

High Weald Joint Advisory Committee



Agenda

High Weald JAC Meeting

Wednesday 26th November 2025, 10.30 am

Uckfield Civic Centre Uckfield TN22 1AE, followed by working lunch

1. Presentation: High Weald Mink eradication project
To note a presentation by NL Co-Director on a major landscape project.
2. Election of Members
To approve the election of the JAC Chair, Vice Chair, Management Board Members and Co-optees to JAC.
3. Apologies
4. Members' Interests
Members and officers are invited to make any declarations of any interest that they may have in relation to items on the agenda and are reminded to make any declaration at any stage during the meeting if it then becomes apparent that this may be required when a particular item or issue is considered.
5. Urgent matters
Members are asked to raise any urgent matters at this stage and not at the end of the meeting. The Chairman will decide whether the JAC should discuss any items so raised but asks members to give him prior notification of such matters unless urgency prevents it.
6. Minutes of the JAC meeting
To consider the minutes of the last meeting of the JAC held on 26th March 2025 (page 3)
7. Minutes of the Management Board Meeting
To note the matters arising from the Management Board meeting held on 15 October 2025 (page 10)
8. Minutes of the Officer Steering Group
To note the minutes of the last meeting of the OSG held on 16 September 2025, appended pond presentation (page 17)
9. Revenue Budget for 2025/26
To consider and approve a report by the Treasurer on the Revenue Budget 2025/26 (page 23) Appendix A budget forecast; Appendix B Self-funded projects; and Appendix C 5-year budget forecast; and to agree the commencement of budget consultation for budget 2026/27.
10. HWNL Planning Advice Note – Soft Landscaping in Housing Developments
To consider a report by the NL Co-Director and approve the HWNL Planning Advice Note – Soft Landscaping in Housing Developments (page 30 and Appendix D)
11. High Weald NL team update and communications discussion in the context of Devolution
To note a facilitated presentation by the NL Business Manager on the team's current work activity and consider how local authority members can promote the Partnership through the Devolution process.
12. Risk Management
To consider a report by the NL Co-Director on risk management (page 32).
13. Any other business

- To note a request for support in achieving International Dark Sky Community Designation from parishes within the High Weald NL.

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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Appendix 1

High Weald Joint Advisory Committee
Election of Management Board Members
November 2025 to 2027



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	Lorraine Carvalho	Mid-Sussex DC
2 Election of MB Member	Sir Nicholas White	Tandridge DC
3 Election of MB Member	Vacant	
4 Election of MB Member	Vacant	
Addition of cooptees to JAC Committee		
Coptee Farming & Forestry	John Marland	
Coptee Fundraising and PR	Andrew Wilson	

Agenda item: 6

High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee



Minutes of Meeting 10,30am to 2pm

26 March 2025, Uckfield Civic Centre, followed by Management Plan facilitated workshop.

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 Mrs E Kirby-Green	East Sussex County Council (JAC Vice-Chair)
Cllr Mr N Williams	Sevenoaks District Council
Cllr Mrs L Carvalho	Mid-Sussex District Council
Cllr Sir N White	Tandridge District Council
Cllr Ms J Walker	Hastings Borough Council
Cllr Mr A Wilson	Wealden District Council
Cllr Mr J Stanger	Rother District Council
Cllr Mr M Lowe	Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
Ms J Hull	Forestry Commission

Officers:

Mr J Lavender	HWNL Co-Director
Mrs S Marsh	HWNL Co-Director
Ms G Sherwin	HWNL Business Director
Miss D Russell	HWNL Planning & Design Advisor
Ms S Brotherton	HWNL Landscape Officer
Mr A Fowler	Finance Manager, East Sussex County Council
Ms S Wheatley	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
Mr C Steenhoff	OSG Wealden District Council
Mr D Greenwood	OSG Surrey County Council

1. A minute's silence was conducted during the meeting in memory of Sylvia Tidy. Sylvia was on the JAC for over 20 years as an East Sussex Councillor, and became Chair in 2019,

standing down in 2021 but continuing the Committee as a representative for the NFU, as well as member for the Farming in Protected Landscapes panel.

2. Apologies

- 2.1 Apologies for absence were received from Cllr N Warne, Tunbridge Wells BC, Cllr T Killen, Rother DC, Cllr R Thomas, Kent CC, Ms Lucy Charman, CLA, Cllr Mrs K Walder, Ashford BC, Cllr P Bradbury West Sussex CC, Cllr Mr S Raby Horsham DC, Cllr Mr I Irvine Crawley BC, Sarah Davies, NE, D Chambers Rother District Council OSG.
- 2.2 It was agreed that Cllr A Wilson, Wealden District Council, will join the Management Board to fill one of the vacant posts.
- 2.3 No declarations of interest were raised by the Members.

3. Urgent Matters

- 3.1. No urgent matters were raised.

4. Minutes of the JAC Meeting

- **RESOLVED** to note the minutes of the JAC meeting held on 27 November 2024.

5. Minutes of the Management Board Meeting

- **RESOLVED** to note the minutes of the Management Board meeting held on 4 March 2025.

6. Minutes of the Officer Steering Group (OSG)

- **RESOLVED** to note the minutes of the OSG meeting held on 26 February 2025.

7. Revenue Budget for 2025/26

- 7.1 The Committee considered a report from Andy Fowler, from the ESCC Treasurer. The report presented a budget position for 2025/6:
 - Appendix A: The High Weald core budget is forecast to have a surplus of £12,900 in 2024/25. This has been achieved by allocating more core staff time to project delivery, an approach that will be increasingly necessary to balance the core budget. The budget for 2025/26 is presented in Appendix A. It is based on the 2024/25 figures with an average inflation of 4.56% which is a combination of pay increase of 3.12% with 2024 pay award of 2.2% and the National Insurance increase. The 2025/26 core budget is a balanced budget.
 - Four local authorities have not responded to the budget consultation to date. West Sussex CC, Hastings BC, Horsham DC and Surrey CC.
 - Appendix C: presents the indicative 5-year budget for 2024-2029, updated to reflect the outcomes of the 2025/26 budget consultation. For comparison, Appendix C also shows a 5-year plan with no increases to Defra or local authority

contributions. The outcome of the second plan would rely on balancing the budget from the reserves which is not sustainable.

- Appendix B: The self-financing project budget has increased by almost £1 million. This is due to the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) grant programme being extended for another year, £1.4 million and an additional capital grant of £312k finishing in 2026.

- 7.2 The Vice Chair thanked Andy Fowler for his long-term support with the partnership's finances and welcomed Sarah Wheatley who will be taking over this role with the support of Andy.
- 7.3 Gerry Sherwin informed the Members that the FiPL programme had been wound down due to the announcement of the closure from Defra in February 2025. It will be a challenge to spend all the funding as the projects take some time to develop and the time is limited to only a year. However, the funding that is not utilised is distributed amongst the other National Landscapes.
- 7.4 Gerry requested that if the local authorities have a project which may have been delayed then to apply for the grant funding as long as it is supporting the Management Plan 2024-2029 objectives. For example, Ashdown Forest already had plans for a changing room facility to aid access but was struggling to raise funds, so this allowed them to complete the works and meets the Management Plan objectives. Several local authorities have benefitted from the grant programmes such as KHWP received a FiPL grant for access. Murray Davidson confirmed that Hastings BC had benefitted from a grant to improve the Hastings Country Park for accessibility.
- 7.5 The Nature and Community Fund (formally Sussex Lund) is continuing to also support landowners and other organisations to meet locally needs for nature recovery especially focussing on larger landscape scale applications and grey to green projects.
- 7.6 Jason Lavender clarified that water, electricity and landowners should be contributing towards the Management Plan objectives and for every £1 raised we match it around £3 externally.

RESOLVED to approve:

- **Approve the revenue budget for 2025/26**
- **Thank local authorities for their contributions to the High Weald National Landscape Partnership in 2025/26.**

8 Local government reorganisation and devolution for Sussex, Surrey, and Kent

- 8.1 The Committee considered a report by Jason Lavender on the impact of the devolution on the JAC Partnership:
- Jason informed the Members that in December 2024 the government published its devolution white paper inviting submissions to join the government's Devolution Priority Programme (DPP). This white paper sets out the government's strategy and policy for local government over the medium-term including devolution and local government reorganisation. The government has proposed

the creation of Mayoral Strategic Authorities and unitary councils in counties that do not have them at the moment such as Sussex, Kent, and Surrey.

- It is vital to the National Landscape Partnership that the process ensures a reorganisation and devolution that works for the Partnership and supports the on-going implementation of the High Weald Management Plan and the major and collaborative efforts to date working to protect the distinctive cultural and natural character of the High Weald landscape.
- To help achieve this, it is recommended that the Management Board works with the National Landscape Unit to consider the implications of devolution and writes a position paper with points for government and the local authorities to consider and address.
- Among other things, this paper will ask: who in the new structures will have responsibility for the High Weald National Landscape designation and the High Weald team; what form of new governance arrangements will be required; from where will the financial contributions to the work of the Partnership and the team come; and how will the statutory obligations of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 and the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 be met by the new unitary authorities and the two Mayoral Strategic Authorities

8.2 A meeting has been set up for 29 April to discuss this paper further and all Councillors are welcome to join if they would find it useful.

8.3 RESOLVED: the Management Board works with the National Landscape Unit to:

- I. **consider the implications for the High Weald National Landscape Partnership resulting from the proposed local government reorganisation and devolution and:**
- II. **write a position paper on the implications for the Partnership and detailing points for government and the local authorities to consider and address to ensure the reorganisation and devolution supports the work and remit of the Partnership.**

9. Position Statement: Solar Farms and the High Weald National Landscape

9.1 The Committee considered a report by Diane Russell on approval of the Position Statement: Solar Farms and the High Weald National Landscape. This is part of a suite of guidance being produced in collaboration with the OSG, to support the Management Plan.

- The Position Statement covers: Climate Change and the High Weald National Landscape, National legislative & policy basis for considering Solar Farms in National Landscapes, Issues for Solar Farms and the High Weald National Landscape, and alternatives solutions.
- The publication of the Solar Farms and the High Weald National Landscape Position Statement will support the AONB Management Plan, helping to deliver its objectives, and will support the LPAs in determining planning applications and defending refusals at appeal where necessary. Members were advised that the

draft Position Statement had been considered by the OSG at their meeting in February, who felt that the Position Statement would give them good support for decision-making, and all were happy with the Position Statement going forward to the JAC for approval.

- 9.2 Members welcomed the production of this Position Statement as a positive step.
- 9.3 In response to questions, Diane confirmed that the position statement also touches on battery infrastructure and the impact to the landscape and includes reference to the setting of the HWNL. Members also asked about producing a statement on wind turbines. It was explained that the topography and scale of the High Weald landscape does not lend itself so readily to large scale wind energy generation, so the development pressures for this type are not so great.
- 9.4 Cllr White informed the group a large-scale solar farm application on the border of the AONB. The site is in a narrow lane and the concern is the major infrastructure which sits along the solar panels as it an isolated site. Diane confirmed that the position statement also supported covered the impact of solar farms on the setting of the National landscape.
- 9.5 Jane Hull Forestry Commission informed the Members that the Cotswolds National Landscape had also produced a paper on renewable energy, and Diane confirmed that this was one of an extensive range of background papers that had been considered in preparing the Position Statement.
- 9.6 The Vice Chair also raised a concern around a Southern Water site at Mountfield putting in a solar farm without requiring planning permission. Diane informed the Members that the team are looking to obtain a legal opinion on permitted development rights around this issue.
- 9.7 The Vice Chair thanked Diane for an excellent and timely piece of work.
- 9.8 **RESOLVED to:**
- I. **approve the Solar Farms and the High Weald National Landscape Position Statement**
 - II. **Promote, within the LPAs, the awareness and use of the Position Statement**

10. Protected Landscapes and Targets & Outcome Framework

- 10.1 Sally informed the Members that in January 2024 the Government published its Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework (PL TOF) which established targets for National Landscapes and National Parks. It recognised the crucial role Protected Landscapes play in achieving positive change for nature, climate, people and place. Sally as reaffirmed that these are landscape targets and the NL team's role is to support facilitate the move towards these targets.
- Work on the High Weald PL TOF Monitoring Addendum started in late summer 2024. The High Weald PL TOF Monitoring Addendum is a 'working document' to accommodate the fast-changing pace of current Government policies, particularly those involving the environment and land use. This allows the addendum to be

updated when required, and to more accurately reflect current Government environmental priorities.

- The apportioned targets need to be agreed between individual local partnerships in each Protected Landscape and Natural England by July 2025. The Monitoring Addendum will then be published on the High Weald NL website alongside the Management Plan by July 2025 but is not required to go through the full Management Plan adoption process.

10.2 Sally Marsh explained that there are risks attached to these targets as the funding may follow which may not meet the directive of the wider Management Plan. The team have submitted realistic targets based on our analysis of land use, but the targets have been placed much higher from Defra.

10.3 Jane Hull confirmed that the apportioned targets submitted are more realistic around tree planting through traditional woodland management, agroforestry and wood pasture. Sally confirmed that the team are actively working with the Nature recovery partnerships and feeding this information into their groups.

10.4 RESOLVED to: Approved the Management Plan 2024-2029 Monitoring Addendum 'Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework Monitoring working document' (subject to minor editorial and professional presentational design) for submission to Natural England and publication.

11. Risk Assessment

11.1 Jason Lavender informed the Members on the risk assessment. He confirmed that the key risks laid out in the paper had not changed since November. He thanked the LAs who have confirmed their contributions to the budget and recognised that if LAs do not support the inflationary uplift this will have a detrimental effect on the organisations ability to manage the wide range of functions it carries out.

11.2 Jason also informed the Members that the NL team has been carrying out a series of stakeholder workshops to help support prioritisation of future workload. Currently, we work with over 170 organisations.

11.3 RESOLVED to: Request 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.

12. A.O.B.

12.1 Cllr Wilson praised the Team for an excellent Deer Management Conference and the work they have been doing to manage the issue around deer damage to the landscape.

12.2 Cllr White also praised the Dark Skies Festival and presentations lead by the team and urged other local authorities to get involved.

12.3 Jason Lavender informed the Members that the Unit would be submitting a response to the current government Land Use Framework consultation and will circulate the NL response when it is completed.

- 12.4 Diane Russell reminded Members of the weblinks in the circulated OSG minutes (para 3.2 and 3.3) regarding Defra guidance published shortly before Christmas on the s.85 CRow Act strengthened duty: [Guidance for relevant authorities on seeking to further the purposes of Protected Landscapes - GOV.UK](#) and the National Landscapes Association (NLA) Briefing Note that had been prepared to provide guidance specifically to planning teams in Local Planning Authorities, on meeting the strengthened s.85 duty [CRow-s.85-duty-guidance-for-LPAs NLA-Briefing-Nov-24.pdf](#) .
- 12.5 The next meeting will be held in November 2025. Dates for the meetings will be circulated.

Agenda item: 7

HIGH WEALD JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE Management Board



**High Weald
National
Landscape
Partnership**

Minutes

Tuesday 15 October 2025, 10.30am

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

Samantha Nicholas

Clerk to the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee

Present: Members:

Cllr Mrs E Kirby-Green

Cllr Lorraine Carvalho

East Sussex County Council (Vice-Chair)

Mid Sussex District Council

Also Present:

Mr A Wilson

Jennifer Hollingum

Jason Lavender

Gerry Sherwin

Diane Russell

Samantha Nicholas

Cooptee (Guest)

OSG Chair

NL Director (job-share)

NL Business Manager

NL Design and Planning Advisor

Clerk to JAC

Actions

Paragraph 8

HWNL to produce the criteria for appointment of co-optees for the Joint Advisory Committee for the High Weald National Landscape (AONB).

Paragraph 13

Management Board agreed to send the HWNL Planning Advice Note – Soft Landscaping in Housing Developments to JAC Meeting for approval.

Paragraph 27

The relevant parishes should email the JAC requesting support of the HWNL Partnership for their application for accreditation for Dark Skies International Communities

Apologies

1. Apologies were received from: Cllr White, and Cllr Bradbury
2. Cllr Kirby-Green chaired the meeting as Cllr Bradbury unexpectedly could not attend.

Members' Interests

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

Minutes of the meeting from 4 March 2025

4. The minutes for 4 March 2025 were agreed to be an accurate record.

November election for MB Members and Chair and Vice-Chair positions

5. The Members were informed that the Chair/Vice Chair and Management Board positions were up for election; There are two vacancies on the Management Board; It was suggested that an email was sent to the JAC to encourage new delegates to join the Board.
6. The Vice Chair requested that the HWNL Team looked at how advisory members (co-optees) could be encouraged onto the Committee, since the loss of Sylvia Tidy. Specific provision for this exists within the Constitution. A discussion took place on areas of expertise that would be useful moving forward such as farming and forestry; fundraising and PR; community and education and access and tourism. It was agreed that a criteria form would be produced by the HWNL Team and interested co-optees would be invited to apply for these positions.
7. Jason confirmed that a couple of candidates have showed interests in advocating for the High Weald supporting representing areas such as farming, deer management and fundraising.
8. **Action: HWNL to produce the criteria for appointment of co-optees for the Joint Advisory Committee for the High Weald National Landscape (AONB).**

Budget report

9. Jason Lavender informed the Members that to date the HWNL has not been informed by Defra of the budget settlement for 2026/2027 and therefore are assuming it will set as previous year without inflation. The day-to-day expenditure running of public services (RDEL) is under review and as such the predication is that NL will receive a lower budget, but there will be a three-year settlement which helps with future planning.
10. Gerry Sherwin confirmed that Local Authorities budget offers through the consultation process has varied, some have offered the increase with inflation, and some have remained on the lower budget which again makes it difficult to plan.
11. Management Board had requested that the reserves could be used to ensure that HWNL team could recruit a more experienced communication officer moving from grade SS9 to SS10 and from 3 to 4 days a week. Gerry Sherwin confirmed that the position has now been successfully filled by Jo O'Driscoll. Jo will be starting at the end of October and will be developing the Partnership's communication strategy. The additional 11K in salary has been covered in this year's budget, as the former communication officer, Emma White left in May 2025. Reserves would have to be used moving forward to support this level of staffing.

Update on HWNL Planning Advice Note – Soft Landscaping in Housing Developments

12. Diane Russell advised that an OSG subgroup has been working on a Planning Advice Note for soft landscaping over the past year and half, to support planning officers' consideration of applications and to improve developers' understanding. This has been well received from the OSG and covers a planner's checklist, scheme layouts, and specific planting typologies, including planting lists. An organisation called GreenBlue Urban has provided some free images to support the guidance. This local company has a good reputation for proactive solutions to support tree-planting in developments. They have also offered training for the OSG.
13. **ACTION: Management Board agreed to send the HWNL Planning Advice Note – Soft Landscaping in Housing Developments to JAC Meeting for approval.**

National Planning update

14. Section.85:

- There had been reports and concerns that ministers may seek a late amendment the Planning and Infrastructure Bill, to remove the CRoW Acts.85 legal duty for public bodies to "seek to further" the purposes of National Landscapes and other protected areas, a duty established by s245 of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023.
- The duty is seen by some as a "planning blocker," with concerns that it creates potential obstacles to development, or being used as a way of getting compensation, particularly for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs), without using the purpose in the correct manner.
- The National Landscapes Association had, jointly with National Parks, written to the secretary of state to put the case for keeping the new duty. The proposal to remove it has been taken off the table. However, the NLA, on whose planning group Diane Russell serves, is maintaining a watching brief, as they believe the issue may resurface in the future.

15. Gatwick 2nd runway compensation:

- The Gatwick 2nd runway has been approved on September 22, 2025. This involves using an existing emergency runway to enable dual-runway operations.
- Four protected landscapes involved in the consultation of the application (HWNL, KDNL, SHNL and SDNP) had previously been asked to submit compensation bids. High Weald NL declined, believing the scheme should comply with the new duty, not simply through compensation measures. However, now the scheme has been approved, the SoS has advised that compensation should be payable to the four protected landscapes. HWNL are currently awaiting confirmation of the amount and terms of the compensation payment, which could be used to help address the impact of light pollution in the High Weald NL.

16. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF):

- A consultation on a revised NPPF has been expected for some months, the latest expectation is a consultation just before Christmas. The OSG have agreed to set up a subgroup to support the consultation process, and the National Landscapes Association will also be submitting a response. It will be important that a new NPPF maintains the same or greater protections for designated landscapes.

Update on the grant programmes

17. Gerry Sherwin took the Members through the 4 grants programmes that HWNL team are managing which takes a considerable amount of the work programme:
- **Nature and Community Fund** is in its 10th year and in 2026 we will reviewing and evaluating its effectiveness and hope to have a celebration of the High Weald. This year we received 29 applications, one which was a major landscape project. The panel approved all the applications and allocated £274,000 grants.
 - **Farming in Protected Landscapes** has a budget of £1.2 million and should allocate 50% of the funding. This is due to the late restart of the programme

and the nature of our landscape with lots of small landowner holdings. However, there have been wide spread of landowners across the High Weald who have benefited. High Weald Heroes and High Weald Deer Initiative have also received funding.

- **Access for all** grant has a budget of £360k, with to date £160k allocated for projects with East Sussex CC, Kent CC, RSPB, Broadwater Warren and Gravetye.
- **Capital Fund** was allocated £250k, and the outcomes that Defra are seeking from their investment fall under two specific areas: 30x30 - a global conservation target, aiming to protect at least 30% of the Earth's land and ocean areas by the year 2030 and Innovation, invest-to-save and income generation. This grant can also be allocated to purchase land for 30/30 aspirations. Woodland Trust requires support to purchase land south of Tunbridge Wells and New England Wood Trust are looking to purchase more connecting woodland in Cuckfield area.

18. Jason provided detailed information about the major project with the Waterlife Recovery Trust, focusing on the eradication of mink:

- The Trust has developed an electronic trap that enables the humane removal of mink using mobile phone signals.
- American minks were first introduced to the UK in 1929 for fur farming. Escapes and deliberate releases led to the establishment of wild populations, with the first confirmed wild breeding recorded in 1956. These highly skilled predators have caused severe declines in moorhen and water vole populations.
- Mink have now been eradicated from a large area of East Anglia, including parts of Norfolk, Suffolk, and Cambridgeshire. The project aims to expand from the East across Hampshire and into the Southeast. Supported by the Nature and Recovery Fund, this programme currently employs 1.5 project officers who are focused on the High Weald.
- To date, over 100 traps have been deployed, and more than 100 minks have been removed. The HWNL team has been working closely with landowners, matching them with suitable trap locations and supporting them in ongoing monitoring efforts.

19. Jason updated the Members on update on national protected landscape initiatives which Sarah Brotherton is managing:

- **Climate Change Action Plan** - All protected landscapes must create a statutory Climate Change Adaptation Plan by 2028. This plan should include practical adaptations tailored to the landscape for landowners and managers and serve as a guide for local authorities and organizations like Natural England. The High Weald team has begun developing a meaningful climate adaptation strategy for the area. However, achieving ambitious goals will require additional funding and resources, which the team will explore over the next year.
- **Landscape Observatory** - The Landscape Observatory is a high-resolution land cover mapping tool using satellite imagery and AI to support habitat monitoring and climate adaptation in protected landscapes. Funded by the Protected Landscapes Partnership and supported by Defra, it was first trialled in the Peak District National Park and will eventually be rolled out to all protected landscapes. The High Weald NL is in the first tranche of protected landscapes as it is rolled out, although no timescale is yet known. The team is actively advocating for early inclusion and has

the recently been looking at the outputs of climate adaption using SCALGO NatureInsights. The team was recently involved in a site-specific trial with an external commercial company which uses satellite and AI to identify habitats, which gave disappointing levels of accuracy and detail, when compared to data already held by the team for those sites. It is hoped that the Landscape Observatory work will address such issues.

Devolution and LGR discussion

20. Members provided an update on the latest position regarding the move to a Sussex Mayoralty and Unitary Authorities. As Sussex is included in the Devolution Priority Programme, Sussex authorities had to submit their devolution proposals at the end of September.
21. East Sussex:
 - The "One East Sussex" plan is a proposal by East Sussex's District Councils to replace the current two-tier system with a single unitary authority. A shadow authority would be elected in 2027, with the new council becoming operational by April 2028. Wealden DC had undertaken the management of the consultation.
 - However, Brighton & Hove City Council had proposed a plan for five unitary authorities in Sussex, which would involve Brighton & Hove expanding its boundaries to include areas like East Saltdean, Telscombe Cliffs, Peacehaven, and Falmer to become a unitary council of the recommended size.
22. West Sussex: West Sussex is also proposing transitioning from a two-tier system to a single unitary authority.
23. Decisions from the government on which proposal to implement are anticipated in March, following public consultation.
24. No update was available at the meeting for the Surrey and Kent Local Authorities.

Agenda items for the High Weald JAC meeting (Wednesday 26 November 2025)

25. Additional agenda items for the JAC:
 - Natural England strategy update presentation (tbc)
 - Chair, Vice-Chair and Management Board member elections
 - HWNL Planning Advice Note – Soft Landscaping in Housing Developments
 - Major landscape projects in the High Weald.

A.O.B

26. International Dark Skies communities

Samantha Nicholas informed the Members that the team has been making steady progress with several parishes who are aiming for accreditation as Dark Skies International (DSI) Communities. However, Dan Oakley, the DSI point of contact, suggested that support from the JAC and the LAs is needed to move towards dark skies approval from the DSI, especially if those parishes have mixed ownership of streetlighting. The Members suggested that the parishes should write formally to the JAC to request support for their application. Cllr Kirby-Green offered to set up a meeting with the representatives from Highways within ESCC.

27. **ACTION** The Parishes should email the JAC requesting support of the HWNL Partnership for their application for accreditation for Dark Skies International Communities
30. The JAC meeting will be held on 26 November 2025 at Uckfield Civic Centre.

Agenda item: 8

High Weald Joint Advisory Committee Officer Steering Group

Notes of a meeting of the High Weald Officer Steering Group
held at Acorn Tourism on 16 September 2025



Samantha Nicholas
Clerk to the High Weald JAC
Present:

Jennifer Hollingum	Mid Sussex DC (Chairman)
Alan Sime	Ashford BC
Sophie Gilbert	Crawley BC
Vivienne Riddle	Sevenoaks DC
Amy Coombs	Hastings DC
David Chambers	Rother DC
David Scully	Tunbridge Wells BC
Craig Steenhoff	Wealden DC

High Weald Unit:	
Jason Lavender	HWNL Joint Director
Diane Russell	HWNL Planning & Design Advisor
Sarah Brotherton	HWNL Research Advisor
Janet Whitman	HWNL Land Management Project Officer (attended part)

Summary of Actions:

<u>Pt</u>	<u>Information</u>	<u>To be actioned by</u>
3.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• David Scully to recirculate the Tunbridge Wells BC guidance on buffer zones.• Catherine Kerr Smith to circulate Bridget Fox details who looks after this area within the Woodland Trust, 03437 705 492 or 07787 104 762, email: BridgetFox@woodlandtrust.org.uk; and how the Woodland Trust can circulate information around these issues.	DS /SN sent 16/9/25
4.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Officers to feed back to DR any comments on the draft Ponds & Planning Permission guidance note.• David Scully to look at how Councils web sites can better advise/direct applicants for draft communications around ‘wildlife’ habitats proposals for websites with the support of HWNL team, for consideration by the OSG and their LPA teams.	OSG Officers DS/DR

5.3	DR to circulate final draft to officers, and officers to feedback to DR any issues on soft landscaping in housing developments by 30th September	OSG officers
6.2	DR to circulate link to habitat banks position statement on www.highweald.org	DR
7.2	A link to the PL TOF Monitoring Addendum on the HWNL website to be circulated to the group.	SB/DR
8.6	DS to send to DR any further comments on the matter of grey belt land in NLs.	DS

1. Apologies

- 1.1 Mark Daly, Horsham DC, Ria Hotchin, Tonbridge & Malling BC, Renato Messere, Tandridge DC and Kate Boorman, KCC.
- 1.2 Virginia Pullan ESCC has retired, and Helen Twizell will join us at the next meeting as the new OSG rep for ESCC.

2. Minutes of the meeting 26 February 2025

- 2.1 The Minutes of 26 February 2025 were agreed to be an accurate account of the meeting.

3. Presentation from Catherine Kerr Smith, Woodland Trust

- 3.1 Catherine Kerr Smith - Landscape Partnership Lead - took the OSG group through the key aspects of the Woodland Trust's projects, around the areas create, protect and restoring woodland.
- 3.2 There was a discussion regarding the definitions used in arboriculture assessment reports under BS5837 accompanying planning applications, which indicate a tree's quality and significance. It was noted that older trees are often described as being at the end of their useful life. However, Catherine confirmed that trees remain significant throughout their entire life cycle and that dead or decaying trees can play an important role in regeneration. It was agreed that guidance from the Woodland Trust would be helpful in highlighting the importance of these older trees.
- 3.3 Buffer zones were also discussed, with particular concern over the significant variation in requirements between local authorities. While the Natural England standing advice indicates a 15-metre buffer zone, this can lead to issues around woodland connectivity and increased pressure on existing woodland areas. For example, the Lewes Local Plan requires developments to maintain a minimum 50-metre buffer zone to ensure appropriate separation and to protect both the environment. In contrast, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council has recently increased its policy to require a 25-metre buffer zone.
- 3.4 It was agreed that supportive data is urgently needed for site allocations, and it would be useful to develop some guidance around principles of development for ancient woodland.
- 3.5 **Actions:**
 - **David Scully to recirculate the Tunbridge Wells BC guidance on buffer zones.**

- **Catherine Kerr Smith to circulate Bridget Fox details who looks after this area within the Woodland Trust, 03437 705 492 or 07787 104 762, email: BridgetFox@woodlandtrust.org.uk; and how the Woodland Trust can circulate information around these issues.**
4. **Presentation from HWNL on importance of High Weald ponds and round table discussion on ponds and planning permission.** (presentation appended.)
 - 4.1 Janet Whitman presented to the Group on the importance of ponds in the High Weald. A key issue highlighted was that, although the landscape has traditionally featured many ponds, many are now reaching the end of their life cycle, and new ponds are not being created to replace them. It was also noted that 36% of landowners are neurodivergent and may struggle with planning paperwork, often finding it difficult to navigate planning portals, particularly for wildlife-related matters.
 - 4.2 Diane Russell had circulated to the Group a draft Ponds & Planning Permission guidance note to help landowners navigate the planning process and requested the officers feedback on how their systems work to support this issue.
 - 4.3. There was general discussion about what is a complex planning matter; the officers agreed that ponds generally fall under the same categories/consideration as any other planning application, although the specific process regarding obtaining advice on whether permission was needed may vary, some LPAs promoting the certificate of lawful development route, and others the pre-application route. The issue with the ease of navigating the system, particularly in relation to wildlife ponds, was acknowledged and it was suggested some central comms advice for landowner applicants around these type of works would be helpful, that could then be adapted by individual LPAs and provided on their planning websites, and it was agreed that David Scully would draft some communications with the support of the HWNL team.

4.4 Actions:

- **Officers to feed back to DR any comments on the draft Ponds & Planning Permission guidance note.**
- **David Scully to draft communications around ‘wildlife’ habitats proposals for websites with the support of HWNL team, for consideration by the OSG and their LPA teams.**

5. Update on HWNL Planning Advice note – soft landscaping in housing developments

- 5.1 The OSG subgroup has been working on a Planning Advice Note for soft landscaping over the past year and half, to support applications. A final draft will be circulated to the Group, and it was requested that the officers feedback any outstanding issues by the end of September, so that this document can be taken to Management Board on 15 October to be signed off at the JAC.
- 5.2 DR advised that once the document was published, she would intend to deliver training over Teams to LPA planning teams in a similar way to we did for the Dark Skies Planning Advice note last year. The group agreed this would be helpful.
- 5.3 **Action: DR to circulate final draft to officers, and officers to feedback to DR any issues on soft landscaping in housing developments by 30th September**

6. Update on HWNL Position statement: Habitat Banks in the High Weald

6.1 This has been agreed by the JAC and about to be published on the HWNL website. It has been produced to help support landowners and operators looking to deliver Habitat Banks in the HWNL, along with Natural England and LAs considering proposals. It would be useful for LPAs to include a link to the guidance on their websites.

6.2 Action: link to habitat banks position statement on the HWNL website to be circulated to the group.

7. Update on Protected Landscapes Targets & Outcomes Framework – Management Plan Monitoring Addendum

7.1 Sarah Brotherton updated the group on progress of the PL TOF, which had been discussed at the previous OSG meeting. Defra has issued ten landscape-specific targets for National Landscapes which will be monitored by various organisations, including Natural England. As the High Weald Management Plan has already been completed before these targets were introduced, a monitoring addendum was produced in July 2025 to address the new targets. However, there are still gaps in the available data, and it remains unclear how some of the targets will be monitored.

7.2 Action: A link to the PL TOF Monitoring Addendum on the HWNL website will be circulated to the group.

8. Legislative & policy update and discussion

Planning & Infrastructure Bill

8.1 There has been no further movement on this, however, David C and Jennifer informed the group that a consultation on the new draft NPPF is expected in Autumn 2025, to include National Development Management Policies.

8.2 It was agreed that it would be worthwhile to hold a Teams meeting to share information on responding to the consultation. The National Landscapes Association will likely also be submitting a response.

S.85 duty

8.3 Diane Russell with Section 85 training for Sevenoaks BC (joint with Kent Downs NL colleagues) and for Wealden DC in July 2025. Diane encouraged the other LAs to set up training sessions. Sevenoaks and Wealden had found the training sessions very useful for their officers.

Grey belt land

8.4 Diane Russell and Kent Downs NL had produced guidance on 'Grey belt land' and National Landscapes for Sevenoaks BC, at their request. The concept of 'grey belt' land within the Green Belt is a recent one, introduced by changes to Chapter 13 of the December 2024 edition of the National Planning Policy Framework. The guidance had also received input from other colleagues across the National Landscape network. DR had then updated the guidance to cover all the HWNL and had circulated to the Group prior to the meeting. Vivienne Riddle confirmed to the group that SDC had found the guidance very helpful.

8.5 A inspector's decision on an application in TWBC had been referenced in the guidance. David Scully questioned the wording of this reference and mentioned that there was other guidance on grey belts that may not have been considered. DR explained that the guidance was simply intended to be a helpful note to LPAs on interpreting this matter, and as it was a new and complex subject it was difficult to provide definitive advice at present. However, she was happy to receive and consider any further information.

8.6 Action: DS to send to DR any further comments on the matter of grey belt land in NLs.

9. Planning and non-planning matters affecting the HWNL including round-table reports from local authority officers

9.1 The officers gave feedback on their LA Local Plan status:

- **Sevenoaks BC** is going to Reg 18 consultation at the end of October, there are no proposed sites in the High Weald.
- **Rother DC** is engaged with site allocations work in preparation for a second Reg 18 consultation in January. DR requested that, despite the short timeframe, it is always helpful to consult with the High Weald National Landscape, on proposed sites.
- **Hastings BC** is intending to carry out a second Reg 18 consultation in January.
- **Wealden DC** are also intending to carry out a second Reg 18 consultation in January. LUC have been engaged to update and review the site assessment work, including new sites.
- **Tunbridge Wells BC** – waiting for PINS letter any day confirming approval of the Local Plan. TWBC are providing funding support for the acquisition of Hoath Farm by Kent Wildlife Trust.
- **Crawley BC** – Local Plan was adopted in October 2024
- **Ashford BC** – have a 'high level' Reg 18 out for consultation at present. There one site in Tenterden which may impact on the setting of the HWNL.
- **Mid Sussex DC** – The Submitted District Plan is still at Examination; however, the Inspector has written to the Council with her findings following the Stage 1 Hearings which took place in October 2024. The Inspector's findings are that the Council has not met the duty to co-operate. The next steps for the Submitted District Plan are still being discussed.

10. Update on HWNL programmes and Devolution Paper

10.1 JL explained to the group that the HWNL partnership had, at the request of the JAC Management Board, submitted a brief report to the higher tier local authorities in Sussex, Kent, and Surrey setting out the Partnership's position in relation to devolution and to help them in the formulation of their response to Government. This report had been circulated the Group in June. No further progress has been made on the Devolution issue. More information is expected in November.

10.2 JL provided the Group with a brief update on Grant programmes: The High Weald team are managing several grant programmes including the continuation of the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme, Management Plan, Access grant.

Nature and Community grant programme for this year has just closed and we had £100,000 over the grant limit for 35 projects.

11. Items for the High Weald JAC – Wednesday 26 November

11.1 Devolution Paper & Planning Advice Notes and Position statement

12. A.O.B.

12.1 DR suggested that if any officers had requests for other subject matters for planning guidance notes, to let her know so they could be considered as part of the rolling programme.

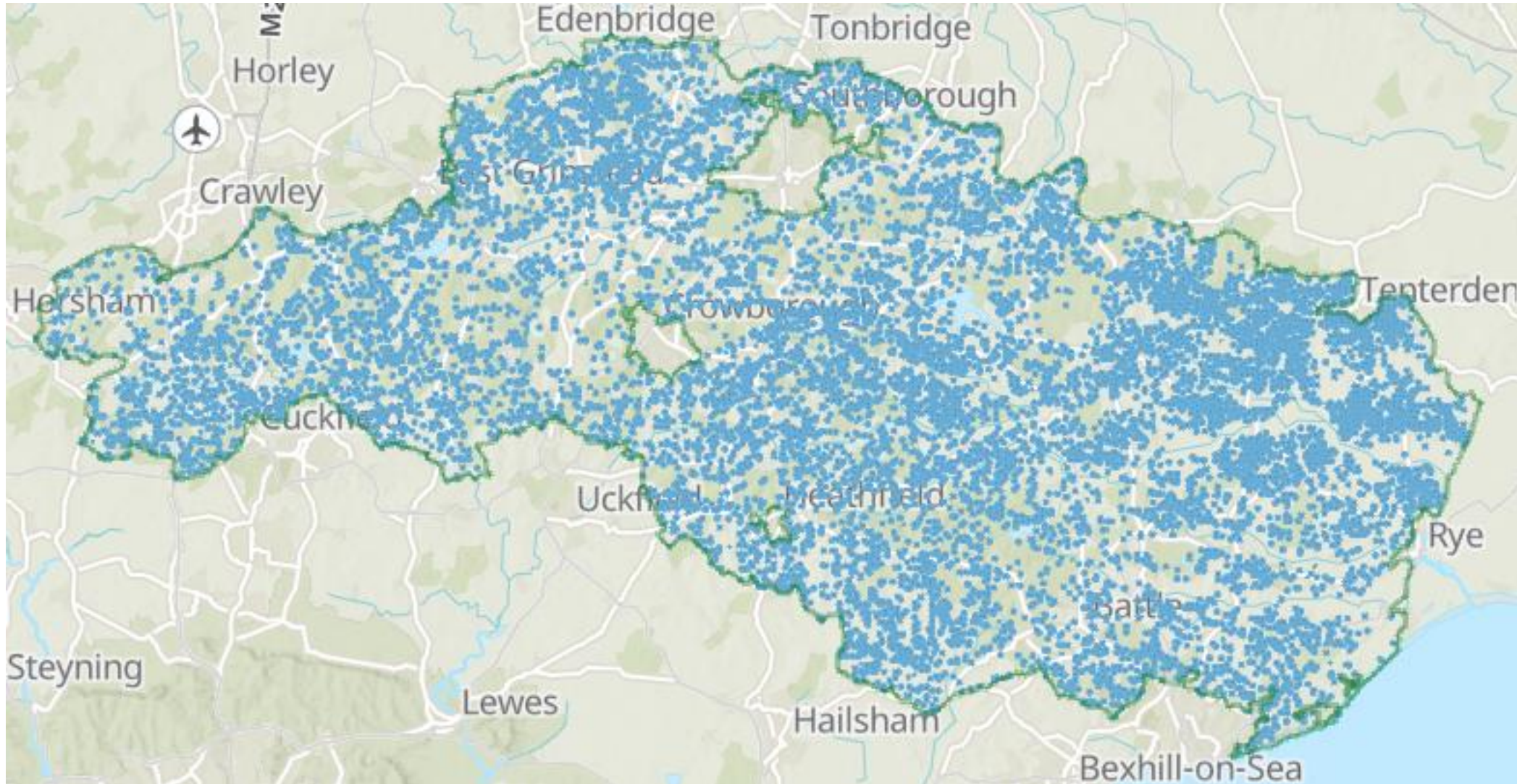
13. **Date of next meeting:** will be in February 2026 in person



High Weald Ponds – OSG Meeting 16 September 2025

Janet Whitman, Land Management Project Officer

High Weald ponds – number and extent



High Weald
National
Landscape

reservoirs **5**

Over
13,000
man-made
ponds



Dissected by
4,613
of small streams

High Weald ponds – origin, types and character



High Weald
National
Landscape



An iron mill and its pond

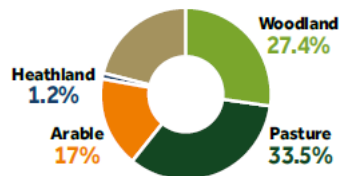
pond

duck
parkland
marl relic
decoy
village
moat
restoration
iron
mill
brickpits
farm
fishery
designed
scrape
fish
temporary
need
pits
irrigation
wildlife
lost
hammer
choked
reservoir
natural
historic
reservoirs
sediment-trap
ghost
dry
forge
lakes
livestock
pond-bays
moats
online
drinking
seasonal
furnace
offline
industry



639
recorded
historic
iron
working
sites

Land use



29
Historic
parks &
gardens
open to
the public

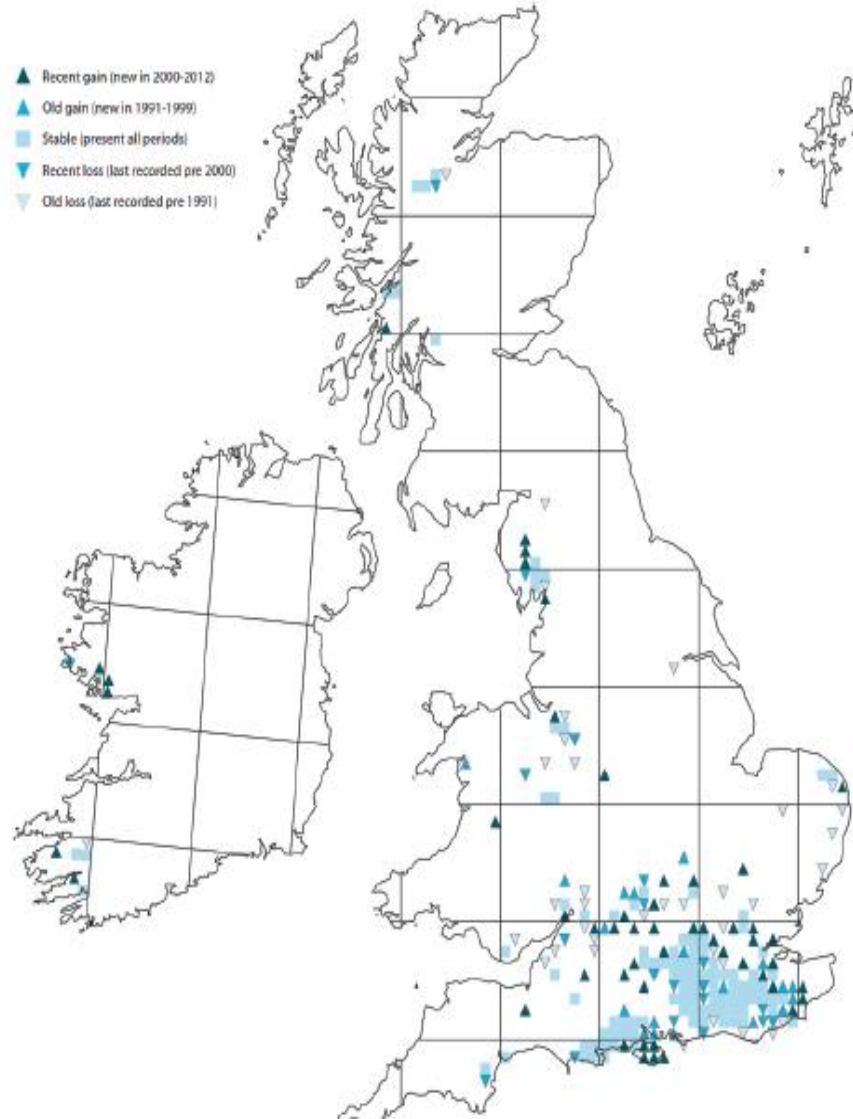
High Weald ponds - wildlife value



High Weald
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Landscape



Distribution Maps

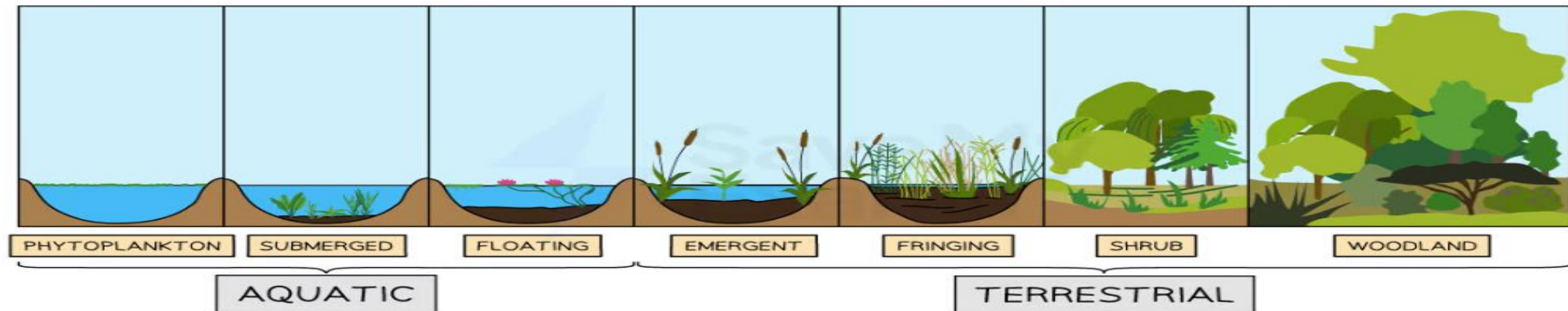


HWNL land management team perspective



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Landscape

- **HWNL team land management advice & site visits across the whole of the High Weald**
 - People recognise ponds are important for wildlife and want to have one or more!
 - HWNL team also want more ponds, with a range of types and forms.
 - HWNL team recognise existing ponds need management/restoration and new ponds are needed as part of pond successional lifecycle
- **High Weald NL team longer-term aspirations**
 - Consistent farmer-friendly guidance
 - A High Weald wide landscape scale pond project - encouraging better management, restoration and creation of ponds for biodiversity.
 - Priority Habitats - Lost/ghost pond focus, new non-native invasive free, high-quality ponds
 - Priority Species - Great Crested Newt, Common Toad, rarer dragonflies, rarer plants.



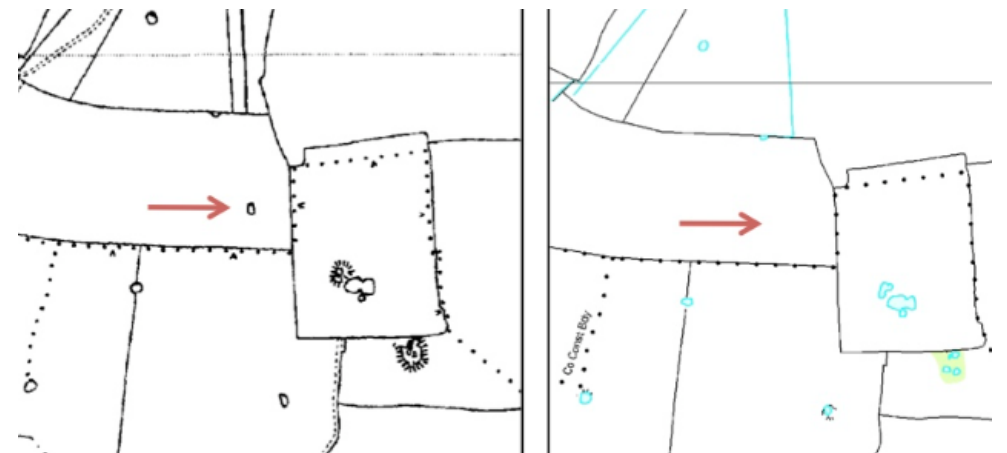
Real-life scenarios

Scenario 1: a ghost pond/lost pond

Pond on the Epoch 1, 1848 – 1900 OS map, now a shallow depression in the ground. Land manager wants to re-instate this pond by digging it out with machinery.

Ghost ponds are historical ponds that were filled in as part of agricultural land reclamation. They are often visible as slight bowl-shaped depressions in a field or a damp circular area. Lost ponds are similar, resulting from natural successional processes rather than deliberate in-filling.

Both can be a valuable source of local provenance wildflower seed and once restored can be very biodiverse.



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Real-life scenarios



High Weald
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Scenario 2: an existing choked pond

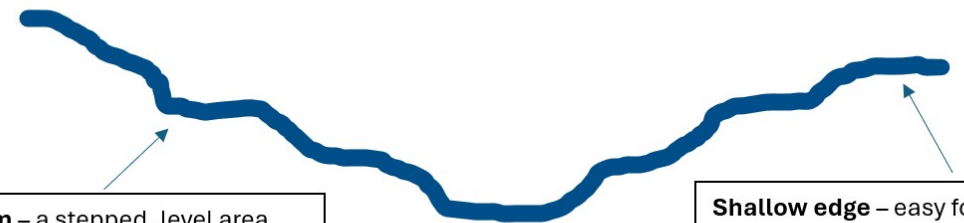
The pond holds water but is silted up and choked with dense bulrushes and bur-reeds.

The landowner wants to use their farm machinery to de-silt this pond, returning it to its original depth and pull back/widen the pond edges; to alter the pond's profile and create shallower, sloping edges with berms as these are better for wildlife.

Important know where the silt will go - to avoid damaging other habitats, e.g. species rich grassland.



Pond cross section illustration



Berm – a stepped, level area around the pond edge, which enables marginal plants to establish.

Shallow edge – easy for wildlife to get into and out of the pond.

Real-life scenarios



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Landscape

Scenario 3: a rural primary school has an existing pond in its grounds

The pond is full of a non-native highly invasive plant, Australian swamp stonecrop aka New Zealand pygmyweed (*Crassula helmsii*).

The school was advised that best course of action was to fill in the existing pond and create a new pond elsewhere in their grounds, e.g. the playing field they own which the other side of the road, opposite the main school grounds.



Real-life scenarios

Scenario 4: a new wildlife pond creation project

A voluntary community group wish to hand dig a new offline wildlife pond in a greenspace field on the edge of a village, which local people access and use.



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Real-life scenarios



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Scenario 5: a new livestock pond in a farmer's field

The farmer wants to dig a new pond with his machinery to provide a water source for livestock and benefit wildlife.



Real-life scenarios



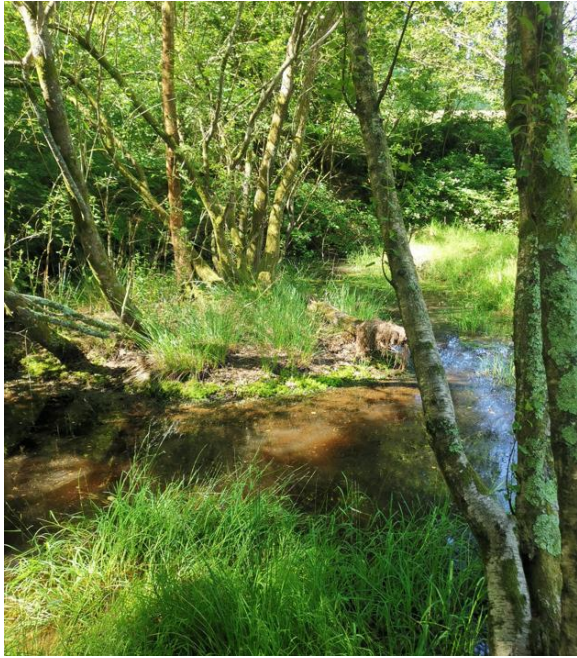
High Weald
National
Landscape

Scenario 6: new scrapes in low-lying fields that seasonally flood

Farmer wants to create a series of shallow scrapes in a floodplain field to slow the flow by holding water on the land in autumn/winter to benefit people living downstream affected by flooding and to benefit wildlife, like snipe that feed in shallow 'splashy' flooded fields.



Thank you



**High Weald
National
Landscape**



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Agenda Item: 9

Committee:	High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee
Date:	26 November 2025
Title of Report:	Draft Revenue Budget 2026/27
By:	Treasurer to the Joint Advisory Committee
Purpose:	To consider the draft Revenue Budget 2026/27 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 2026/27;
 2. Agree to the commencement of budget consultation with the local authorities and Defra; and
 3. Welcome Defra's commitment to supporting land management advice beyond the life of the Farming in Protected Landscape Programme.
-

1. FINANCIAL APPRAISAL

- 1.1. A draft budget for 2026/27 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% to local authority contributions, a contribution of £42,600 from self-funding projects and £12,100 from reserves to achieve a balanced core budget for 2026/27 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 2026/27 will be presented to the Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) for approval at its March 2026 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 £252,000 in 2026/27 are likely to generate additional funds for delivery of statutory purposes and AONB Management plan delivery of over £1 million.

High Weald JAC budget 2025/26

- 2.3. The forecast outturn for 2025/26 is a balanced budget.
- 2.4. The agreed local government national pay award for 2025/26 was higher than forecast and equates to an increase of 3.2% for High Weald core staff. Increased costs have been offset by salary savings from vacant roles.
- 2.5. It is forecast that some of the one-off capital funds made available by Defra for 2025/26 will be uncommitted.

Programme	Defra commitment prior to financial year	Grant award within financial year	Forecast spend (high certainty)	Forecast spend (low certainty)
Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme	0	£1,393,363	£400,000	£100,000
Removing Barriers to Access Programme	0	£359,255	£245,000	£114,255
Management Plan Implementation Fund	£312,100	£467,200	£262,500	£204,700

- 2.6. The forecast reserve on 31 March 2026 is £252,400.

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. In 2025/26, twelve of fifteen Local Authorities increased their contributions as requested. Three Local Authorities either did not increase their contributions, or increased at a reduced amount and one Local Authority advised they will not be increasing their contributions beyond 2025/26 due to financial pressures.
- 3.3. A draft 2026/27 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 with two scenarios’, the first being an inflationary increase of 3% applied to both expenditure and contributions and the second with an inflationary increase of 3% to expenditure only.

- 3.5. A balanced budget for 2026/27 is presented.
- 3.6. The draft budget assumes an allocation of the Defra (single pot) contribution between core and projects of 85% to core and 15% to projects.
- 3.7. The draft budget assumes that local authorities can increase their contributions in line with inflation as proposed in the SLA.

Core budget – expenditure

Summary

- 3.8. Inflation has been applied at rate of 3.0% for salaries. All other costs have been inflated by 3%. It should be noted however the CPI is variable (3.8% as at September 2025), and this may have an impact on costs.
- 3.9. The budget is balanced by a £12,100 draw from reserves.

Staff costs

- 3.10. The draft budget allows the Partnership to sustain a team of 6FTE 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 0.8FTE, Team Support Officer/JAC clerk 0.8FTE; and a small budget for finance support.
- 3.11. The budget provides for an upgraded Communications Officer role and an increase in hours from 0.6 FTE to 0.8 FTE until 31 March 2027.
- 3.12. Staff costs allow for a pay award of 3%. The costs include a small travel and training budget.
- 3.13. The budget assumes contributions to the East Sussex Pension Fund of 19.7% in 2026/27.

Accommodation/office equipment

- 3.14. 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

- 3.15. 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.

- 3.16. 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

- 3.17. 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

- 3.18. Our three-year agreement with Defra ended on 31 March 2025. We received a one-year settlement for 2025/26. We are expecting a longer-term settlement from 2026/27. Defra have provided no indication of their likely contribution in 2026/27. A standstill budget has therefore been assumed. The 2026/27 core contribution is £270,600, the same contribution as 2025/26.

Local Authority contributions

- 3.19. The draft budget assumes an inflationary increase of 3% to the core contributions of all local authorities for 2026/27. This is lower than CPI which at September 2025 was 3.8%.
- 3.20. 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

- 3.21. The draft budget assumes significant other contributions to the core budget of £42,600 from charges to Self-funding projects for management, administration, and office costs.
- 3.22. The draft budget includes a contribution from reserves, approved by the Management Board, to build the Partnership's communications capacity in the context of Devolution.

Core budget - reserves

- 3.23. The JAC reserves on 31 March 2026 are estimated to be £252,400.

Self-Funding Projects

- 3.24. 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.
- 3.25. 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 Administrators (1.2FTE) and an Education Officer (0.6FTE).
- 3.26. 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.
- 3.27. 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.
- 3.28. 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.
- 3.29. The Defra single pot grant contribution allocated to Partnership Projects is £47,530, the same contribution as 2025/26. The contribution is enabling delivery of most of the Partnership's Self-funding projects.
- 3.30. However, Defra have committed an additional £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 2026, but a continuation is being considered by Defra.

4. FINANCIAL ISSUES 2027/28 AND BEYOND

- 4.1. A balanced position has been achieved for 2026/27 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. This has been achieved for 2026/27.

- 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. There is a risk that Defra's core revenue contribution will decrease. This will impact the core team. Funds for capital investment may be available from Defra, but it will be difficult to effectively utilise and commit these capital funds with a reducing revenue budget.
- 4.5. Devolution presents a significant risk to the Partnership's budget. The number of contributing local authority partners is expected to fall from fifteen to as few as three to five. To maintain the Partnership, financial support and agreement from the newly formed authorities will need to be secured.
- 4.6. The JAC reserves policy (agreed at the 27 March 2024 meeting) sets out the purpose and justification for reserves of £252,400, including the need for a minimum reserve of £95,000 to meet redundancy costs.
- 4.7. 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 has been used for this purpose in 2026/27. Long term 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 2026/27 assumes that:
 - Defra maintains its single pot funding to National Landscape Partnerships in 2026/27 at the same level as 2025/26
 - 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.
- 5.3. The JAC continues to consider ways of reducing costs or increasing income. Redundancies would mean difficult decisions about the scope of the Partnership's work.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1. The Core budget for 2026/27 will be balanced providing that there are no significant changes to the assumptions that underpin the budget.

- 6.2. The draft budget for Self-financing projects assumes operation of five programmes in 2026/27. 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 2026/27.



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

HIGH WEALD AONB JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

FORECAST OUTTURN for 2025/26, PROPOSED BUDGET for 2026/27 AND INDICATIVE BUDGET 2027/28

Appendix A

2024/25		2025/26		2026/27				2027/28
Outturn	Core Budget	Budget	Forecast	Original Budget	Inflation	Budget Pressures	Other	Indicative Budget
£'000		£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
	Expenditure							
323.8	Staff costs	344.0	344.0	344.0	10.3	0.0	12.1	377.4
36.4	Accommodation/office equipment	37.5	33.2	37.5	1.1	0.0	0.0	39.8
7.2	Partnership running costs	7.4	11.7	7.4	0.2	0.0	0.0	7.9
33.6	Support services	34.6	34.6	34.6	1.0	0.0	0.0	36.6
401.0	Total Core Expenditure	423.5	423.5	423.5	12.7	0.0	12.1	461.7
	Income							
(270.6)	Defra	(270.6)	(270.6)	(270.6)	0.0	0.0	0.0	(270.6)
(28.2)	East Sussex County Council	(29.5)	(29.5)	(29.5)	(0.9)	0.0	0.0	(31.3)
(9.0)	Kent County Council	(9.0)	(9.0)	(9.0)	(0.3)	0.0	0.0	(9.6)
(14.7)	West Sussex County Council	(15.4)	(15.4)	(15.4)	(0.5)	0.0	0.0	(16.4)
(3.1)	Surrey County Council	(3.2)	(3.2)	(3.2)	(0.1)	0.0	0.0	(3.4)
(10.0)	Wealden District	(10.3)	(10.3)	(10.3)	(0.3)	0.0	0.0	(10.9)
(10.0)	Rother District Council	(10.5)	(10.5)	(10.5)	(0.3)	0.0	0.0	(11.1)
(8.3)	Mid Sussex District Council	(8.7)	(8.7)	(8.7)	(0.3)	0.0	0.0	(9.3)
(8.9)	Tunbridge Wells Borough Council	(9.3)	(9.3)	(9.3)	(0.3)	0.0	0.0	(9.9)
(5.2)	Horsham District Council	(5.4)	(5.4)	(5.4)	(0.2)	0.0	0.0	(5.8)
(6.3)	Sevenoaks District Council	(6.6)	(6.6)	(6.6)	(0.2)	0.0	0.0	(7.0)
(1.6)	Ashford Borough Council	(1.6)	(1.6)	(1.6)	0.0	0.0	0.0	(1.6)
(4.1)	Hastings Borough Council	(4.3)	(4.3)	(4.3)	(0.1)	0.0	0.0	(4.5)
(2.3)	Tandridge District Council	(2.4)	(2.4)	(2.4)	(0.1)	0.0	0.0	(2.6)
(1.5)	Crawley Borough Council	(1.6)	(1.6)	(1.6)	0.0	0.0	0.0	(1.6)
(1.5)	Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council	(1.6)	(1.6)	(1.6)	0.0	0.0	0.0	(1.6)
(15.7)	Other income	(33.5)	(33.5)	(33.5)	(1.0)	0.0	(8.1)	(43.6)
(401.0)	Total Core Income	(423.5)	(423.5)	(423.5)	(4.6)	0.0	(8.1)	(440.8)
0.0	Surplus/(deficit) transfer to/(from) reserves	(0.0)	0.0	(0.0)	(8.1)	0.0	(4.0)	(20.8)
0.0	Net Core Budget	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

Self Funding Projects

See Appendix B for detail

1,360.0	JAC expenditure on self-funded projects	2,322.0	1,545.6	711.5			711.5	534.5
(351.0)	Defra contribution to self-funded projects (Excluding FIPL)	(359.6)	(406.8)	(47.5)			(47.5)	(21.0)
(545.3)	Defra contribution to FIPL Project	(1,393.4)	(663.0)	(95.7)			(95.7)	0.0
(38.2)	Local authorities contributions	(135.5)	(28.2)	(129.0)			(129.0)	(136.6)
(425.4)	Other contributions to self-funded projects	(433.5)	(447.6)	(439.3)			(439.3)	(376.9)
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

1,761.0	Total core and project expenditure	2,745.5	1,969.1	1,135.0	12.7	0.0	12.1	996.2
(1,761.0)	Total core and project income	(2,745.5)	(1,969.1)	(1,135.0)	(4.6)	0.0	(8.1)	(975.3)
0.0	Total High Weald JAC Budget	(0.0)	0.0	(0.0)	(8.1)	0.0	(4.0)	(20.9)

Reserves	£000
Reserves at 31 March 2024	235.0
Transfer to/(from) reserves 2024/25	17.4
Reserves at 31 March 2025	252.4
Transfer to/(from) reserves 2025/26	0.0
Reserves at 31 March 2026	252.4
Transfer to/(from) reserves 2026/27	(12.1)
Reserves at 31 March 2027	240.3

HIGH WEALD AONB JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE
SELF-FUNDING PROJECTS OUTTURN for 2024/25 and INDICATIVE BUDGET 2025/26, 2026/27 and 2027/28

Appendix B

2024/25 Outturn £'000		Budget 2025/26			Forecast 2025/26			Indicative Budget 2026/27			Indicative Budget 2027/28		
		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/Removing Barriers to Access												
106.2	JAC expenditure	46.9			390.3			39.0			37.3		
62.1	Defra		(14.0)			(373.3)			(14.0)			(14.0)	
(0.2)	Local authorities		(25.5)			0.0			(24.6)			(22.9)	
(168.1)	Other		(7.4)			(17.0)			(0.4)			(0.4)	
0.0	Total Community Outreach and Access for All			(0.0)		0.0			(0.0)			(0.0)	
	High Weald Heroes												
29.7	JAC expenditure	30.3			19.7			36.6			17.9		
(25.0)	Defra		(18.0)			(18.0)			(26.5)			0.0	
0.0	Local authorities		(12.3)			(1.7)			(10.1)			(17.9)	
(4.7)	Other		0.0			0.0			0.0			0.0	
0.0	Total High Weald Heroes			0.0		0.0			0.0			0.0	0.0
	2 Management Plan Evidence and Guidance												
9.2	JAC expenditure	19.2			18.200			17.0			17.0		
(7.0)	Defra		(9.2)			(9.2)			(7.0)			(7.0)	
(2.2)	Other		(10.0)			(9.0)			(10.0)			(10.0)	
0.0	Total Management Plan Evidence and Guidance			0.0		0.0			0.0			0.0	0.0
	3 Landscape Enhancement*												
277.0	JAC expenditure	499.3			454.4			502.2			441.3		
(8.7)	Defra		(6.3)			(6.3)			0.0			0.0	
(60.0)	Environment Agency		(60.3)			(100.0)			(73.3)			0.0	
(3.0)	Local authorities		(76.7)			(26.5)			(73.3)			(74.8)	
100.2	Other		(21.0)			(7.4)			(20.6)			(31.5)	
0.0	National Grid Grant programme		0.0			0.0			0.0			0.0	
(305.5)	High Weald Nature and Community Fund (Charities Aid Foundation)		(335.0)			(314.2)			(335.0)			(335.0)	
0.0	Total Landscape Enhancement			0.0		0.0			0.0			0.0	0.0
	4 Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme (FIPL)												
866.4	JAC expenditure	1,393.4			663.0			95.7			0.0		
(866.4)	Defra		(1,393.4)			(663.0)			(95.7)			0.0	
0.0	Total Farming in Protected Landscapes			0.0		0.0			0.0			0.0	0.0
	Management Plan Implementation Fund												
224.2	JAC expenditure	312.1			467.2			0.0			0.0		
(244.9)	Defra		(312.1)			(467.2)			0.0			0.0	
20.7	Other												
0.0	Total			0.0		0.0			0.0			0.0	0.0
	5 Project Development												
63.9	JAC expenditure	21.0			0.0			21.0			21.0		
(61.0)	Defra		(21.0)			0.0			0.0			0.0	
(2.9)	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			0.0	0.0
1,576.6	JAC expenditure (to Appendix a)	2,010.1			1,545.6			711.5			534.5		
(906.0)	Expenditure funded by Defra (to Appendix A)		(1,461.9)			(1,069.8)			(143.2)			(21.0)	
(3.2)	Expenditure funded by LAs (to Appendix A)		(114.5)			(28.2)			(129.0)			(136.6)	
(443.2)	Expenditure funded by Other (to Appendix A)		(433.7)			(447.6)			(439.3)			(376.9)	
224.2	TOTAL JAC expenditure/income	2,010.1	(2,010.1)	0.0	1,545.6	(1,545.6)	0.0	711.5	(711.5)	0.0	534.5	(534.5)	0.0

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

High Weald National Landscape Partnership - Five year budget plan with inflation applied to expenditure and contributions

Supports a core team of 6.0FTE: 1FTE Director, 0.8FTE Operational Manager, 1FTE Planning and Policy Officer,

1 FTE Land Management Adviser, 0.6FTE, Research officer, 0.8FTE Administrator, 0.8FTE Comms Officer.

	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30
<u>Expenditure</u>	£	£	£	£	
Staff costs	344,000	366,400	377,390	388,710	400,370
Accommodation/office equipment	37,500	38,625	39,780	40,970	42,200
Partnership running costs	7,400	7,622	7,850	8,090	8,330
Support services	34,600	35,638	36,710	37,810	38,940
Total Core Expenditure	423,500	448,285	461,730	475,580	489,850
<u>Contributions</u>					
Defra	(270,600)	(270,600)	(270,600)	(270,600)	(270,600)
East Sussex County Council	(29,509)	(30,394)	(31,306)	(32,245)	(33,212)
Kent County Council	(9,410)	(9,692)	(9,983)	(10,282)	(10,590)
West Sussex County Council	(15,401)	(15,863)	(16,339)	(16,829)	(17,334)
Surrey County Council	(3,231)	(3,328)	(3,428)	(3,531)	(3,637)
Wealden District	(10,447)	(10,760)	(11,083)	(11,415)	(11,757)
Rother District Council	(10,447)	(10,760)	(11,083)	(11,415)	(11,757)
Mid Sussex District Council	(8,723)	(8,985)	(9,255)	(9,533)	(9,819)
Tunbridge Wells Borough Council	(9,306)	(9,585)	(9,873)	(10,169)	(10,474)
Horsham District Council	(5,385)	(5,547)	(5,713)	(5,884)	(6,061)
Sevenoaks District Council	(6,570)	(6,767)	(6,970)	(7,179)	(7,394)
Ashford Borough Council	(1,673)	(1,723)	(1,775)	(1,828)	(1,883)
Hastings Borough Council	(4,308)	(4,437)	(4,570)	(4,707)	(4,848)
Tandridge District Council	(2,369)	(2,440)	(2,513)	(2,588)	(2,666)
Crawley Borough Council	(1,568)	(1,615)	(1,663)	(1,713)	(1,764)
Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council	(1,615)	(1,663)	(1,713)	(1,764)	(1,817)
Other income	(33,500)	(42,600)	(43,600)	(44,908)	(46,255)
Total Core Income	(424,062)	(436,759)	(441,467)	(446,590)	(459,988)
Surplus/(deficit)	(562)	(11,256)	(20,263)	(28,990)	(29,860)

High Weald National Landscape Partnership - Five year budget plan with inflation applied to expenditure but not to contributions

Would lead to reduction in core team from 6FTE to 4.2FTE

	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30
<u>Expenditure</u>	£	£	£	£	
Staff costs	344,000	366,400	377,390	388,710	400,370
Accommodation/office equipment	37,500	38,625	39,780	40,970	42,200
Partnership running costs	7,400	7,622	7,850	8,090	8,330
Support services	34,600	35,638	36,710	37,810	38,940
Total Core Expenditure	423,500	448,285	461,730	475,580	489,840
<u>Contributions</u>					
Defra	(246,246)	(246,246)	(246,246)	(246,246)	(246,246)
East Sussex County Council	(29,509)	(29,509)	(29,509)	(29,509)	(29,509)
Kent County Council	(9,000)	(9,000)	(9,000)	(9,000)	(9,000)
West Sussex County Council	(15,401)	(15,401)	(15,401)	(15,401)	(15,401)
Surrey County Council	(3,077)	(3,077)	(3,077)	(3,077)	(3,077)
Wealden District	(10,291)	(10,291)	(10,291)	(10,291)	(10,291)
Rother District Council	(10,447)	(10,447)	(10,447)	(10,447)	(10,447)
Mid Sussex District Council	(8,723)	(8,723)	(8,723)	(8,723)	(8,723)
Tunbridge Wells Borough Council	(9,306)	(9,306)	(9,306)	(9,306)	(9,306)
Horsham District Council	(5,385)	(5,385)	(5,385)	(5,385)	(5,385)
Sevenoaks District Council	(6,570)	(6,570)	(6,570)	(6,570)	(6,570)
Ashford Borough Council	(1,600)	(1,600)	(1,600)	(1,600)	(1,600)
Hastings Borough Council	(4,308)	(4,308)	(4,308)	(4,308)	(4,308)
Tandridge District Council	(2,369)	(2,369)	(2,369)	(2,369)	(2,369)
Crawley Borough Council	(1,568)	(1,568)	(1,568)	(1,568)	(1,568)
Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council	(1,615)	(1,615)	(1,615)	(1,615)	(1,615)
Other income	(33,500)	(42,600)	(43,600)	(43,600)	(43,600)
Total Core Income	(398,915)	(408,015)	(409,015)	(409,015)	(409,015)
Surplus/(deficit)	(24,585)	(40,270)	(52,715)	(66,565)	(80,825)

Agenda item: 10

Committee: High Weald Joint Advisory Committee

Date: 26 November 2025

Title of Report: **Soft Landscaping in Housing Developments Planning Advice Note**

By: Planning & Design Advisor

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Joint Advisory Committee is recommended to

- a) Consider and approve the final version of the HWNL Soft Landscaping in Housing Developments Planning Advice Note
 - b) Promote, within their LPAs, the awareness and use of the HWNL Soft Landscaping in Housing Developments Planning Advice Note.
-

1.0 Background

- 1.1 At the OSG meeting of 12th October 2023, officers advised that they wished to see a suite of planning guidance developed to sit alongside and support the Management Plan. It was resolved to take forward in the first instance two Planning Advice Notes; 'Dark Skies' and 'Soft Landscaping in Housing Developments', and two position statements; 'Solar Farms in the AONB' and 'Farm Diversification (including vineyards and associated infrastructure)'.
1.2 The High Weald Dark Skies Planning Advice Note was approved by the JAC in August 2024, and the Solar Farms in the HWNL Position Statement was approved by JAC in March 2025. Additionally, a Habitats Banks in the HWNL Position Statement was circulated to the JAC in August 2025. All three documents have subsequently been published and distributed to the Local Planning Authorities.

2.0 High Weald Soft Landscaping in Housing Developments Planning Advice Note (PAN).

- 2.1 The purpose of the PAN will be to provide developers and Local Planning Authorities' planning teams with focussed and useable advice and information to design and to assess soft landscaping schemes which are appropriate to the High Weald landscape. It applies to consideration of proposals both at the time of determination of the application itself, and at detailed condition discharge stage. It expands the

advice of the High Weald Housing Design Guide, and is intended to be read in conjunction with that Guide, within the over-arching context of landscape-led design.

2.2 The PAN has been developed in collaboration with an OSG working group over the last eighteen months, and the final version was presented to the OSG in September 2025 and agreed, with some minor text amendments.

2.3 The soft landscaping PAN is structured similarly to the Dark Skies one, and includes:

- a ‘planners’ checklist,
- planning policy context,
- Strategic Soft Landscaping Principles (prior to determination of application),
- Interrogating the Drawings,
- Planting Typologies – by various locations; Tree planting and Buffer Zones, Native hedgerows, Decorative Hedgerows (plot boundaries), Street Tress, Amenity Greenspace (ornamental shrub planting, amenity grassland, verges) and Ponds
- An appendix listing native plants typical of the High Weald

3.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

3.1 The production of the HWNL Soft Landscaping in Housing Developments PAN will support the AONB Management Plan, helping to deliver its objectives, and will support the LPAs in considering and determining planning applications.

3.2 It is requested that JAC Members proactively promote within their LPAs the awareness and use of the HWNL Soft Landscaping in Housing Developments Planning Advice Note.

3.3 The Joint Advisory Committee is recommended to

- a) consider and approve the HWNL Soft Landscaping in Housing Developments Planning Advice Note, and
- b) promote within their LPAs the awareness and use of the HWNL Soft Landscaping in Housing Developments Planning Advice Note.

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

The High Weald National Landscape an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty



High Weald
National
Landscape



Planning Technical Advice Note:

Soft Landscaping & Planting Plans in Development Proposals

Guidance for planners and developers on soft landscaping proposals in the protected landscape

October 2025

Soft Landscaping in Development Proposals – Technical Advice Note

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

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



Credits

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High Weald National Landscape Partnership

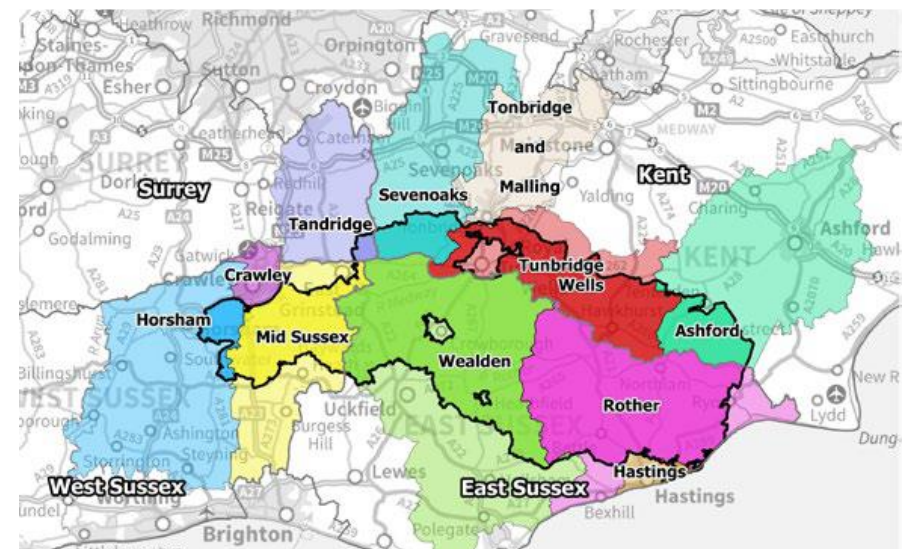
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 East Sussex TN5 7PR
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From November 22nd 2023, all AONBs are to be known as National Landscapes. The High Weald National Landscape remains designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and is referred to as such in legislation. The statutory purpose “to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the designated landscape” remains unchanged.

The High Weald National Landscape Partnership was established in 1991, consisting of 15 local authorities, Defra, Natural England and organisations representing farming, woodland, access and community interests. The Partnership is responsible for publishing and monitoring the **statutory AONB Management Plan**.

The Partnership is supported by a small, dedicated staff team, the **High Weald National Landscape Unit**, which develops understanding of the High Weald’s character components - their history, development, distribution, special qualities, deterioration, damage and loss - to provide an evidence base for the AONB Management Plan and related policy and guidance.

This guidance is based on that understanding, and aims to help everybody conserve and enhance **one of England’s finest landscapes**.



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Introduction

The High Weald National Landscape (AONB) is a special place. Designated in 1983, and benefitting from strong legislative and policy protection to conserve and enhance its natural beauty, it is an exceptionally beautiful medieval landscape covering over 500 square miles across the counties of East and West Sussex, Kent and Surrey.

Its scattered settlements, ancient routeways, abundant ancient woodland, extensive open heaths, and small, irregular shaped fields, all draped over rolling hills of clay and sandstone, together create a unique landscape distinct from other parts of Britain. The area's natural beauty arises from a long history of human interaction with the natural environment; its main features were established by the fourteenth century, and it is considered one of the best surviving coherent medieval landscapes in north-west Europe. Further detail on the special character of the High Weald is set out in the High Weald AONB Management Plan.

The High Weald AONB Management Plan 2024-2029 Statement of Significance defines what makes the High Weald special, and identifies the qualities that justify its designation as a nationally important landscape. The High Weald's natural beauty is described by eight character components around which the Management Plan is structured.

The Management Plan is supported by the High Weald Housing Design Guide which seeks to achieve higher quality and 'landscape-led' design that reflects intrinsic High Weald character. It seeks design which steers away from generic or suburban layout and design approaches, and instead is embedded with a true sense of place, without stifling innovation and creativity. **The strategic and detailed approach to soft landscaping in a housing scheme is an intrinsic and key part of achieving such design quality.**

This guidance aims to provide developers and planners with the necessary information to design and assess soft landscaping schemes which are appropriate to the High Weald landscape. It applies to consideration of proposals both at the time of determination of the application itself, and at detailed condition discharge stage, and should be used as such.

This guidance should be read in conjunction with the **High Weald Housing Design Guide**, within the over-arching context of landscape-led design set out in Design Theme 1: *Responding to Site & Landscape Context*.

It expands the advice of the Design Guide, in particular Design Theme 3: *Layout & Structuring the Site*, Design Theme 4: *Using Buildings to Define Streets & Spaces*, and Design Theme 10: *Reinforcing Local Planting Character and Habitats*, to cover:

- **General Principles**
- **National Planning Policy Context**
- **Strategic Soft Landscaping Principles – prior to determination of application**
- **Appropriate planting strategies and species for a variety of location types within and around new developments**
- **Lists of native plants typical of the High Weald**

N.B. This guidance focusses solely on matters of soft landscaping proposals, and does not consider any other impacts of proposed development on the natural beauty of the High Weald National Landscape.

General Principles

The High Weald Housing Design Guide explains that soft landscaping is an intrinsic part of design quality and place-making, and a key element in a landscape-led approach to housing developments within the High Weald National Landscape.

This echoes national planning policy's recognition that nature is a critical component of well-designed places.

High Weald settlements are characteristically very 'green' and verdant places, with substantial soft landscaping; grass verges, lush hedgerows and full tree canopies, breaking up the built form in all but the tightest-knit built core of villages and towns.

Public open space and public realm in new housing developments needs to contribute to local distinctiveness and sense of place. Newly created open spaces should complement and be connected to existing green infrastructure. As well as providing visual amenity, a well-designed planting scheme can provide multiple benefits such as maintaining and reinforcing local and distinctive landscape character, supporting and increasing biodiversity by providing habitats and pollen/nectar sources, improving water quality, preventing soil erosion, and providing shade and 'urban cooling'.

Research has shown that natural features can add significant value to developments through the social, economic and environmental benefits they bring. ¹Exposure to nature and natural environments confers many benefits to human health and wellbeing. The benefit of accessing nature has advantages for every age, socio-economic status, gender and ethnicity, and there is growing evidence that the higher the level of biodiversity, the greater the health and wellbeing benefits.

Any soft-landscaping scheme in the High Weald should aim to maintain local landscape character and its features through layout and design, plant species choices, and management techniques.

¹ CABE (2005) *Does money grow on trees?*

The High Weald Partnership recommend the following key principles for a successful soft landscaping strategy:

- Consider green infrastructure as an intrinsic part of the design and place-making 'vision' for the scheme at the earliest stages of the design process, to help embed High Weald character;
- Structural soft landscaping should be a positive and meaningful design aspect of the proposal, not an attempt to mitigate the impacts of the proposal on the natural beauty of the HWNL;
- Retain existing on-site and site adjacent landscape features (trees, hedgerows, ponds) and structure the layout around these;
- Minimise fragmentation of retained and new habitat, ensuring connectivity within the site and with the surrounding landscape
- Ensure sufficient space is made available within all aspects of the layout for green infrastructure and planting, including street trees and hedgerows, and verges, and avoid 'left-over' areas;
- Avoid in-fill areas of ubiquitous, 'estate' style planting of massed ground-cover ornamental shrubs to the front and sides of plots, verges or amenity areas;
- Instead, choose locally prevalent planting typologies (such as grass verges with wildflowers, hedges underplanted with bulbs) and native species found in the High Weald that will tolerate and thrive in the local soil conditions, and that are recommended for climate resilience;
- Create a multi-layered planting strategy across the site;
- Avoid invasive and non-native species and avoid imported topsoil.

Section 1: Planners' Checklist, Planning Policy Context, Strategic Principles



Soft Landscaping – Planners’ Checklist

Planners’ Checklist

To help assess the quality of the soft-landscaping proposals on the landscape and settlement character of the AONB, the following checklist is recommended (the content is expanded on later in the PAN). Liaison with the Council’s tree officer on street tree species selection, stock sizes and growth habits is recommended.

Scheme layout

- Has **sufficient space been made available within the layout** at the earliest stage of the design process, to incorporate an appropriate and meaningful structural soft landscape including:
 - street tree planting,
 - grassy areas including verges,
 - front and side boundary hedges to plots
 - opportunities for cooling of hard landscaping areas
- Have **sufficient buffer zones been provided** to protect and support adjacent existing woodland and water courses etc.?
- Have **existing landscape features within the site been retained** and used for positive placemaking in the layout and design strategy?
- Has **amenity green space** been included in a meaningful way within the development?
- Have street trees been given sufficient **root room and space to grow** to maturity?

Species Choice

- Does the proposal specify **locally prevalent native species found in the High Weald** that will provide food and perching spots for wildlife, and considered climate resilience? (see lists per planting typologies pages 14-24 and in Appendix 1)
- Has the species choice been based on a **thorough understanding of the site’s soil conditions**? Does it include species that grow locally and that will tolerate and thrive in the local soil conditions?
- Has the species list **avoided invasive and non-native plants**? (see lists per planting typologies pages 14-24)

Soft landscaping design

- Has the proposal created a **multi-layered planting strategy across the site** to allow for a range of vegetation heights and habitats; trees, hedgerow boundaries, underplanting with native wildflowers and bulbs, grassland verges, and open grassy spaces?
- Has the proposal **avoided areas of ubiquitous, ‘estate’ planting of ground cover ornamental shrubs** in the public realm? (these species rarely blend with their rural setting and have limited wildlife value).
- Have opportunities for **green curtilage boundaries** (hedgerows to plot frontages) been maximised?
- Are areas of soft landscaping sufficiently connected to allow species to move across the site?

Management & Maintenance

- Does the Construction Management Plan explain how areas proposed for soft landscaping will be protected from soil damage during construction?
- Can the planting scheme be **realistically and appropriately maintained** through the proposed maintenance regime (LEMP)?
- Does the management regime demonstrate an awareness of urban forestry best practice?
- Can the on-site soft landscaping be **retained** for a meaningful number of years through conditions?
- Are post development monitoring /compliance mechanisms in place?

Soft Landscaping – Planning Policy Context

NPPF

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2025 makes reference to soft landscaping as part of design quality in Chapter 12: Achieving well-designed places, which includes:

“Planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments... are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;” (para 135b)

and

“Trees make an important contribution to the character and quality of urban environments, and can also help mitigate and adapt to climate change. Planning policies and decisions should ensure that new streets are tree-lined, that opportunities are taken to incorporate trees elsewhere in developments (such as parks and community orchards), that appropriate measures are in place to secure the long-term maintenance of newly-planted trees, and that existing trees are retained wherever possible.”
(para 136)

BNG

Biodiversity net gain (BNG) aims to ensure that habitats for wildlife are left in a measurably better state than they were before the development. BNG is mandatory under [Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 \(as inserted by Schedule 14 of the Environment Act 2021\)](#). The delivery of 10% BNG is a statutory requirement of most types of planning application.

This PAN is not aimed specifically at BNG matters, however, within the High Weald AONB, it is important that all soft-landscaping proposals are informed by a robust understanding of the habitat typologies and systems within the landscape, so that they are designed to provide a genuine positive contribution to local biodiversity and habitats. The pursuance of ‘biodiversity units’ with the BNG metric should not inadvertently harm existing on-site or site-adjacent habitats through the introduction of inappropriate planting, or a reduction in connectivity to wider habitat networks.

It is extremely important that on-site BNG proposals, including ‘units’ obtained through street tree planting, front garden hedges, and amenity areas, are not subsequently diluted post-permission, through amendments at condition or delivery stage.

National Design Guide

This National Design Guide, published in 2019, sets out to promote higher standards in urban design, and outlines priorities for well-designed places in the form of 10 characteristics - one of which is ‘Nature’ - and a series of statements that provide a series of tests for assessing whether a place is well designed or not.

Its sets out that:

“Nature contributes to the quality of a place, and to people’s quality of life, and it is a critical component of well-designed places. Natural features are integrated into well-designed development. They include natural and designed landscapes, high quality public open spaces, street trees, and other trees, grass, planting and water.” (para 90)

and that

“Well-designed places:

- ***integrate existing, and incorporate new natural features into a multifunctional network that supports quality of place, biodiversity and water management, and addresses climate change mitigation and resilience;***
- ***prioritise nature so that diverse ecosystems can flourish to ensure a healthy natural environment that supports and enhances biodiversity;***
- ***provide attractive open spaces in locations that are easy to access, with activities for all to enjoy, such as play, food production, recreation and sport, so as to encourage physical activity and promote health, well-being and social inclusion.”*** (para 91)

Soft Landscaping – Planning Policy Context

Local Plans

Local Plan policies and Neighbourhood Plans adopted by Local Planning Authorities may include strategic policies regarding soft landscaping in new development, in particular the retention and enhancement of existing landscape features in schemes, often in both the *'green infrastructure / biodiversity'* and *'design quality'* sections of local plans, and these may be supported by other guidance.

Ecological Assessments

Consideration must be given to the impact of the proposal on on-site and site-adjacent habitats and the wildlife species that inhabit them. This is usually determined by an Ecological Assessment undertaken by a competent and qualified ecologist.

Natural England provide *'standing advice'* to be taken into account when making planning decisions that affect ancient woodland, ancient trees or veteran trees. This advises on the need to assess both the direct and indirect effects of development on ancient woodland and veteran trees, and that negative effects should be avoided. Direct and indirect impacts can include the loss or deterioration of ancient woodland, ancient and veteran trees by a number of means.

The High Weald Management Plan sets out that appropriate buffer zones to woodland should be provided in development proposals; a minimum 15m zones when justified by survey, otherwise 25m. This is to avoid root damage (known as the root protection area) and to protect the woodland from the detrimental direct and indirect impacts of development, including activity and light spill.

Planning Conditions

Planning Conditions can be a useful tool in controlling the detail of soft landscaping plans. However, **conditions are not a substitute for fully considering strategic soft landscaping proposals as part of the determination of the application itself** (since this may be intrinsically linked to the layout approach, and the impact on the landscape character of the AONB) – see pages 10 and 11 of this PAN for more information.

Sufficient information must be submitted upfront with the application prior to determination, to enable proper consideration of the strategic soft landscaping proposal on the AONB character as part of the whole application appraisal.

Due to the intrinsic role of soft landscaping in creating place-appropriate development within the High Weald AONB, planning conditions should be used to ensure the retention (and replacement where necessary) of soft landscaping features secured as part of the planning permission for at least 15 years after completion.

Similarly, consideration should be given to imposing a specific Article 4 Direction on new developments to remove permitted development rights for changes to front boundaries, where soft landscaping has been an important part of the proposed streetscene.

Post-development monitoring of soft landscaping is critical to ensure that approved schemes have been put in place, are properly maintained, and are retained in the scheme. When necessary, enforcement of non-compliance with soft landscaping conditions is important to maintain positive qualities of a development.

LEMPs / management/ maintenance & enforcement

LEMPs (Landscape & Ecology Management Plans) should be secured within S106 agreements (where applicable), and should:

- use the same base map as is used for the BNG proposals/calculations,
- include clear management prescriptions and timelines for plant establishment, protection, ongoing maintenance and longer-term interventions such as coppice rotations, hedgerow cutting and mowing of grassy areas, and show a clear understanding of machinery needs for appropriate management operations and removal of materials arising, such as clippings and mown grass etc,
- Demonstrate best practice urban forestry management: [How to protect and manage the urban forest - GOV.UK](#),
- identify risks and mitigations if plant substitutions are made or management specifications not met.

Strategic Soft Landscaping Principles (scheme layout) – prior to determination of application

Strategic soft landscaping principles, including response to existing site features and the incorporation of new green infrastructure, need to be considered at the earliest stages of the design process of the scheme layout. They should underpin the place-making ‘vision’ for the scheme, and be an integral part of design choices about location of built development, open space, and the layout of the street network, including street widths.

Integrating trees and green spaces early in the design and planning process rather than ‘retrofitting’ to an already designed scheme can also help minimise costs and maximise the benefits they provide.

Careful consideration of soft landscaping proposals at early design stages can also help avoid conflicts later in the development process, such as with location of services, or highways visibility. For example, to ensure that tree-planting proposals are compatible with street layout and geometry of junctions/crossovers. Early liaison with local highways authorities can help in this process.

Three sections of the **High Weald Housing Design Guide**; Design Theme 1: *Responding to Site & Landscape Context*, Design Theme 3: *Layout & Structuring the Site*, and Design Theme 4: *Using Buildings to Define Streets & Spaces*, set out specific advice relating to strategic soft landscaping principles **that need to be considered prior to determination of applications**, these are summarised right.

Meanwhile a further section of the Design Guide; Design Theme 10 *Reinforcing Local Planting Character & Habitats*, advises on detailed planting matters, setting out that plant species within new housing schemes in the High Weald are critical to support the rich biodiversity and landscape character of the local area. Because native species have adapted to live in particular ecosystems, they play a crucial role in their local environment. They are better able to support local wildlife such as birds, bees and butterflies, as they have evolved side by side for centuries. It is vital that new housing developments play a role in supporting the rich diversity of wildlife supported by the diverse habitat mosaic of the High Weald.

Design Theme 1: *Responding to Site & Landscape Context* describes how existing site features such as hedgerows, trees and woodland, field ponds and gill streams, offer great opportunities to help embed a genuine local sense of place in the scheme and to create positive green spaces within the scheme. Also, that maintaining the network of woods, hedgerows and fields is critical to the identity of the High Weald, and that opportunities should be taken to retain and improve the species diversity of grassland on the site.

Design Theme 3: *Layout & Structuring the Site* describes how High Weald settlements are characteristically very ‘green’ and verdant places, with substantial soft landscaping; grass verges, lush hedgerows and full tree canopies, breaking up the built form in all but the tightest-knit built core of villages and towns.

Sufficient space must be incorporated at the earliest stages of site layout and plot disposition to accommodate such green infrastructure, including street width, verge and pavement dimensions, parking areas, and distances between and around dwellings.

This should include sufficient space to allow large scale trees to grow, to enable the development to maintain this important characteristic impression of greenness in new housing developments.

Street Character

‘Soft’ edges to streets, such as banks, verges or swales, are typical of the High Weald, and have both visual and ecological value – these should be incorporated into development schemes to ‘green’ the development and reflect local character.



Strategic Soft Landscaping Principles (scheme layout) – prior to determination of application

Design Theme 4: Using Buildings to Define Streets & Spaces sets out, under ‘avoiding left-over spaces’, that whilst ditches and roadside verges are characteristic of the High Weald and recommended, it should be noted that lots of small ‘left-over’ or ambiguous spaces around plots within housing schemes are neither characteristic of High Weald settlement streetscape, nor good urban design practice. The design guide explains that they are ill-defined as neither private curtilage nor meaningful public realm and difficult to manage.

Such small ‘left-over’ spaces, (e.g. photo, below) should be avoided in street layouts, plot shape and disposition and building placement. These spaces often end up mass in-fill planted with incongruous, ornamental ‘ground cover’ shrubs.

By following local streetscape characteristics of well-defined streets with strong built frontage, private curtilage enclosure, and well-located open green spaces, then a good layout should be able to avoid these incongruous ‘left-over’ areas.



Future Pressures

In assessing layout proposals, consideration must be given to minimising potential future pressures for tree removal by future occupiers, i.e. ensuring that garden sizes and orientation take account of existing tree canopies that might cause overshadowing. Plots should not be subject to excessive shade from retained trees which could lead to future pressure for them to be removed or cut back.

‘Screening Planting’

While new planting, trees and hedgerows, can help to embed a development into the landscape in long views, and sit appropriately within the wider landscape context, nevertheless **Design Theme 1: Responding to Site & Landscape Context** of the High Weald Housing Design Guide sets out that:

‘new development should be good enough to be seen, not justified on the basis that existing or proposed planting will screen it from view’

and that

‘structural landscaping should not be used to screen or disguise inappropriately-sited or poorly-designed development, but instead to add to the quality and local character and place-making of a scheme, helping it relate more meaningfully to its High Weald context.’

Where ‘screening planting’ is proposed, it should

- be meaningful in size and shape to fulfil the screening function, such as the creation of a new shaw or woodland block;
- use native planting strategies similar to those set out for ‘buffer planting’ in this guide, in species and composition;
- avoid changing areas of open landscape character, including important grassland, and medieval field patterns;
- avoid establishing trees on sites with existing wildlife interest, particularly species-rich grassland, a rare and threatened habitat, or on archaeological sites (for example wood banks);
- be located and designed in keeping with the High Weald landscape character and historic field patterns and avoid obscuring important landscape views;

Any boundary trees that a scheme relies on for landscape ‘mitigation’ must sit within the site, i.e. be in the control of the applicant and within the scope of any conditions regarding retention/management attached to any grant of planning permission.

Soft Landscaping Proposals – interrogating the drawings

Interrogating the drawings

There are two main types of soft landscaping drawings submitted as part of planning applications; those that relate to **Landscape Strategy** (sometimes labelled 'Landscape Masterplan drawing') and those that relate to the **detailed planting proposals** (sometimes labelled 'planting plans').

The former is submitted with the main application (Full or Reserved Matters) and is important in **assessing the amount and location of space that has been provided in the proposed layout for soft landscaping such as buffer zones (where relevant), amenity greenspace, street trees, verges and boundary treatments around plots, including front boundary hedges where proposed.**

The latter may be submitted with the main application, though will often be submitted post-permission pursuant to conditions, and will set out exactly what plants are proposed for different areas, along with a plant species key, usually setting out both Latin and common names.






It is important to fully interrogate these drawings and their keys, pre-determination of the application as well as at condition discharge stage, in order to understand the three-dimensional reality of what is proposed, and the type of streetscene or place that it would create. The subsequent sections of this PAN will help with regard to those specific planting typologies and locations.

A full '**Boundary Treatment Plan**' can also be very useful at pre-determination stage to show how *all* the plot frontages are proposed to be enclosed, be it with green hedges, or other means such as picket fences, estate railing, or post-and-rail fencing. This again will help assess the type of streetscene or place that would be created.

Liaison with the local authority tree officer and urban design officer is strongly encouraged as part of the interrogation of the drawings, to assess the wider soft landscaping strategy, how realistic the space provided for soft landscaping actually is, and the detail of street tree species selection, stock sizes and growth habits.

Detailed soft landscaping plans:

Check these for the following '**red flags**': (the subsequent sections of this PAN will help you consider these)

- **Are there no front boundary hedgerows, and instead inappropriate infill with 'ground-cover ornamentals' ?** (sometimes labelled 'amenity planting', with an associated planting specification) 
- **Is an inappropriate plant species proposed for a front boundary hedgerow?** 
- **Is there 'lazy' use of tree stamps on the drawing?** Tree stamps are a convenient CAD tool, but do not represent size and spread of trees at maturity. As such they may not give an accurate representation of an achievable proposal. 
- **Is there insufficient space for specified tree species to realistically grow successfully?** (consider mature canopy of that species, for example *Sorbus aucuparia* (Rowan) may have a spread between 4-8 m at maturity, while the spread of *Quercus Robur* (English Oak) can reach over 12 m). 
- **Is the area set for understorey planting too narrow to be meaningful?** 

Also:

- **Check plant specification abbreviations** – the drawings will include a schedule that explains these abbreviations, and the Latin and common names. Check the exact Latin names against 'suitable species' lists in this guidance.
- Check – are locations of street trees suitable in terms of visibility and highway safety, and do not conflict with any street-lighting proposals (liaise with the local highways authority) to ensure a meaningful and deliverable scheme is being proposed.

Section 2: Planting Typologies



Planting Typologies – Tree Planting & Buffer Zones (adjacent to existing woodland)

Woodland Buffer Zone

A buffer is a landscape feature, located usually along a woodland edge to protect a sensitive area such as existing woodland from the impact of disturbance both during and after construction, and increase its resilience to edge impacts.

Natural England guidance² sets out that a buffer zone should:

- **contribute to wider ecological networks**
- **be part of the green infrastructure of the area**

The guidance also sets out development proposals, including gardens, should not be located within buffer zones. Access to buffer zones should only be allowed if the habitat is not harmed by trampling.

Buffer zones should be of meaningful width, considered in relation to the site context, covering at least the Root Protection Area to woodland trees. The buffer zone should usually be 25m, to take account of ancient and veteran trees (or a minimum of 15m where justified by survey) to accommodate a mature canopy and multi-layered planting.

A buffer zone should consist of mixed semi-natural habitats, and proposals should include creating or establishing habitat with local and appropriate native species. This could be achieved through a mixture of approaches; natural regeneration should be encouraged, allowing native species to move in gradually, supplemented as necessary with active planting to maximise structural and species diversity.

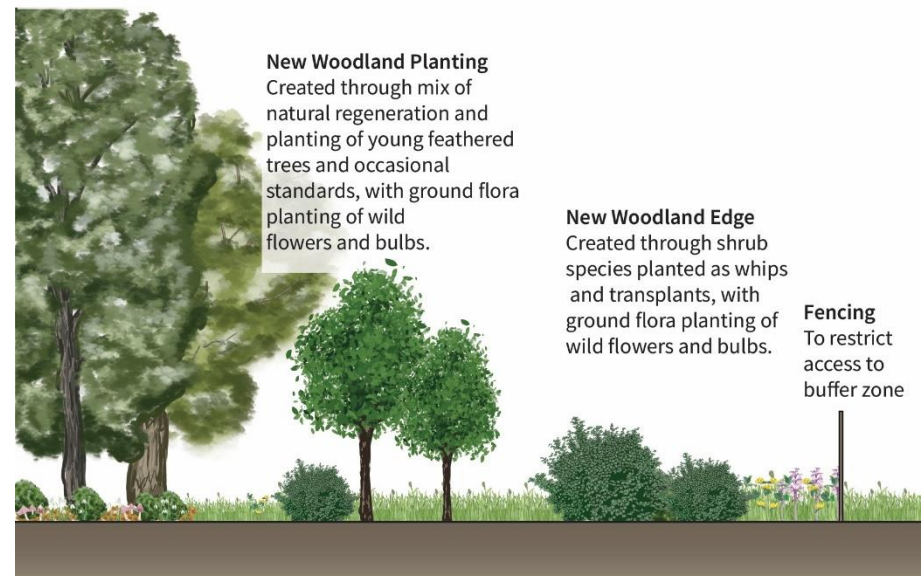
Plant choices should be informed by surveys of local hedges and woods to ascertain which native species are found in the local area – planting compatible species will help extend the habitat, and support the existing flora and fauna.

The trees in the table on the next page can also be used for specimen or informal tree planting in other soft landscaping areas within a development, such as within amenity grassy areas.

² [Ancient woodland, ancient trees and veteran trees: advice for making planning decisions - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ancient-woodland-ancient-trees-and-veteran-trees-advice-for-making-planning-decisions)



Existing Woodland



New Woodland Planting
Created through mix of natural regeneration and planting of young feathered trees and occasional standards, with ground flora planting of wild flowers and bulbs.

New Woodland Edge
Created through shrub species planted as whips and transplants, with ground flora planting of wild flowers and bulbs.

Fencing
To restrict access to buffer zone

Above: Typical good example buffer zone 'planting' in the HWNL

Planting Typologies – Tree Planting & Buffer Zones (adjacent to existing woodland)

Tree Planting and Buffer Zone Planting Specification (to supplement natural regeneration in buffer zones)

Successful buffer zones are multi-layered, with trees and native shrubs to ensure screening below the canopy. If planting into bare ground appropriate ground flora planting of wildflowers and bulbs should be added. Biodegradable tubes should be used to protect newly planted trees from browsing animals, and in open areas strimmer guards should be used. In amenity tree planting, 'clumps' of one single species should be avoided, in favour of a more natural dispersal of species.

Suitable size of plants:

Should include variety in the species, height and age of trees and shrubs; young feathered trees, standards (8-10 cm girth).

Suitable Species: select mixtures from the core list below, and observe and replicate existing native species adjacent to buffer zone (also refer to species list in Appendix 1).

'General woodlands':

Trees:

- *Acer campestre* Field maple
- *Carpinus betulus* Hornbeam
- *Quercus robur* English oak
- *Sorbus torminalis* Wild service tree (use sparsely in planting mix)
- *Tilia cordata* Small-leaved lime
- *Castanea sativa* Sweet chestnut
- *Ilex aquifolium* Holly
- *Prunus avium* Wild Cherry
- *Betula pendula* Silver birch (on dry acidic soils)
- *Fagus sylvatica* Beech (on well-drained soils)
- *Quercus petraea* Sessile Oak (on sandier soils)

Shrubs / Understorey planting

- *Corylus avellana* Hazel
- *Crataegus monogyna* Hawthorn
- *Euonymus europaeus* Spindle (use sparsely in planting mix)
- *Prunus spinosa* Blackthorn (use sparsely in planting mix)
- *Viburnum opulus* Guelder rose

Ground Flora planting:

- *Mercurialis perennis* Dogs mercury
- *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* Bluebell
- *Anemone nemorosa* Wood anemone

'Wet woodland' (e.g. damp soils, carr woodland):

- Trees: *Alnus glutinosa* Alder
- *Salix alba* White willow
- *Salix cinerea* Grey willow
- *Betula pubescens* Downy birch

Shrubs / Understorey planting

- *Corylus avellana* Hazel
- *Rhamnus frangula* Alder buckthorn
- *Cornus sanguinea* Dogwood

Ground Flora planting:

- *Allium ursinum* Wild garlic
- *Caltha palustris* Marsh marigold

Key plants to avoid – these are non-native or invasive species that are out of place in the High Weald AONB:

- **Rhododendron** *Rhododendron ponticum* – a highly invasive shrub, its rapid dense growth out-competes native plants and significantly reduces biodiversity.
- **Common/cherry Laurel** *Prunus laurocerasus 'rotundifolia'* - a fast growing non-native evergreen shrub which shades out native ground flora.
- **Bramble** *Rubus fruticosus spp.*, though native, this can be an invasive plant which would be likely to eventually smother other plants.

Planting Typologies – Native Hedgerows

Native Hedgerows

Native hedgerows are a key component of the High Weald's landscape and their restoration and creation helps maintain the historic pattern of field boundaries. Their colour and shape are typical of rural landscapes, and they have many wildlife benefits. Many High Weald hedgerows also contain some shrubs allowed to grow into hedgerow trees.

Hawthorn, hazel, beech, hornbeam, holly and yew are native species found in the High Weald that are easily managed as hedges, and can benefit wildlife year-round.

Native hedges can form an important part of the soft landscaping proposals in new housing developments in a number of specific locations:

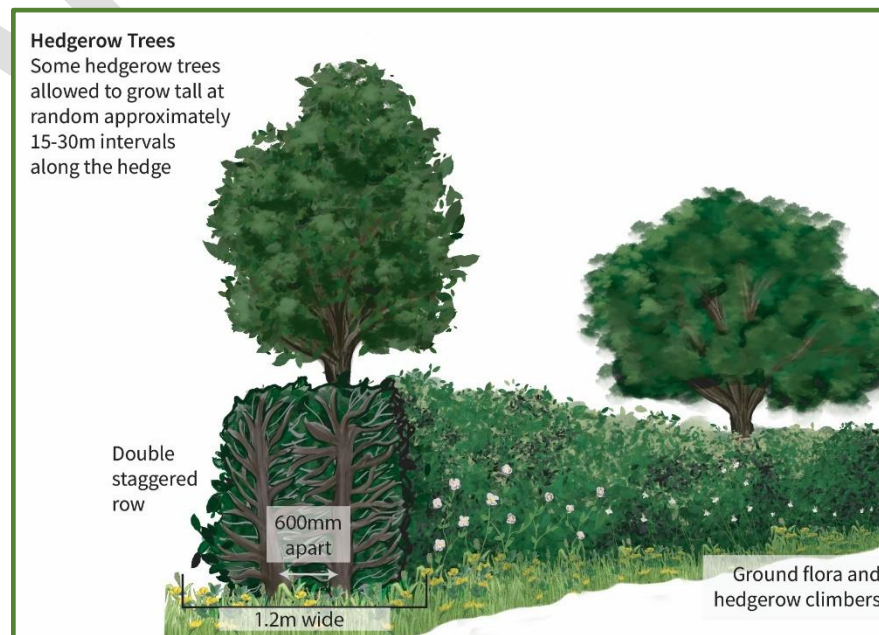
- Site boundaries - along historic field boundaries or existing hedge lines to maintain landscape character.
- Hedge reinstatement – including complementing or filling gaps in the existing hedgerow network. Historic mapping can be useful.
- Interfaces with woodland.



Above: Typical native hedgerow planting in the HWNL giving seasonal benefits; hawthorn, hazel and holly.



Above: Typical native hedgerow ground flora planting in the HWNL; violets, wood anemone, primrose.



Above: Typical example of native hedgerow planting in the HWNL

Planting Typologies – Native Hedgerows

Hedge Planting Specification – Native Hedges in the High Weald

What to look out for:

- Plants as a mixture of bare-rooted whips 60-90 cm tall or transplants 45-60 cm tall.
- A double-staggered row of plants at a spacing of 20-30 cm, and planting width between rows 600 mm (not single row).
- Use of biodegradable protection and mulches.

Suitable Species:

Commonly, High Weald hedges have a high proportion of hawthorn, but a wide variety of species can and should be used, ideally five or more different native species, including:

<i>Acer campestre</i>	Field maple
<i>Carpinus betulus</i>	Hornbeam
<i>Corylus avellana</i>	Hazel
<i>Crataegus monogyna</i>	Hawthorn
<i>Euonymus europaeus</i>	Spindle
<i>Ilex aquifolium</i>	Holly
<i>Prunus spinosa</i>	Blackthorn
<i>Sambucus nigra</i>	Elder

Tall trees are a feature of many hedges in the High Weald. Appropriate management should be included in the LEMP to allow some hedgerow trees (mix of field maple, hornbeam and hawthorn from the above list, and add English oak) to grow tall at 15-30 m intervals along the hedge.

Also include hedgerow climbers such as wild dog rose (*Rosa canina*), native honeysuckle (*Lonicera periclymenum*), and travellers joy (*Clematis vitalba*).

The mix of species should be specified as a percentage, for example:

Hawthorn 30%, Blackthorn 20%, Maple 15%, Hazel 15%, Hornbeam 10%, Holly 5%, Dog rose 5%

Or

Hawthorn 40%, Blackthorn 10%, Maple 15%, Hazel 15%, Hornbeam 15%, Spindle 5%

Key plants to avoid – these are non-native species that are out of place on rural roads and lanes, and within new housing developments in the AONB:

- **Common/cherry Laurel** *Prunus laurocerasus 'rotundifolia'*
- **Leylandii** *Cupressocyparis leylandii*

Planting Typologies – Decorative Hedges / plot boundaries

Decorative Hedges / Plot Boundaries

In this context, the term ‘decorative hedges’ is used to describe those hedges that form the front/side boundaries to properties, lining the street.

Hedges as front boundary enclosures are typical of villages and a key characteristic of street scenes in the High Weald. The High Weald Housing Design Guide describes that where there is private front curtilage, however small, within the High Weald it is typically enclosed, either by hedgerows, low walls, wooden picket fences or occasionally metal railings. The Guide also explains that the hedgerows often add to the ‘green-ness’ of the place, (for example creating green-lined lanes/streets within development to reinforce rural character) as well as being good urban design practice in terms of clearly defining public and private space. Hedged boundaries in the streetscene can also help remove air pollutants.

The Guide sets out that new developments should follow this local characteristic; undefined and unenclosed front curtilages will not be appropriate within the High Weald. Meanwhile, low-level ornamental planting to front plot boundaries would fail to provide sufficient vertical boundary enclosure in the streetscene.

Scheme layouts should provide for sufficient space for meaningful establishment of front/side plot boundary hedges, usually 1 m depth.



Above: Lack of front boundary enclosure in a new housing development – uncharacteristic of street scenes in High Weald settlements.



Above: Front boundary hedge – immediately after construction (left) and after six years (right) hedge has established to create a successful green ‘lane’ character to the street.



Above: Front boundary hedge – immediately after construction (left) and after six years (right) hedge (including in-hedge tree) has established to successfully define private front curtilage.

Planting Typologies – Decorative Hedges / plot boundaries



Above: Newly planted front boundary hedge combined with post-and-rail fence.



Above: Example of sufficient space provided in a layout for decorative hedge planting to plot frontage and in between front curtilage of dwellings, to reinforce 'green' character of street/lane. Including some in-hedge trees.

Hedge Planting Specification – plot frontage / boundary hedgerows

What to look out for

- Use of transplants 45-60 cm tall, whips 60-90 cm tall, or locally sourced 3 L pots
- Single row, planting at 300 mm intervals.
- Protection (usually with a sacrificial wire fence) for a period of at least 2 years to allow the plants to establish and minimise risk of homeowners removing them.

Suitable Species

Species that will be capable of reaching a height to make a meaningful boundary enclosure in the streetscene (usually 0.9 m – 1.2 m high). Can be one species only in the hedge. Avoid species with thorns adjacent to pavements.

- *Carpinus betulus* Hornbeam
- *Fagus sylvatica* Beech
- *Corylus avellana* Hazel
- *Ligustrum vulgare* Wild privet (native to UK but not typical of High Weald – may be suitable in more suburban developments)

Key plants to avoid:

Non-native species that are out of place within new housing developments in the HWNL (suburban in character, and fail to reinforce rural character):

- *Prunus laurocerasus* 'rotundifolia' Common/cherry laurel
- *Prunus Lusitanica* Portuguese laurel
- *Cupressocyparis leylandii* Leylandii
- *Photinia fraseri* spp. Photinia 'Red robin'
- *Ligustrum ovalifolium* Californian / Korean privet
- *Osmanthus burkwoodii* Osmanthus

Additionally, avoid ornamental shrubs that are low growing and will not make a meaningful boundary enclosure in the streetscene, such as *Lavendula* spp, *Skimmia* spp, *Potentilla* spp, *Symphoricarpos*, *Chaenomeles*, *Cotoneaster*.

Planting Typologies – Street Trees

Street Trees

Street trees in new developments include those planted within grass verges lining roadways /pavements, and in other public areas such as parking courts. They have an important role in ‘greening’ the place, and can also be an important food source (e.g. nectar early in the year) and provide perching for birds, supporting biodiversity in the streetscene. The shade street trees provide can help cool street scenes increasing resilience as the climate warms.

Paragraph 136 of the NPPF makes specific reference to the importance of including tree-lined streets in new developments, along with appropriate measures being in place to secure the long-term maintenance of newly planted trees. Within the High Weald NL, they should be included where they would suit the scale and character of the development and reflect the character of the main settlement.

Strategic soft landscaping plans submitted prior to determination of the application should indicate locations of street trees, to show that sufficient space, in quantum and character, is made available for street tree planting. LPAs should ensure they seek specific advice from the local highways authority on the soft landscaping masterplan as to the suitability of proposed locations of such trees in terms of visibility and highway safety etc. This ensures a meaningful and deliverable scheme is being proposed. Care should also be taken in the layout design to avoid conflicts with lighting columns.

LPAs should also make sure the developer is aware of the importance of the street trees once they are agreed, and that the services routing must be designed around that layout, such that subsequent reductions in street trees as a result of services routing will not be supported.

Street tree species need to be robust and suitable for the location, considering habit and spread in relation to the available space. In particular, the layout must ensure sufficient room for trees to develop and grow to maturity and sufficient space for root ball expansion. However, this should not excuse insufficient space being made available for the realistic inclusion of tree-planting in the layout of the scheme and the width of pavements, verges and parking areas.

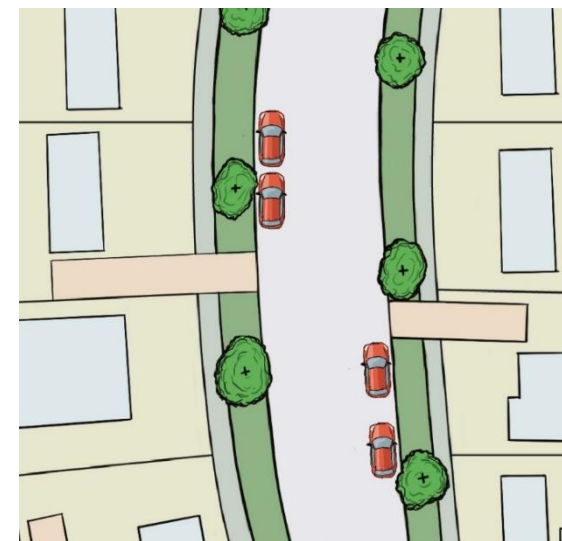


Above: street trees too sparse to create a meaningful contribution to streetscene, also planted in a visually ‘sterile’ verge setting, interrupted with multiple crossings, lacking High Weald characteristics.

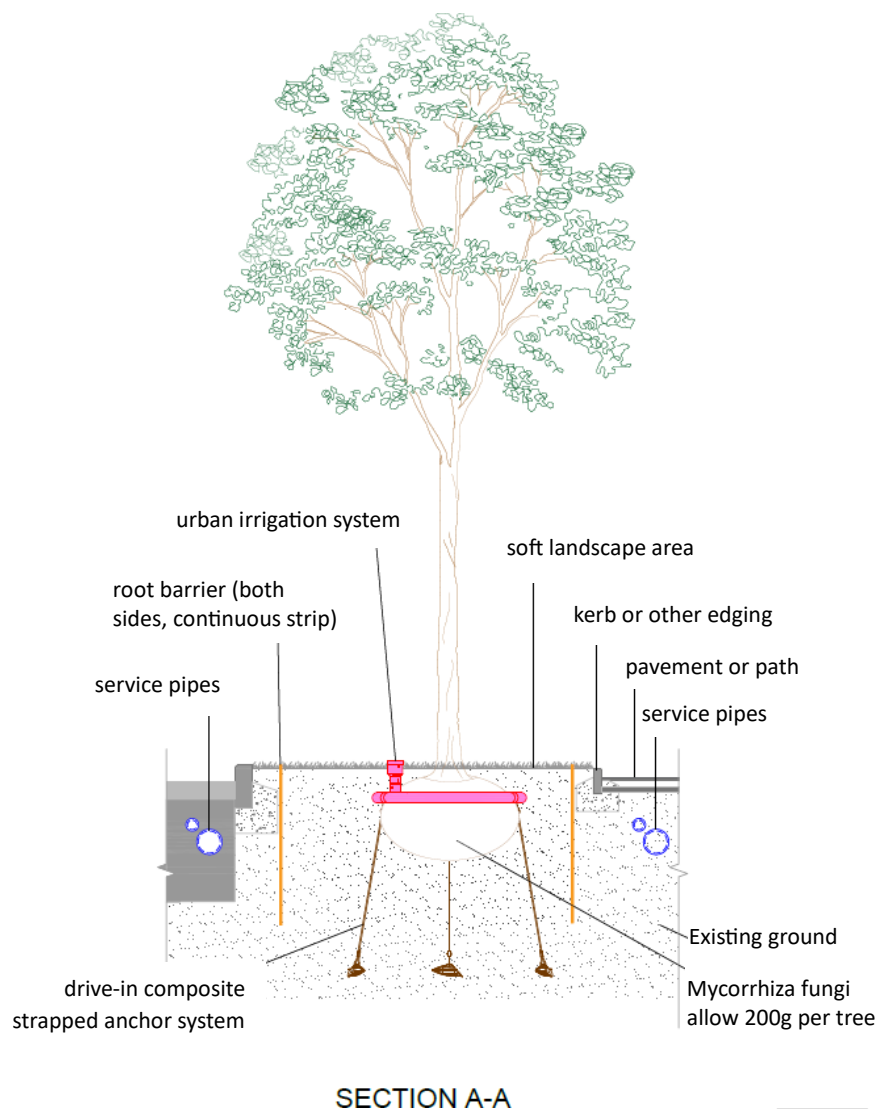


Left – above, street trees in new developments, and below, in historic High Weald settlement,

right: example sufficient space is provided in layout for inclusion of street-trees within meaningful grass verge. Note absence of multiple cross-over points.



Planting Typologies – Street Trees



Above; example section of tree pit detail in grass verge, road carriageway on left, pavement on right, showing sufficient space for roots to grow, and to accommodate service pipes, with inclusion of root barrier system, irrigation system and strapped ground anchor system.

Planting Specification – Street Trees in the High Weald

What to look out for:

- Sufficient space in the layout for the tree canopy to reach maturity.
- Trees should be heavy standards or semi mature specimens (min 18-20 cm girth) with clear stem at least 2 m tall (for highway visibility).
- Ensure there is enough space for roots to develop, i.e. for lateral root spread, and ideally integrate with SUDs, and avoid conflict with underground services. When planting in smaller grassed areas, and where soil access is limited, bespoke structural spoil cell systems such as crate systems can be used under adjacent hardstanding.
- Request tree pit detail showing how the root systems will access sufficient water and space to grow (see example image, left).
- Appropriate protection for the tree while it establishes, and a description of maintenance requirements and replacement scenario in the LEMP.

Native Species which may be suitable:

- *Acer campestre* spp Field maple
- *Sorbus torminalis* Wild service tree
- *Sorbus aria* Whitebeam
- *Sorbus aucuparia* Rowan
- *Malus sylvestris* Crab apple
- *Tilia cordata* Small leaved lime
- *Prunus Avium* Wild cherry

Some cultivars of native species have been bred for upright and compact form, and can be useful as street trees, including *Acer campestre* 'Streetwise' or 'Elsrijk', and *Tilia cordata* 'Greenspire'.

Additionally, some decorative tree species sit comfortably within the rural character of High Weald settlements, and can provide visual amenity and valuable sources of pollen in late winter and early spring to benefit biodiversity, including:

- *Prunus serrulate* spp Flowering cherry (non-native)
- *Prunus subhirtella* Winter flowering cherry (non-native)
- *Pyrus calleryana Chanticleer* Ornamental pear (non-native)
- Cultivars of *Malus* (non-fruiting crab apple)

Key species to avoid – these are non-native species, often considered as specimen trees, that are out of character within new housing developments in the HWNL and on rural roads and lanes: *Eucalyptus* spp, *Liquidamber*, *Ginkgo*, *Laburnum*, ornamental conifers such as *leylandii*, cultivars of *cypress* and *western red cedars*.

Planting Typologies – Amenity Greenspace

Amenity Greenspace Planting

'Amenity' planting in the public realm in new housing developments can contribute to maintaining the High Weald's distinctiveness and rural sense of place, as well as achieving other benefits such as nature recovery and flood management and providing nectar and pollen sources for wildlife.

Carefully considered planting of native species, in a manner typical of High Weald settlements, can significantly improve the wildlife value of the public realm. It can offer a more locally distinctive alternative to non-native and ornamental plants, which can detract from the area's rural sense of place, inappropriately 'suburbanise' the character of the locality, and can have limited wildlife value.

Some pollinator species emerge early in the year, others later, and therefore it's important that soft-landscaping schemes offer a continuous source of nectar and pollen from flowering plants (including tree blossom) for as long a season as possible.

New amenity greenspace planting should include a combination of:

- areas of amenity grassland that include sown wildflower areas,
- amenity grassland planted with 'in-field' trees,
- Roadside verges (of meaningful width)

N.B. This section of the PAN focusses on amenity grassland only, and not other types of grassland offered under BNG.

'Ornamental Shrub' Planting

Areas of ubiquitous, massed 'estate' planting of ornamental ground-cover shrubs are not appropriate in developments within the High Weald, where they would appear uncharacteristic and incongruous.

Unfortunately, these are often proposed by landscapers to infill odd areas of ground, or to demarcate the front gardens of plots. In this type of use, *en masse*, and by virtue of their habit, they create poor quality soft public realm – these are the plants that are often used on supermarket car parks for example. Meanwhile, by virtue of their habit, they fail to provide the meaningful frontage enclosure to plots that is characteristic of the High Weald streetscene.

Whilst any of the species below might be fine in an individual sense in a domestic garden, **infill areas with groups of the following plants in particular are to be avoided in the public realm in housing developments in the High Weald:**

Berberis, Chaenomeles, Cotoneaster, Elaeagnus, Escallonia, Euonymus, Mahonia, Photinia 'Red Robin', Pyracantha, Skimmia, Symphoricarpos

In the High Weald, planting should instead seek to promote a more native, naturalistic, simpler approach to structural landscaping.



Above: Right:-inappropriate infill planting with ground cover ornamentals - uncharacteristic in High Weald settlements.



Planting Typologies – Amenity Greenspace

Amenity Grassland with Wildflowers

New areas of wildflower amenity grassland can be a valuable part of a soft-landscaping strategy in new developments in the AONB, providing habitat and pollen/nectar sources, as well as an attractive soft public realm feature that reflects landscape and settlement character of the High Weald and that can be enjoyed by residents. A contribution can be made by leaving longer grass around the margins of amenity grassland and other open space.

Meanwhile spring bulbs in grassland can provide visual delight and useful early pollen sources for bees.

It is critical that the seed/plant species type is suitable for the soils of the particular site, usually clay in the High Weald, but it can vary, with some sandy soils, so should always be informed by soil testing, while a long-term management regime must be put in place.



Above: Right – successful wildflower and bulb planting in amenity grassland.



'Wildlife-friendly' Amenity Grassland Planting Specification

The grassland composition will be dependent on the soil type/characteristics. Importantly the mix should include around 8 grasses and 10-15 wildflowers to provide a range of flowering times. By seed weight this will generally be 70% grass 30% flowers.

Suitable Species

Please refer to the list at Appendix 1 of this PAN, '**Native wildflower and grass species typical of the High Weald**' and check proposed seed mix against this list.

Also include native origin spring bulbs, including *Narcissus pseudonarcissus 'lobularis'* British wild daffodil, *Galanthus nivalis* native snowdrop, *Fritillaria meleagris* snake's head fritillary and *Crocus tommasinianus* (though not native, they are heavily naturalised).

Key species to avoid –

Avoid generic mixes that are non-native to High Weald clay soils, especially those for coastal locations or chalk soils.

Planting Typologies – Amenity Greenspace

Verge Planting

Grass verges extending alongside roads and paths are a strong characteristic of High Weald settlements and should be incorporated into new housing developments in appropriate street-types.

Planting in new verges should be simple and naturalistic, primarily grassland species with a layered approach. **Ornamental 'ground cover' shrubs filling a verge area are uncharacteristic of the High Weald NL and should be avoided.**

Flowering 'weeds' can help insects and produce nectar and pollen over a long season, and should not be underestimated for their contribution to wildlife as a pollen and nectar source, especially dandelion very early in the year.



Above, and Left: Existing characteristic verge design and planting in settlements in the High Weald.



Left: Ornamental verge planting inappropriate in the High Weald.

Grass Verge Planting Specification

Suitable Species

Generally best to use a grass with wildflower mix (70:30 grass to flowering species) rather than adding in plug plants, though plugs planted in grass may be appropriate for some species/situations.

Select as appropriate depending on soil and light conditions.

- *Cardamine pratensis* Cuckoo flower
- *Primula vulgaris* Wild primrose
- *Ranunculus ficaria* Lesser celandine
- *Leucanthemum vulgare* Ox-eye daisy
- *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* Common spotted orchid
- Flowering 'weeds', including dandelion, red dead-nettle, red Clover, bird's-foot-trefoil
- *Rhinanthus minor* Yellow rattle (semi-parasitic keeps grasses in check)

Include spring bulbs, such as *Narcissus pseudonarcissus 'lobularis'* (British Wild Daffodil), *Galanthus nivalis* (native snowdrop) and *Crocus tommasinianus* (though not native, they are heavily naturalised)

Key species to avoid:

- Ornamental ground cover species set out in page 22.
- Seed mixes which include a lot of chalk specialists not suited to the generally neutral clay soils of the High Weald

Planting Typologies – Ponds

Planting In and Around New Ponds

The Weald has one of the highest concentrations of ponds in the south-east of England. Ponds are a key characteristic of the landscape, and are important to the High Weald's biodiversity, supporting many species that are uncommon or rare. Birds, mammals, amphibians, and insects all use ponds for food, shelter or to complete their lifecycles.

New or improved ponds proposed within housing developments should have a mixture of deep areas and shallow, sloping areas around edges with berms to create varied aquatic habitats.

Existing water courses should not be dammed to create on-line ponds as this can seriously affect the natural function of the stream and lead to flooding.

Around the pond, specific areas of tree/scrub planting should be located to create a mixture of shaded and open areas of water. Buffer planting around the pond helps prevent silt and chemicals entering the water, and provides shelter and feeding habitats for many different creatures, including dragonflies, frogs and newts.

Planting up a pond is not always necessary; native plants and animals will find their way to a new pond quite naturally. Where planting is proposed, it is important to source plants suited to the different pond zones i.e. margins, shallow areas and deep areas - each zone is important to different wildlife.

Non-native or invasive aquatic plant species should not be introduced; they can compete aggressively with native species and can spread quickly affecting other aquatic and wetland habitats.

Attenuation Ponds

Housing schemes may also propose attenuation ponds or swales as part of Sustainable Drainage schemes (SUDs). Attenuation ponds are not designed for permanent water storage, but rather as temporary reservoirs to manage and control excess rainwater runoff and help prevent flooding. Subject to appropriate management, such water features can provide a key opportunity to create seasonal aquatic and marginal habitats to support a range of wildlife.

Ponds Planting Specification

Planning proposals should include the different vegetation zones relating to the different depths of the pond, and plants proposed for these different habitats.

Suitable Species

A mixture of plants; for marginal, shallow and deep zones, and oxygenators, will make the pond appealing to a range of wildlife. Planting should be specified as plug plants rather than seed, to avoid potential run-off and loss of seed.

Take care to follow closely the scientific name, as many inappropriate invasive species have similar common names.

<i>Caltha palustris</i>	Marsh marigold	(marginal)
<i>Mentha aquatica</i>	Watermint	(marginal)
<i>Iris pseudacorus</i>	Yellow flag iris	(marginal)
<i>Alisma plantago-aquatica</i>	Water plantain	(marginal/shallow planting)
<i>Ranunculus aquatilis</i>	Water crowfoot	
<i>Potamogeton natans</i>	Broad-leaved pondweed	(deep planting)
<i>Potamogeton crispus</i>	Curled pondweed	(submerged aquatic)
<i>Ceratophyllum demersum</i>	Hornweed	(submerged aquatic)
<i>Lemna trisulca</i>	Ivy-leaved duckweed	(submerged aquatic)
<i>Myriophyllum spicatum</i>	Water milfoil	(submerged aquatic)

For SuDS attenuation ponds, which may not permanently hold water, the above marginal plants may be suitable for planned planting at the edges, otherwise it is recommended to allow plants to colonise naturally.

Key plants to avoid:

Freshwater systems including ponds are very susceptible to non-native invasive aquatic and marginal plants. Because of the severity of the threat there is a growing list of plants associated with freshwater now banned from sale in England (Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981, schedule 9), while it is an offence to plant others in the wild, under the same Act.

Supporting Information

Further Reading / References

[National Planning Policy Framework \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

[National design guide.pdf \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

[Ancient woodland, ancient trees and veteran trees: advice for making planning decisions - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

[residential-developments-and-trees.pdf](#) Woodland Trust 2019

[ProfitablePlaces](#) Landscape Institute 2014

[Landscape and urban design for bats and biodiversity.pdf](#)
Bat Conservation Trust, 2012

[Why Plant UK Sourced and Grown Trees? - Woodland Trust](#)

[Woodland Creation Guide](#) Woodland Trust, 2022

[Hedgerows in the High Weald Landscape](#) HWNL Partnership, see also
[Hedges - High Weald](#)

[Hedgerow-Learning-Guide-3-Hedge-planting-and-growing.pdf](#) The Tree
Council 2022, also see [Hedgeline - Working together for the UK's hedgerows](#)

[Invasive non-native plants / RHS Gardening](#)

The Plant Health Alliance promote and enhance plant health and biosecurity measures in the UK. View their Directory of Certified Businesses here: [Directory - Plant Healthy](#) which lists members of the Plant Healthy Certification Scheme.

Glossary

Ancient Woodland

Any area that has been wooded continuously since at least 1600. It includes ancient semi-natural woodland mainly made up of trees and shrubs native to the site, and plantations on ancient woodland sites.

Biosecurity

The measures taken to stop potentially harmful organisms being introduced or spreading to animals and plants. Pests and diseases that originate in other countries can be incredibly dangerous for species in a different country that has not evolved or adapted to deal with it.

Gill woodland

Wooded deep clefts or ravines, forming the course of a stream.

Landscape-led design

Using landscape as a framework to both understand the site – its context, character, qualities and functioning – and to formulate a design response in terms of site capacity, layout and design.

LEMP

Landscape & Ecology Management Plan sets out the detail of how habitats will be managed and maintained in the long term.

Public realm

All external spaces that are publicly accessible, such as streets, lanes and paths, verges, village greens and squares, and the features within them, such as signage, lighting and street furniture.

Shaw

A narrow strip of woodland.

Tree stock categories: **Transplants** are young trees that have been moved from one place to another (e.g. grown at a tree nursery then moved to be planted in their final growing position)

Whip refers to a very young tree that has not yet got any branches.

Feathered is slightly bigger than a whip with well-developed side branches

A **standard** is a larger tree, typically over two metres in height, and with a head of branches. (usually min 8-10 cm girth)

A **heavy standard** is simply a larger standard, typically above three metres in height. (usually min 12-14 cm girth)

A **semi-mature** tree is over four metres tall (usually min 18-20 cm girth) (girth is the circumference of the stem taken 1.5 m up from the soil level).

Supporting Information – Appendix 1: Native plants typical of the High Weald

Appendix 1: Native plants typical of the High Weald

Native trees and shrubs typical of the High Weald

Scientific name	Common name	Description
<i>Acer campestre</i>	Field maple	A deciduous, medium-sized tree with good butter yellow autumn colour. Delicate leaves, winged fruits that hang in clusters and finely fissured bark. A good hedgerow species and colourful amenity tree. Good fuel wood.
<i>Alnus glutinosa</i>	Alder	A medium-sized deciduous tree that thrives in damp, cool areas such as wet woodlands where its roots help to prevent soil erosion. Good for hostile conditions.
<i>Betula pendula</i>	Silver birch	A medium-sized deciduous tree that supports a wide range of insects – its thin canopy allows the understory and other plants to thrive. Good for hostile conditions. Bark makes it an attractive amenity tree if space permits. Grows and spreads naturally very easily so not normally recommended in a woodland planting scheme.
<i>Betula pubescens</i>	Downy birch	A medium-sized tree that grows well on poorly drained soils. Grows and spreads naturally very easily so not normally recommended in a woodland planting scheme.
<i>Carpinus betulus</i>	Hornbeam	A large deciduous tree with a fluted trunk suitable for wet clay soils and shady conditions. Dense, serrated leaves; clusters of papery seeds in autumn. Native only to the southern half of Britain and common in the High Weald. Good fuel wood. A good hedging plant.
<i>Castanea sativa</i>	Sweet chestnut	Introduced by the Romans, this species is commonly found throughout the High Weald and has often been planted in blocks that are coppiced for small-diameter timber. The flowers provide an important source of nectar and pollen to bees and other insects.
<i>Corylus avellana</i>	Hazel	Hazel is a small understorey tree, which often has multiple stems – the yellow male catkins open in Spring. Provides weaving materials and pea sticks. Good fuel wood.
<i>Cornus Sanguinea</i>	Dogwood	A small shrub with strikingly red twigs and clusters of black berries.
<i>Crataegus monogyna</i>	Hawthorn	Spiny; has white flowers in March–April, red berries in autumn which are good for birds and making preserves. Good nectar source.
<i>Cytisus scoparius</i>	Common broom	A native deciduous shrub, which, like common gorse, likes free-draining soils and is found naturally on the area's sandier soils. It has bright yellow flowers from April – June and smells of vanilla.
<i>Euonymus europaeus</i>	Spindle	Leafy shrub with lovely pink and orange berries.
<i>Fagus sylvatica</i>	Beech	Grows on dry, free draining soils, for example on the High Weald's sandy ridges. Grows into stately tree if untrimmed; retains dense orange-brown leaves all winter. Good fuel wood, but susceptible to squirrel damage during establishment phase. A good hedging plant.
<i>Ilex aquifolium</i>	Holly	A glossy, dense evergreen with spiky leaves and red berries in autumn and winter. Good nectar source. Often left to grow as a tree in hedges. A good hedging plant.
<i>Lonicera periclymenum</i>	Honeysuckle	A scented, climbing plant that twines itself around shrubs and trees and is good for a range of wildlife.
<i>Malus sylvestris</i>	Crab apple	Produces fruit for preserves. Domesticated fruit trees such as bullace and meribels are a good choice for amenity schemes.
<i>Populus nigra</i>	Black poplar	Uncommon, favouring wet areas and stream sides.
<i>Prunus avium</i>	Wild cherry	A large deciduous tree whose early spring flowers provide a valuable source of nectar and pollen for bees.
<i>Prunus spinosa</i>	Blackthorn	Spiny; has white flowers in May; sloes in October.
<i>Quercus petraea</i>	Sessile oak	Preferring drier sandy soils to English Oak. Good fuel wood.
<i>Quercus Robur</i>	English oak	Oak trees support more life than any other native tree and are ubiquitous to the High Weald. Good fuel wood.

<i>Rhamnus Frangula</i>	Alder buckthorn	A small native tree with fleshy fruits that are a good winter food source for birds and small mammals. Grows best in wet, marshy ground and is shade tolerant.
<i>Rosa canina</i>	Wild dog rose	Thorny, rambling rose with delicate leaves; pink-white flowers in June; red hips in autumn and winter.
<i>Salix caprea</i>	Goat willow	Locally common and associated with rivers, ponds and streams. Easily grows naturally without planting.
<i>Salix cinerea</i>	Grey willow	Locally common. Easily grows naturally without planting.
<i>Salix fragilis</i>	Crack willow	Less common than white willow and generally confined to the waterside. Easily grows naturally without planting.
<i>Sambucus nigra</i>	Elder	White scented flowers in June; glossy black berries in autumn.
<i>Sorbus aria</i>	Whitebeam	Suitable as an amenity tree for parks or gardens. The flowers are pollinated by insects and berries favoured by birds.
<i>Sorbus aucuparia</i>	Rowan	Common in the north and west of the UK where it often grows in high altitude locations. Not typical in the High Weald but suitable as an amenity tree in parks and gardens as it is small with berries that are a rich source of autumn food for birds, especially fieldfare and waxwing.
<i>Sorbus torminalis</i>	Wild service tree	Widespread but at very low density.
<i>Taxus baccata</i>	Yew	Our only native conifer with dense evergreen needles and red berries; long-lived. Poisonous to livestock so planting locations need to be carefully selected. A good evergreen hedging plant that is easy to manage.
<i>Tilia cordata</i>	Small leaved lime	Good nectar source. Produces edible young spring leaves for salads.
<i>Ulex europaeus</i>	Common gorse	A large, evergreen shrub covered in needle-like leaves and distinctive, coconut perfumed yellow flowers during the spring and summer. Likes well-drained soils and is normally found naturally on the area's sandier soils.
<i>Viburnum opulus</i>	Guelder rose	Found in very low numbers. Colourful. Autumn food for birds (particularly attractive to waxwings). Good nectar source.

Ground-flora species typical of the High Weald that are often associated with woods and hedges.

We do not recommend planting of these in the area's ancient woods, grasslands, or ponds. They are however suitable for naturalising in amenity areas, particularly as part of a multi-layer planting, and at the base of new hedgerows.

Scientific name	Common name	Description
<i>Allium ursinum</i>	Wild Garlic	A native perennial. The leaves are broad and flat. The white, star-shaped flowers are held in a spherical head from April to June. The plant has a distinctive garlic smell when crushed. Prefers damp shady areas.
<i>Anemone nemorosa</i>	Wood anemone	A native perennial that prefers shady, damp conditions. It has ferny foliage and delicate white flowers from March to May. Like bluebells the plants need to be left undisturbed to come back year after year.
<i>Hyacinthoides non-scripta</i>	British Bluebell	Prefers shady or partly shaded sites and will naturalise in grass and under trees. The plants need to be left undisturbed to come back year after year. Deep blue, fragrant flowers from late April to May.
<i>Narcissus pseudonarcissus 'lobularis'</i>	British Wild Daffodil	The wild species was once common but is now rare in High Weald woodlands. It is smaller and more delicate than daffodil cultivars. Blooms February to March.
<i>Primula vulgaris</i>	Primrose, Wild	Native perennial with yellow flowers from February to May. Prefers a shady site. .
<i>Ranunculus ficaria</i>	Lesser Celandine	A small perennial with yellow star-like flowers from March to May. Best planted where it can be left undisturbed.

Native wildflower and grass species typical of the High Weald

The grassland composition will be dependent on the soil type/characteristics. Most importantly a mix should include around 8 grasses and 10-15 wildflowers to provide a range of flowering times. The * denotes key species in ancient High Weald grassland.

Scientific Name	Common Name	Scientific Name	Common Name
<i>Achillea ptarmica</i> *	Sneezewort	<i>Lamium purpureum</i>	Dead Nettle, Red
<i>Agrimonia eupatoria</i>	Agrimony	<i>Leontodon hispidus</i>	Hawkbit, Rough
<i>Agrostis canina</i>	Bent, Velvet	<i>Leucanthemum vulgare</i>	Ox-eye Daisy
<i>Agrostis capillaris</i>	Bent, Common	<i>Linum catharticum</i> *	Flax, Fairy
<i>Ajuga reptans</i>	Bugle	<i>Listeria ovata</i> *	Twayblade, Common
<i>Alopecurus pratensis</i>	Foxtail, Meadow	<i>Lotus corniculatus</i>	Bird's-foot-trefoil, Common
<i>Anacamotis morio</i> *	Orchid green-winged	<i>Lotus pedunculatus</i>	Bird's-foot-trefoil, Greater
<i>Anthoxanthum odoratum</i> *	Sweet Vernal-grass	<i>Luzula campestris</i>	Wood-rush, Field
<i>Briza media</i> *	Quaking Grass	<i>Ophioglossum vulgatum</i> *	Adder's-tongue Fern
<i>Carex flacca</i>	Sedge - Glaucous	<i>Pimpinella saxifrage</i> *	Burnet Saxifrage
<i>Carex hirta</i>	Sedge - Hairy	<i>Poa trivialis</i>	Meadow-grass, Rough
<i>Carex ovalis</i>	Sedge - Oval	<i>Potentilla erecta</i>	Tormentil
<i>Centaureum erythraea</i>	Centaury, Common	<i>Prunella vulgaris</i>	Selfheal
<i>Centaurea nigra</i>	Knapweed, Black	<i>Ranunculus acris</i>	Buttercup, Meadow
<i>Conopodium majus</i> *	Pignut	<i>Rumex acetosa</i>	Sorrel, Common
<i>Crepis capilaris</i>	Hawk's-beard, Smooth	<i>Silaum silaus</i> *	Pepper Saxifrage
<i>Cynosurus cristatus</i>	Crested Dog's-tail	<i>Stachys officinalis</i> *	Betony
<i>Dactylorhiza fuchsii</i> *	Orchid, Common Spotted	<i>Stellaria graminea</i>	Stitchwort, Lesser
<i>Euphrasia nemorosa</i>	Eyebright, Common	<i>Succisa pratensis</i>	Devil's-bit Scabious
<i>Festuca rubra</i>	Fescue, Red	<i>Tragopogon pratensis</i>	Goat's-beard
<i>Genista tinctoria</i> *	Dyers Greenweed	<i>Trifolium pratense</i>	Clover, Red
<i>Hypochaeris radicata</i>	Cat's-ear, Common	<i>Veronica chamaedrys</i>	Speedwell, Germander
<i>Lathyrus nissolia</i> *	Vetchling, Grass	<i>Vicia sativa</i>	Vetch, Common
<i>Lathyrus pratensis</i>	Vetchling, Meadow	<i>Vicia cracca</i>	Vetch, Tufted

Published by the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee on behalf of:



Agenda Item: 11

Committee: High Weald Joint Advisory Committee

Date: 26th November 2025

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.

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 2025/26

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 economic context and its influence on the government's policies and priorities for our sector remain considerable and this will continue to have negative consequences for funding and support provided by government and local authorities.
- 2.3 There is no sign the inadequate funding settlements the National Landscape Partnerships have experienced since 2010 will change. 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 again choose not to re-instate an adequate, stable, and long-term funding settlement for National Landscape Partnerships. Should the core team drop to fewer than four Full Time

Equivalents, maintaining the current work demands will be even more difficult (if not impossible) than it is today.

- 2.4 This will be exacerbated should the current government require National Landscape Partnerships to undertake additional duties as part of the last government's response to the Landscapes Review but not provide adequate, commensurate, and sustained resources. The government's intermediate and longer-term intentions on a stable and adequate funding settlement for the sector are unclear.

Local Authority annual financial contributions

- 2.5 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.
- 2.6 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 would be in line with inflation from the start of 2024/2025.
- 2.7 However, it is important to note that local authority budgets and funding settlements remain under severe pressure and there is a major risk that some or all local authorities may not be able to maintain their current contributions (or increase their contributions in line with inflation) to the work of the High Weald Partnership.
- 2.8 The planned local government reorganisation and devolution for Sussex, Surrey, and Kent will affect local authority financial contributions. Despite the magnitude of the changes proposed to the current organisation of local authorities, the implications of devolution on local authority financial support for the work of the High Weald Partnership are still not understood.

Self-funded projects

- 2.9 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
- 2.10 In addition, the team administers and manages grant programmes on behalf of others (e.g. High Weald Nature and Community Fund, National Grid), which also bring considerable benefits across the High Weald.

- 2.11 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.
- 2.12 DEFRA's advocacy of and support for a greater investment in designated landscapes has resulted in a considerable but temporary increase in the budget allocation for capital projects for 2025/2026. While this additional investment is cautiously welcomed, it has not come with any commensurate funds to support the core team (which oversees the management of the funds and the scheme). This means potential projects need to be sought and developed and funds spent within a tight time frame, applying further pressure on the already under-resourced High Weald team.
- 2.13 Given this, Members need to be aware of the risk that the budget allocations for the extended one year (2025/2026) of the FiPL grant programme and the one-year DEFRA Capital Fund may not be fully spent despite significant efforts by the High Weald team, and any unspent funding would need to be returned to DEFRA for re-allocation elsewhere.

New and greater expectations and demands

- 2.14 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) and the one-year Capital Fund places considerable demands on our existing and limited 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, land managers and others to submit strong grant applications

Staff on fixed-term contracts

- 2.15 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.
- 2.16 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.
- 2.17 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

- 2.18 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. However, given the nature and inherent complexity of the High Weald finances, a large proportion of this work is undertaken by the High Weald team, and this puts a considerable extra strain on our limited time and resources and will do so again in the run up to the end of the current financial year.
- 2.19 ESCC has been able to recruit an additional finance officer who will be providing finance and budget support to the High Weald Partnership, and we expect the risks to the High Weald team to decline once the officer becomes familiar with our budget, work, and remit.

Staff succession planning

- 2.20 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 and, consequently, 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. This is particularly important now given the planned local government reorganisation and devolution for Sussex, Surrey, and Kent.
- 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 and new work commitments. It remains our intention to re-start this work to develop a succession planning strategy for the team.

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 2025/2026 will continue to be characterised by the challenges outlined above. The constraints on both the financial and personnel resources of the High Weald Unit along with the retention of the fixed-term staff to complete projects in their final year remain the most significant and immediate 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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To:

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cc. Jason Lavender, CO-Director High Weald National Landscape

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cc. Diane Russell, Planning & Design Advisor High Weald National Landscape

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Dear Cllr Bradbury

Re: Request for Support in Achieving International Dark Sky Community Certification

We are writing on behalf of the parishes of Brightling, Burwash, Crowhurst, Etchingham, Ticehurst and Wadhurst in respect of our community's efforts to become recognised as a Dark Sky Community by the Dark Skies International (DSI).

Dark Skies International is an international organisation which seeks to protect the night sky from light pollution by promoting responsible outdoor lighting through advocacy, public education, and the certification of "Dark Sky Places" like parks and communities.

Dark Sky Community certification acknowledges communities that demonstrate exceptional commitment to preserving the night sky through responsible outdoor lighting policies and community engagement.

Achieving this status requires adherence to specific lighting guidelines to minimise light pollution, enhance night-time environment quality, and promote environmental sustainability. Our parishes have developed Dark Skies policies for the parish or through Neighbourhood Development Plans. Such an approach to outdoor lighting aligns with the High Weald National Landscape (AONB) Management Plan 2024-2029 under policies D1 and D2, and with the High Weald NL Dark Skies Planning Technical Advice Note.

The Dark Skies International (DSI) British representative Dan Oakley has advised that we require the support of the JAC and Local Authorities to put in a successful application to the DSI to become recognised as a Dark Sky Community. Once the application has been successful, the parishes, supported by their Local Authorities, will need to implement their lighting plans over a ten-year period to meet DSI criteria.

We are therefore seeking the support from the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee for the principle of seeking Dark Sky International Community certification, and for the JAC to support parishes in moving towards the certification criteria. We hope that the JAC recognises that certification as a Dark Skies Community will not only protect our natural night environment but also enhance tourism and community pride within the High Weald National Landscape and help meet objectives in the High Weald Management Plan.

Yours sincerely

David Field

Nature Recovery Network

[Apply for Dark Sky Place certification | DarkSky International.](#)

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