predicament facing the English National Landscape Partnerships 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 Partnership.
- 3.2 Our experience dealing with the funding cuts since 2009 reminds us that all members of the High Weald Partnership will need to continue to demonstrate at the local and national government level the value and the worth of the work the Partnership does, and lobby for adequate and stable long-term funding.

- 3.3 The development of secure and alternative long-term income streams to support the core remit of the 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 High Weald landscape.
- 3.4 The High Weald team's business strategy aims to respond to the risks caused by the constraints on both the financial and personnel resources of the staff. It is adapted where possible to accommodate the emerging risks associated the greater pressures placed on the High Weald landscape and the newer expectations and demands. The specific risks associated with the larger projects and grant schemes will continue to be assessed on a routine basis.
- 3.5 However, the assumption the current and inadequate resources provided by government to the High Weald Partnership can continue to cover the current and emerging demands while also meeting the government's stated vision that National Landscape partnerships are at the heart of nature recovery, landscape conservation, and climate change mitigation need to be challenged. Asking the High Weald Partnership to do more with less is no longer a viable option.

Staff on fixed-term contracts

- 3.6 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 by government offering greater permanent employment opportunities, it remains inevitable we will continue to lose talented and experienced staff members.

Staff succession planning

- 3.7 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 High Weald Unit.
- 3.8 We have begun to investigate possible options but progress on this has stalled primarily because of existing work commitments. We aim to re-start this in the hope we can develop a succession planning strategy for the team, and we will inform the JAC on any progress.

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 safe to assume the rest of 2024/2025 and beyond will continue to be characterised by the challenges outlined above. The constraints on both the financial and personnel resources of the High Weald Unit and the retention of the fixed-term staff to complete projects in their final year remain the most significant risks to the core and project work of the High Weald partnership.

4.3 The High Weald 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 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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