

## Notice of Meeting

# Cabinet Member for Environment and Planning



**SURREY**  
COUNTY COUNCIL

**Date & time**

Wednesday, 4 June  
2014 at 2.30 pm

**Place**

Room 107 - County  
Hall

**Contact**

Anne Gowing  
Room 122, County Hall  
Tel 020 8541 9122  
[Anne.gowing@surreycc.gov.uk](mailto:Anne.gowing@surreycc.gov.uk)

**Chief Executive**

David McNulty

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This meeting will be held in public. If you would like to attend and you have any special requirements, please contact Anne Gowing on 020 8541 9122.

**Elected Members**  
Mr Mike Goodman

## **AGENDA**

### **1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

To receive any declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests from Members in respect of any item to be considered at the meeting.

### **2 PROCEDURAL ITEMS**

#### **2a Members' Questions**

The deadline for Member's questions is 12pm four working days before the meeting (29 May 2014).

#### **2b Public Questions**

The deadline for public questions is seven days before the meeting (28 May 2014).

#### **2c Petitions**

The deadline for petitions was 14 days before the meeting, and no petitions have been received.

### **3 ADOPTION OF HIGH WEALD AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY (AONB) MANAGEMENT PLAN**

(Pages 1  
- 64)

Under part IV of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CRoW Act), the County Council, along with the other local authorities administering the area of an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) have a duty to produce an AONB Management Plan.

Section 85 of the same Act also requires all local authorities and other statutory bodies to have due regard to the policies in that Management Plan when delivering their functions. Surrey County Council delegated the duty of producing the High Weald AONB Management Plan to the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee in 2004 when the first plan under the CRoW Act was produced.

The current plan (2009-14) has now been reviewed. The County Council, along with all the Local Authorities, is now being asked to adopt the plan for 2014-19.

**David McNulty**  
**Chief Executive**  
Published: Friday 23 May 2014

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**SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL**

**CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING**

**DATE: 4 JUNE 2014**

**LEAD OFFICER: TREVOR PUGH, STRATEGIC DIRECTOR, ENVIRONMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE**

**SUBJECT: ADOPTION OF HIGH WEALD AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY (AONB) MANAGEMENT PLAN**



**SUMMARY OF ISSUE:**

Under part IV of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CRoW Act), the County Council, along with the other local authorities administering the area of an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) have a duty to produce an AONB Management Plan.

Section 85 of the same Act also requires all local authorities and other statutory bodies to have due regard to the policies in that Management Plan when delivering their functions. Surrey County Council delegated the duty of producing the High Weald AONB Management Plan to the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee in 2004 when the first plan under the CRoW Act was produced.

The current plan (2009-14) has now been reviewed. The County Council, along with all the Local Authorities, is now being asked to adopt the plan for 2014-19.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

It is recommended that the High Weald AONB Management Plan for 2014-2019 is adopted.

**REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:**

If the County Council does not adopt the plan then the Council would be in breach of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 and would be expected to produce its own review of the management plan to cover the area of the AONB in Surrey.

**DETAILS:**

1. The High Weald AONB is one of two AONBs in Surrey. It is the largest AONB in the South East, covering 15 local authorities. A small area of the AONB (0.7%) is in Surrey covering the south east part of Tandridge District.
2. The AONB is characterised by dispersed settlements, historic farmsteads, over 24% woodland cover, ancient trackways, irregular fields and shaws. Just under 64% of the area of the AONB is farmland with the size of those farms decreasing over the last ten years. As with much of the landscape in the South East, the farmers and foresters have a key role in managing the landscape for the future.

## High Weald AONB Unit

3. The High Weald AONB is run by the High Weald AONB Unit, which is responsible for preparing the management plan and carrying out the review. The Unit is largely a strategic body, influencing the policy for the area and running a series of pilot projects to manage key landscapes in the AONB.

## High Weald AONB Management Plan

4. Under part IV of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CRoW Act) all local authorities with an area in an AONB have a duty to produce a Management Plan and to review that plan every five years. The County Council, along with the other local authorities covered by the High Weald AONB delegated that task to the Joint Advisory Committee (JAC).
5. The JAC comprises representatives from the 15 local authorities, including Surrey County Council. The JAC has both an officer and Member representative from the County Council. In addition there is an Officers' Steering Group.
6. The Management Plan was originally developed in consultation with the County Council and the other local authorities plus other partners who influence what happens in the High Weald. The County Council first adopted the plan in 2004. The plan is a partnership plan to be delivered by all the partners.
7. The Management Plan can, when adopted, be used to inform policies and actions of the Council and help to ensure that it is meeting the statutory duty and adopted policy to conserve and enhance the AONB. The Management Plan can also continue to be used to inform strategic and development control planning decisions.

## Management Plan Review

8. Attached, at Annex 1, is the pre-publication review 2014 to 2019 which is the second review of the 2004 plan. The document, described as a "light touch review", has been subject to public consultation and the necessary assessments and was reviewed by officers and members of the 15 constituent authorities.
9. The document was approved by the High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee on 8 November 2013 to be recommended to the constituent authorities for formal adoption. A letter has been received from the Chairman of the JAC requesting that the County Council now adopt this revised plan for the next five years from 2014-2019.
10. The reviewed Management Plan focuses on the key features that make the High Weald an AONB and as such they comply with the County Council's policies. The County Council can therefore adopt the plan as it does not conflict with any of its policies and no assumptions are made in the Plan that the County Council will deliver any targets that are not already in the business plans.
11. Officers and the Member representative to the JAC, Cllr Michael Sydney, recommend that Surrey Council continue with its support for the Management

Plan and the JAC to ensure the continued protection of the High Weald AONB and the Council's compliance with its statutory duty.

#### **CONSULTATION:**

12. The Management Plan has been subject to public consultation and the necessary assessments and was reviewed by officers and members of the 15 constituent authorities.
13. The Assistant Director, Environment has been consulted on this report.

#### **RISK MANAGEMENT AND IMPLICATIONS:**

14. If the County Council does not adopt the plan then we would be in breach of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 and would be expected to produce its own review of the management plan to cover the area of the AONB in Surrey. However if the Districts and Borough Council adopt the plan then the County would have to agree with them on any changes to the plan.

#### **Financial and Value for Money Implications**

15. All 15 authorities contribute a proportionate amount of core funding to the High Weald JAC to enable the existence of the High Weald AONB Unit, the officers who carry out the work of producing and monitoring the Management Plan. In addition, the AONB Unit carries out research and projects which have brought significant benefits.
16. The County Council contributes £2900 per annum (2014/15) to the High Weald AONB unit.

#### **Section 151 Officer Commentary**

17. The Section 151 Officer confirms that all material financial and business issues and risks have been considered and addressed. The financial implications associated with the recommendation are explained in paragraphs 15 and 16.

#### **Legal Implications – Monitoring Officer**

18. Section 89 of the CRoW Act requires all local authorities in the area of an AONB to act jointly in producing a management plan which then has to be formally reviewed and amended as appropriate every 5 years. The proposed reviewed plan as attached has been prepared by the High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee in accordance with its delegated powers and needs to be formally adopted by all the relevant local authorities including Surrey. The approval of the plan is an executive function of the Council.

#### **Equalities and Diversity**

19. There are no equality and diversity implications arising from this report.

### **Climate change/carbon emissions implications**

20. There are no climate change/carbon emissions implications arising from this report.

### **WHAT HAPPENS NEXT:**

21. If the Cabinet Member agrees the High Weald AONB Management Plan will be adopted for 2014-19.

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#### **Contact Officer:**

David Greenwood, Team Leader Countryside Funding and Marketing, 020 8541 7005.

#### **Consulted:**

The Management Plan has been subject to public consultation and the necessary assessments and was reviewed by officers and members of the 15 constituent authorities.

#### **Annexes:**

Annex 1 – High Weald Management Plan 2014 – 19.

#### **Sources/background papers:**

- The High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2014-19.
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# The High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2014-2019



[www.highweald.org](http://www.highweald.org)

**Pre-publication Nov 2013**

*Published by the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee  
March 2014*

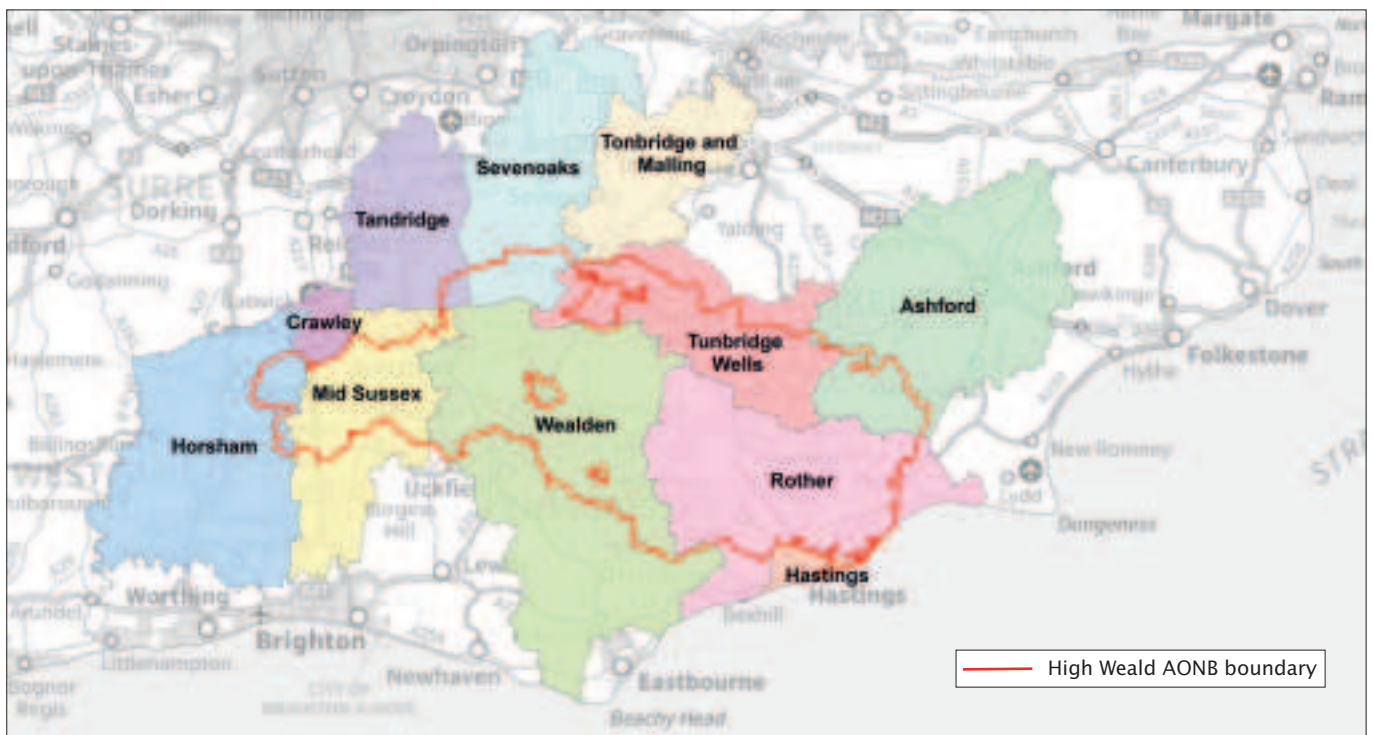
*'working together to care for one of England's finest landscapes'*  
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# The High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

## Management Plan 2014-2019

Produced by the High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee, under the *Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000*, on behalf of:

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



### High Weald AONB Unit

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**Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty** (AONBs) are some of our finest landscapes. They are cherished by residents and visitors alike and allow millions of people from all walks of life to understand and connect with nature.

I am pleased to see that this management plan demonstrates how AONB Partnerships can continue to protect these precious environments despite the significant challenges they face. With a changing climate, the increasing demands of a growing population and in difficult economic times, I believe AONBs represent just the sort of community driven, collaborative approach needed to ensure our natural environment is maintained for generations to come.

AONB Partnerships have been the architects of a landscape-scale approach to land management. This approach is a key feature of the Government's Natural Environment White Paper and emphasises the need to manage ecosystems in an integrated fashion, linking goals on wildlife, water, soil and landscape, and working at a scale that respects natural systems.

This management plan also makes the important connection between people and nature. I am pleased to hear that local communities have been central to the development of the plan, and will be at the heart of its delivery. From volunteers on nature conservation projects, to businesses working to promote sustainable tourism, it's great to hear of the enthusiasm and commitment of the local people who hold their AONBs so dear.

AONBs are, and will continue to be, landscapes of change. Management plans such as this are vital in ensuring these changes are for the better. I would like to thank all those who were involved in bringing this plan together and I wish you every success in bringing it to fruition.



Lord de Mauley

# Foreword

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Councillor Brian Kentfield  
Chair 2011 –  
High Weald AONB  
Joint Advisory  
Committee

**The High Weald** is a nationally important landscape. It is a wonderful place cherished by many people and rightly celebrated for its breathtaking scenery. It is also the product of a long history of human interaction with the natural environment. The High Weald landscape – which we see, feel, work in and enjoy today – has survived many major historical events and social and technological changes, and it is considered to be one of the best surviving and most coherent medieval landscapes in northern Europe. This is why the High Weald is considered worthy of protection and celebration: it has remained a unique, distinct, and recognisable area for at least the last 700 years.

As a nation, we instinctively want to look after our beautiful and much loved landscapes, buildings, and special places. We intuitively understand the importance of our built and natural places and their capacity to inspire. Yet, as a nation, we are also deep in the throes of an economic recession. It is increasingly fashionable to claim that a concern for the environment and the conservation of our landscapes are fripperies we can no longer indulge, and that nature must not be allowed to get in the way of economic activity, growth and job creation.

But to think like this threatens the unique combination of qualities that makes the High Weald such a special place to live, work and visit. It fails to understand that the countryside has been fashioned over generations by land-based activities, such as agriculture, woodland management, field sports and industry. Also, it does not recognise that landscapes have provided our essential needs: food, water, energy, employment, and residential and business development. Most importantly, this attitude diminishes the skills and assets of our rural communities, and the social and economic processes that are fundamentally connected to nature and the physical environment.

It is, therefore, more important than ever to encourage our society, and our policy and decision makers, to value and be inspired by our landscapes, buildings and settlements. We need to understand that a vibrant working rural landscape harbouring responsible land-based activities and the re-building of people's economic relationships with the land around them is essential if we are to conserve and make wise use of the High Weald. The challenge for us all is to take the long- and the wide – view and aspire to actions that harness appropriate social and economic activity providing the food, water, energy, employment, development and wildlife we need, whilst conserving the High Weald landscape that we all experience and enjoy, and which contributes to our identity.

To help meet this challenge, the High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee has prepared this Management Plan on behalf of the 15 local authorities in which the High Weald lies. But it could not have done so without the help of many people. We would like to thank all those who have contributed and urge everyone with an interest in the area to help us turn this Plan into action.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Brian Kentfield". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Brian Kentfield Page 8

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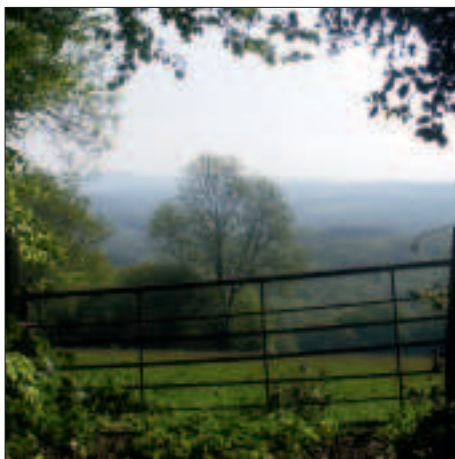
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# About the plan

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**AONB management plans** are locally prepared and agreed statements of public policy for managing landscapes of national importance and their associated nature conservation and other values.



**This management plan** is founded upon a raft of supporting studies and consultation, and delivers up-to-date tools, data, guidance notes and maps to assist implementation. The statutory plan itself has been kept concise and readable with supporting studies and guidance available online at [www.highweald.org](http://www.highweald.org)

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## Purpose of AONB Management Plans

Local authorities with land in an AONB, acting jointly in the case of AONBs crossing administrative boundaries, are legally obliged under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 to prepare and publish a plan which **'formulates their policy for the management of the area and for the carrying out of their functions in relation to it'**, and to review this plan every five years. AONB Management Plans are focused on delivering the statutory purpose of AONB designation: conserving and enhancing natural beauty. Considerations relating to wider environmental issues, the rural economy and communities are dealt with in the context of delivering this purpose.<sup>1</sup>

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## Who is this plan for?

This Plan has been formally adopted by all 15 local authorities covering the High Weald AONB as their policy for management of the AONB. It sets out their policy aspirations for the AONB and provides a framework to help them make judgments about the delivery of their services in relation to it. The Plan also has a wider role: providing a transparent and accessible means by which all public bodies can ensure they are exercising their duty to have regard to the purposes of designation (CROW Act, Section 85); and providing a guide for everyone involved with the AONB on the actions they can take to care for the area.

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## Format of the Plan

The Plan takes a character-led approach with the main body of the plan setting out the long term policy objectives and short term targets for conserving and enhancing natural beauty. Additional sections cover a description of the High Weald and its history; the vision; an introduction to the legislation and principles of the plan; the Statement of Significance; facts and figures describing the state of the High Weald landscape, and a section on implementation and monitoring.

The Objectives, together with Indicators of Success and Five-year Targets, are effectively the plans policies, and provide the strategic direction for AONB management. These policies comprise:

- **Management Objectives** provided for each component of natural beauty and for public understanding and enjoyment. Objectives are defined as qualitative statements that indicate a desired trend. These are the agreed long term aims for the High Weald as a whole that need to be achieved in order to secure the purpose of designation and the vision for the AONB. Each management objective has Indicators of Success describing the direction of travel management should take to achieve the objectives. Movement along this path can be used to judge the performance of the Plan.
- The **Targets** are the current set of ambitions for the next five years (2014–2019) that local authorities and relevant public bodies can undertake, influence or utilise in their dealings with others, to achieve change on the ground. They are quantitative and qualitative actions or interventions and represent milestones on the intended direction of travel. The actions of others – land managers, residents, visitors and businesses – can make a positive contribution to these targets.

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<sup>1</sup> Guidance for the review of AONB Management Plans (Countryside Agency, CA 221, 2006, p.7)

Together with the criteria against which actions and activities that have an effect on the AONB should be judged.

# The High Weald

**The High Weald** is a historic countryside of rolling hills draped by small irregular fields, abundant woods and hedges, scattered farmsteads and sunken lanes. It covers 1461 sq km across four counties and 11 districts. The High Weald was designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in 1983.

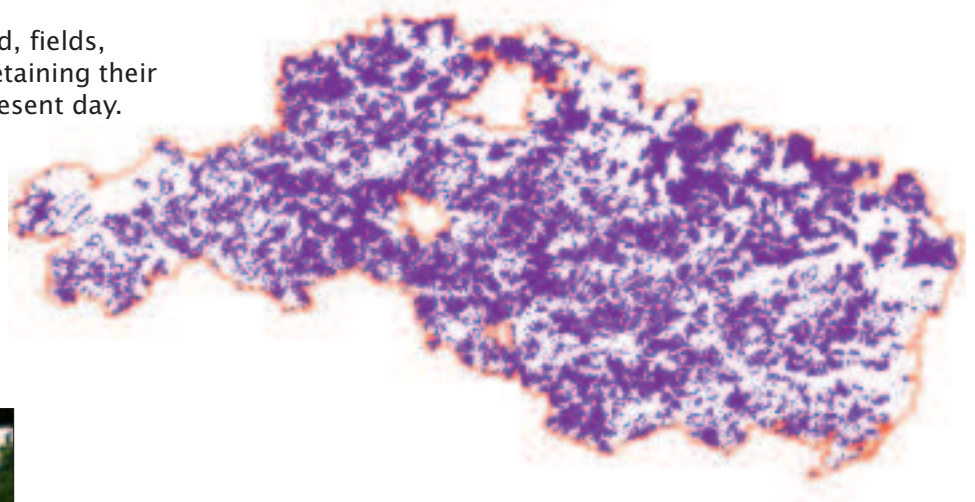
## Exploring the landscape <sup>2</sup>

The High Weald occupies the ridged and faulted sandstone core of an area known from Saxon times as the Weald. It is an area of ancient countryside and one of the best surviving medieval landscapes in Northern Europe. The mosaic of small mixed farms and woodland is now considered to represent a quintessentially English landscape yet for many years until the advent of turnpikes it was better known for the terrible state of its roads and 'backward' nature of its agriculture.

At first glance the High Weald appears to be a densely wooded landscape but closer examination reveals a detailed agricultural tapestry of fields, small woodlands and farmsteads. Wildflower meadows are now rare but the medieval pattern of small fields with sinuous edges surrounded by thick hedges and shaws (often surviving remnants of ancient woodland) remain. Extensive views punctuated by church spires can be glimpsed along the ridge-top roads. Around almost every corner a harmonious group of traditional farm buildings comes into view with their distinctive steep, clay tile and hipped roofs. Everything in the High Weald landscape is human scale. Its rich detail is best explored through the myriad of interconnecting paths and tracks. From early in its history this dense network of routeways linked the Weald with settlements on its fringes where farming was easier, and they remain a visible legacy of the value these communities placed on the resources of the forest.

Landscape features – woodland, fields, commons and settlements – retaining their medieval character into the present day.

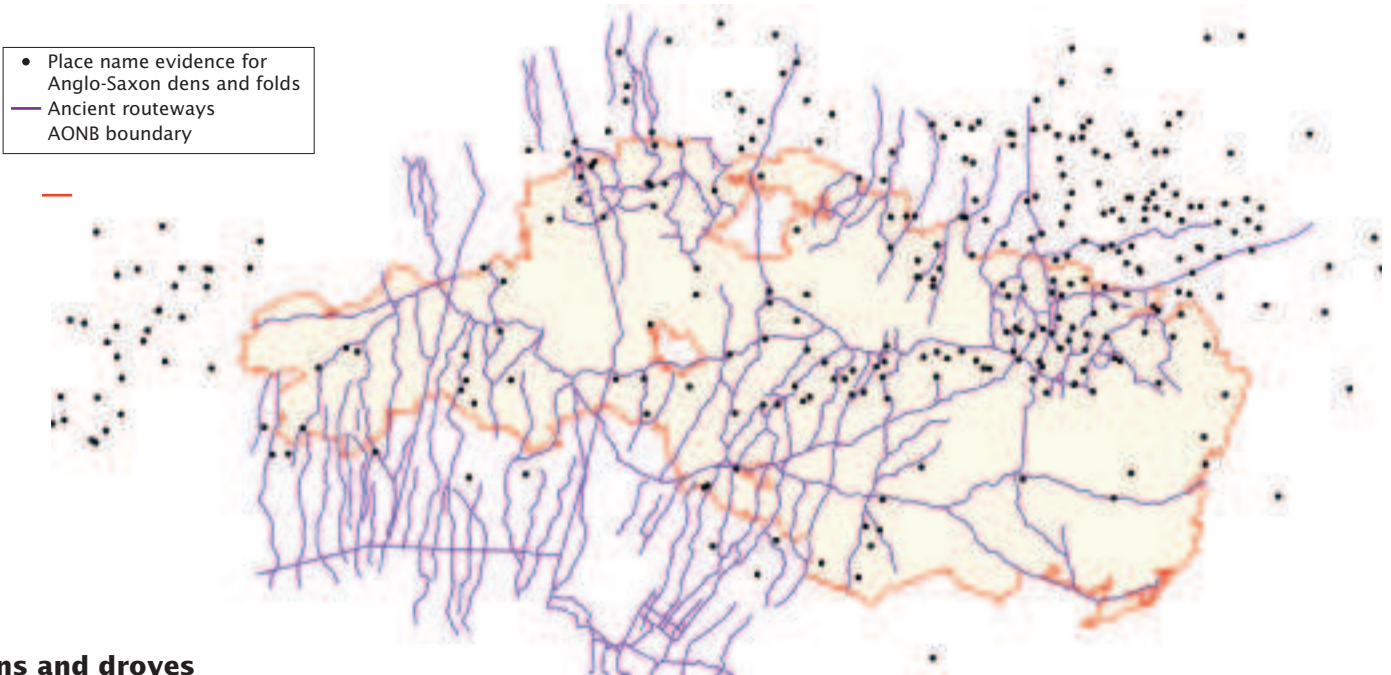
*Source: Historic landscape Characterisations for Kent, Surrey and Sussex*



Woodland is extensive covering nearly a third of the area in an intricate network of small wooded shaws, pits and gills; farm woods and larger wooded estates. Most of the woodland is ancient, managed in the past as coppice and swept with bluebells and wood anemones in the spring but of the mature oaks for which the Weald was once famous, few remain. The drier sandy soils favour pine and birch within a patchwork of lowland heath.

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

<sup>2</sup> Edited and adapted from 'The Kent and Sussex Weald', Peter Brandon, 2003



## Dens and droves

Transhumance, the seasonal movement of people and their animals between the downs and the High Weald, and exploitation of the resources of the forest created a radial pattern of ancient routeways (in purple) which still exists today.

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



Today the High Weald is probably best known internationally for the collection of stories about the character of Pooh Bear set on Ashdown Forest but in the past its mix of wilder elements reminiscent of the former forest, surviving amidst a beautiful small scale landscape shaped by man inspired many people including the architect Norman Shaw; William Holman Hunt; William Robinson who pioneered creation of the English natural garden and writers such as Rudyard Kipling.

## The High Weald through time <sup>3</sup>

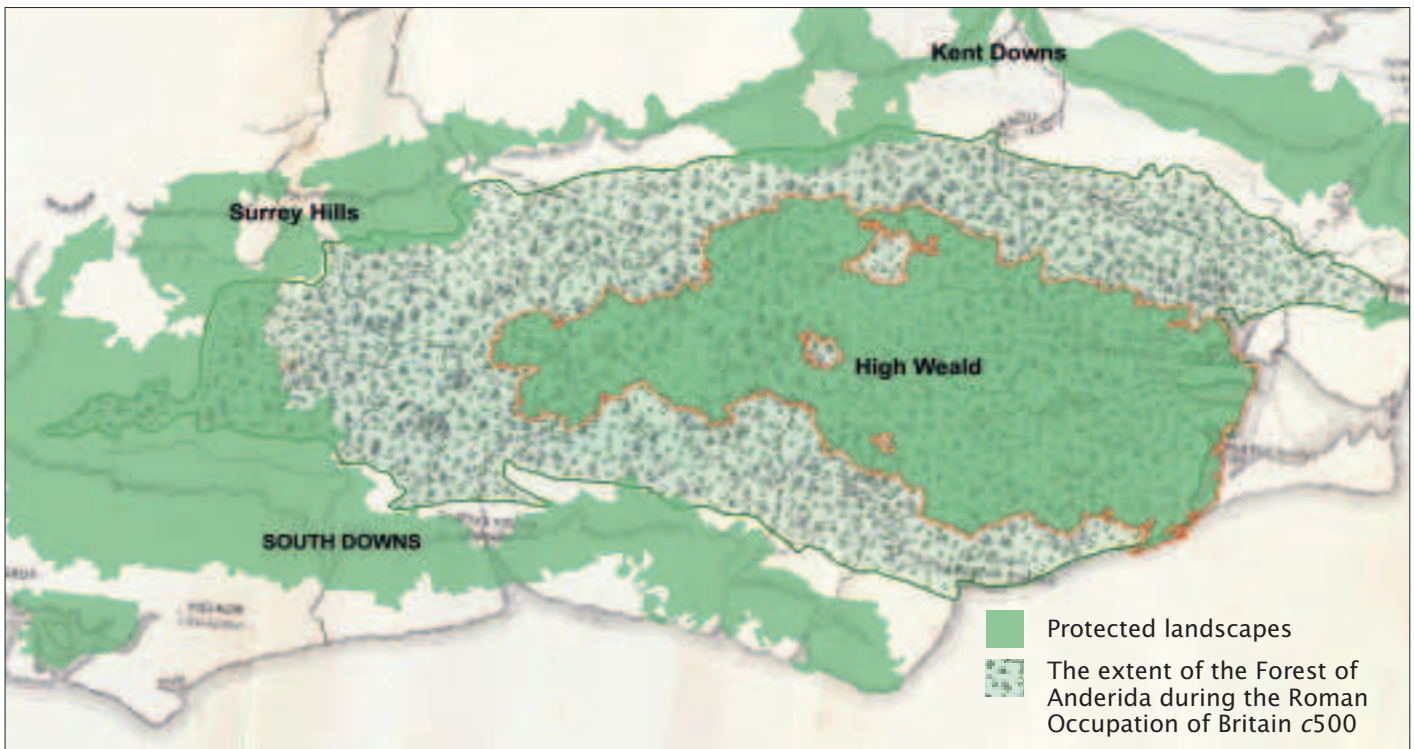
The High Weald forms the central core of a geological landform of sedimentary rocks, the Wealden anticline, which underpins the South East. The unique geology of the Weald is shared with only three places in Europe – the northern part of the Isle of Wight and parts of the Boulonnais and Pays de Bray in France. The Purbeck beds which lie along the Battle ridge form the oldest sediments being laid down in shallow lagoons at the end of the Jurassic period (142 million years ago). Iron-rich clays and sandstones followed as the landscape changed Page 12 flood plains and rivers. The area gradually sank below the sea and around 75 million years ago the great uplift began

<sup>3</sup> Edited and adapted from 'Making of the High Weald', Roland B. Harris, 2004



followed by compression which folded and faulted the strata. Subsequent weathering has cut through the strata exposing the layers as sandstone ridges and clay valleys. The amazing variability of soils produced has shaped the Weald's social and economic history.

With rising temperatures at the beginning of the post-glacial period and the continuing land link to Europe arboreal species were able to expand with birch, hazel and pine being followed by oak, elm, alder, ash and lime. There is some evidence for small scale, sporadic and temporary clearance by Mesolithic hunter-gatherers, and from c6000 BC when Britain became separated from Europe the natural vegetation was subject to man's increasing presence as evidenced by the wealth of flint finds. Periodic woodland clearance continued with Bronze age barrows and iron age hill forts indicating active communities in Ashdown Forest, but it was the medieval practice of transhumance, the seasonal movement of people and animals between the settlements on the borders of the Weald and its interior, coupled with exploitation of the valuable resources of the forest that really transformed the Weald into the settled landscape we see today.



Adapted from: *A History of Kent*  
by Robert Furley, 1871

The High Weald lies within one of the largest tracts of woodland in early medieval England termed *Anderida silva* by the Romans; *Andredesleah* ('leah' suggesting wood pasture)<sup>4</sup> in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, and later *Andredesweald* (the high forest of Andred) shortened to *Weald* in Saxon charters (sometimes associated with *weald-bera* or *den-bera* – a right to feed swine in the forest).<sup>5</sup> The Weald is one of the longest lasting regional names in Britain. Tantalising clues to the process of early settlement in the area are provided by place names like *-den* or *-fold* meaning woodland pastures; distinctive curved boundaries aligned in a similar direction to roads and tracks; and the relationship between manors and their Wealden outliers suggesting that creation of dens partly through transhumance was the main colonizing theme of Wealden history. By the 14th century the High Weald's characteristic dispersed settlement

<sup>4</sup> Della Hooke, 'The Woodland landscape of Medieval England' in N.J Higham and Martin J Ryan, *Place-Names, Language and the Anglo-Saxon Landscape* (2011) p.150.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Furley, *A history of the Weald of Kent* (1871) p. 88.

# The High Weald



pattern based on small scale family holdings was well established. The land was mostly worked from farmsteads with villages developing later as settlements for workers involved in trade and craft.

The small size of Wealden holdings; the importance of crafts to supplement the income from agriculture on poor soils and the high economic value of timber for ships, buildings and to fuel the iron, glass and cloth industries explains the survival of more ancient woodland in the High Weald than anywhere else in the country. Woods were enclosed and managed as coppice with standards, producing underwood and construction timber. Large widely spaced trees in hedgerows and parklands produced the crooked boughs required for shipbuilding. In the 17th and 18th centuries when hop growing expanded so did the extent of chestnut coppice for hop poles.

For five hundred years the rivers of the Eastern High Weald were an important link for trade and war between the wooded interior and the sea ports of Winchelsea and Rye. Wooden barges were still moving timber and goods from the interior of the High Weald until the end of the 19th century when the last barge, Primrose, was built.

The High Weald was the premier iron producing district during the Roman occupation with up to 2000 bloomeries scattered across the area and 9 industrial scale sites. In the 16th century iron production became important again based on the blast furnace and facilitated by the expertise of immigrant French workers. Interconnecting chains of leats, dams and hammer ponds were constructed to provide sufficient head of water for the forges. Wealthy ironmasters built notable mansions such as Gravetye and Great Shoemiths.

As early as 1825 William Cobbett commented on the artificial landscapes of the new gentry spreading out of London and the arrival of the railways in the mid 19th century brought further building and the growth of country houses and estates. The railways also made a significant impact on agriculture, opening up the London market for hops, fruit and poultry.



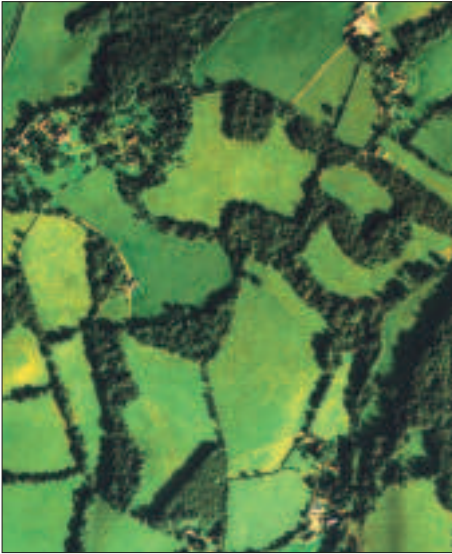
Until the 1950s the Weald was one of the slowest changing regions in Britain. For 700 years prior to this, agriculture and the field shapes, sizes and pattern of surrounding woodland and hedges hardly altered. Since then farming and forestry, always difficult on the poor soils, has been pushed further to the economic margins with the majority of farmsteads now residential hamlets. This decline in mixed farming and woodland management is a major threat to the long term survival of the High Weald's distinctive landscape character.

**The Making of the High Weald** defines the major processes that have helped shape this landscape: human colonisation and resource exploitation, particularly transhumance (the seasonal movement of animals from the Downs into the High Weald). These processes are the key to the early history of the High Weald and their legacy dominates the landscape.

Roland B. Harris, *The Making of the High Weald* (2004)  
Page 14

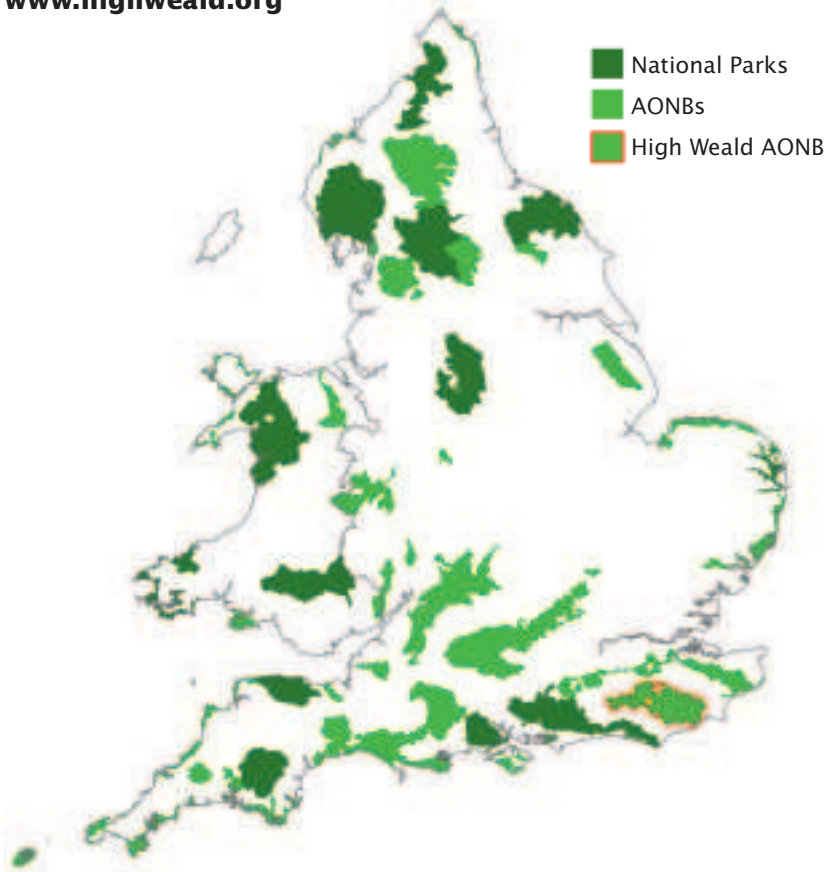


# Key facts



## An outstanding area

This section provides selective key facts and figures about the AONB. For a full account of the information, including a schedule of nature conservation assets, underpinning this Plan visit [www.highweald.org](http://www.highweald.org)



## Landscape context

- The High Weald was designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in 1983.
- It is one of 34 AONBs in England.
- 20% of Britain's finest countryside in England and Wales is protected by law as National Parks or AONBs.
- Protected landscapes cover 37% of the South East area.





## Administration

- The High Weald AONB covers 1461 sq km
- It extends across four counties, 11 districts and 100 parishes

## Socio-economic profile

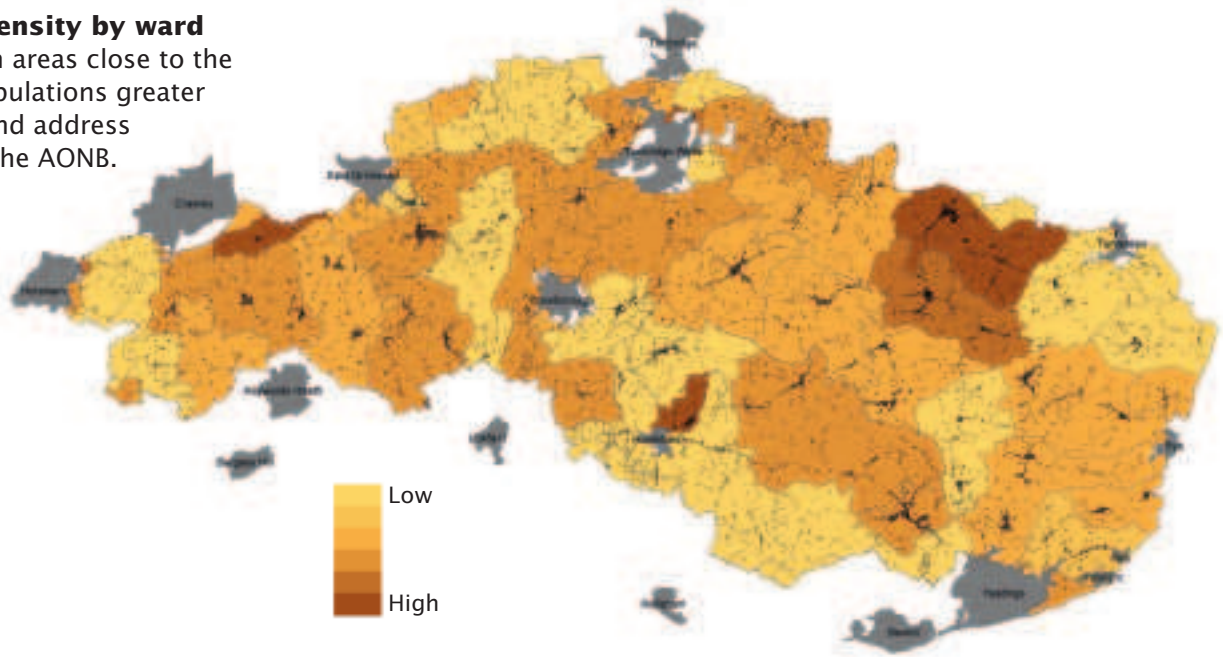
- The AONB has a population of 127,000 with a density of 86 people per sq km.
- An additional 70,000 people live in urban areas – Tunbridge Wells, Crowborough and Heathfield – excluded from the designation but within the outer AONB boundary.
- A further 873,000 people live in wards wholly or partly within 5km of the AONB boundary.
- The High Weald AONB has no urban areas but has 17 market towns and villages with populations greater than 2000, the largest being Battle with a population over 6000.
- Adopted Green Belt covers 7.7% of the area.
- 13% of High Weald businesses are land based businesses compared with 3% in the South East.
- 38% of employment in the High Weald is in Micro-Businesses compared to 17% in the South East.
- 29% of the High Weald population are retired compared with 21% of the South East.
- Average house prices in the High Weald are 142% higher than in the South East.

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



# Key facts

**Population density by ward**  
showing urban areas close to the AONB with populations greater than 10,000 and address points within the AONB.



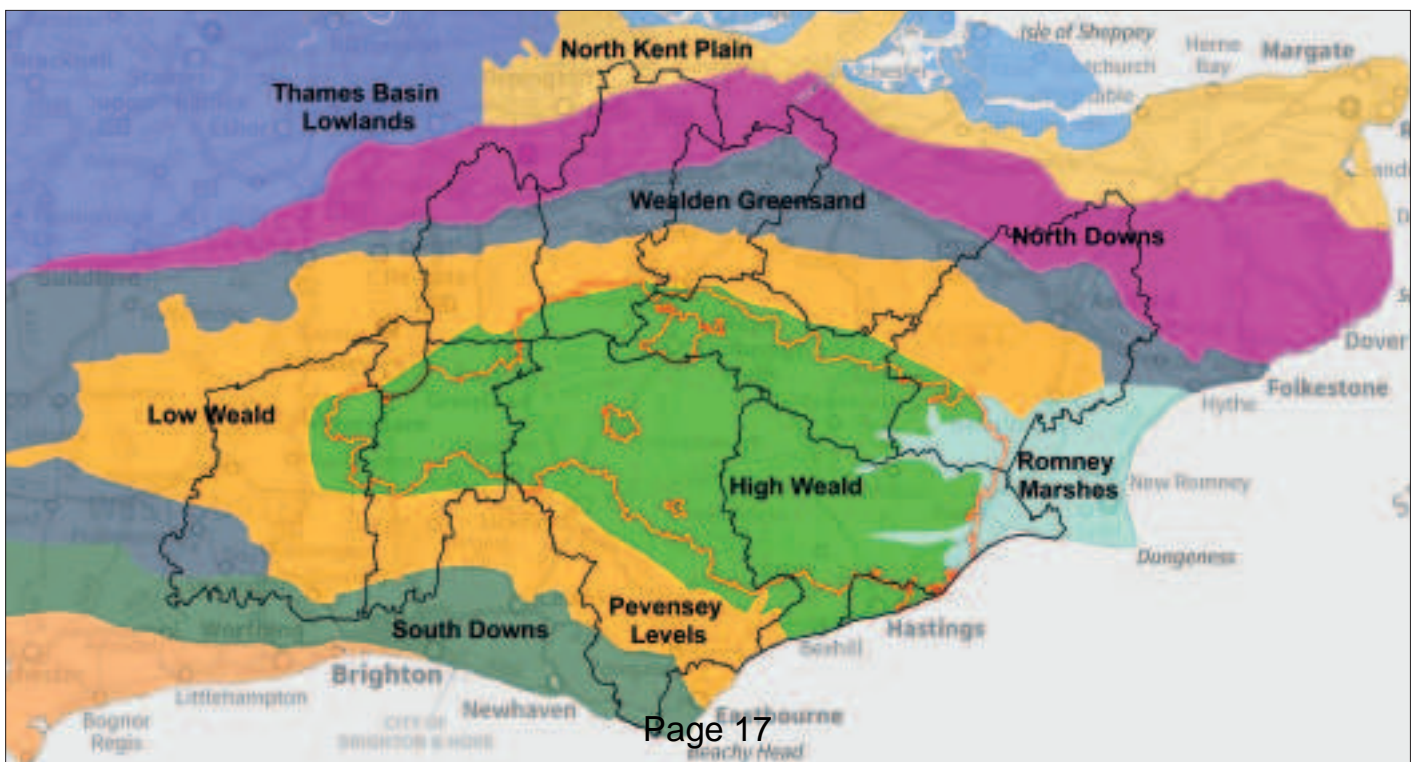
## England's National Character Areas

The High Weald lies almost entirely within the High Weald National Character Area (NCA). Character Areas divide England into 159 distinct areas defined by a unique combination of natural and cultural factors. They follow natural boundaries rather than administrative boundaries.

[www.naturalengland.org.uk](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk)

- There were 1563 registered farm holdings in the AONB in 2010 down from 3192 in 2008.
- The total area used for agriculture fell by 10% in the same period with farms under 5 ha showing the greatest fall in numbers down from 1363 to 128.
- The number of farms engaged in livestock production remained steady while horticulture declined and those engaged in general cropping quadrupled.
- The number of people employed in agriculture also fell from 4698 in 2008 to 3708 in 2010.

Source: Defra 2013.

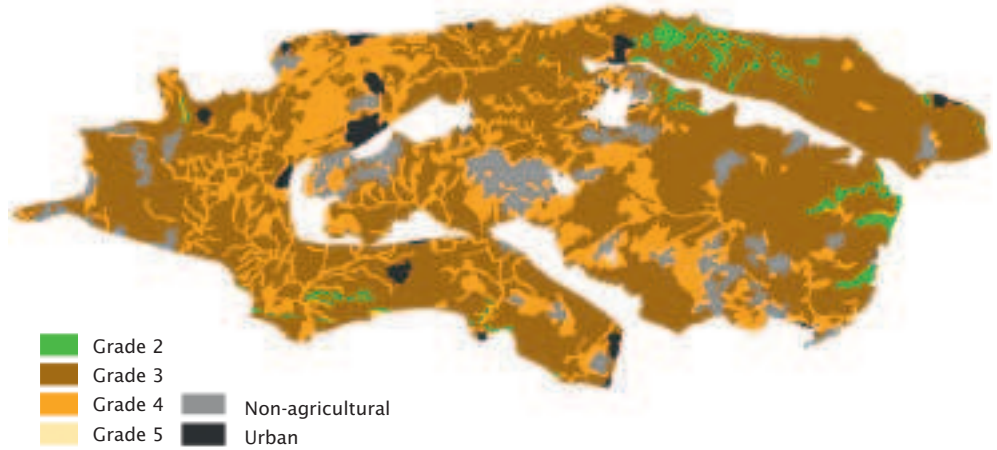


## Environmental profile

### Agricultural land quality

The majority of High Weald soils are relatively poor and highly variable over short distances.

There is no Grade 1 agricultural land in the High or Low Weald. Grade 2 covers 2.5% of the High Weald with 85% being Grade 3 and 4 compared to 3.7% Grade 2 in the Low Weald and 90% Grade 3 and 4.



### River catchments and main rivers

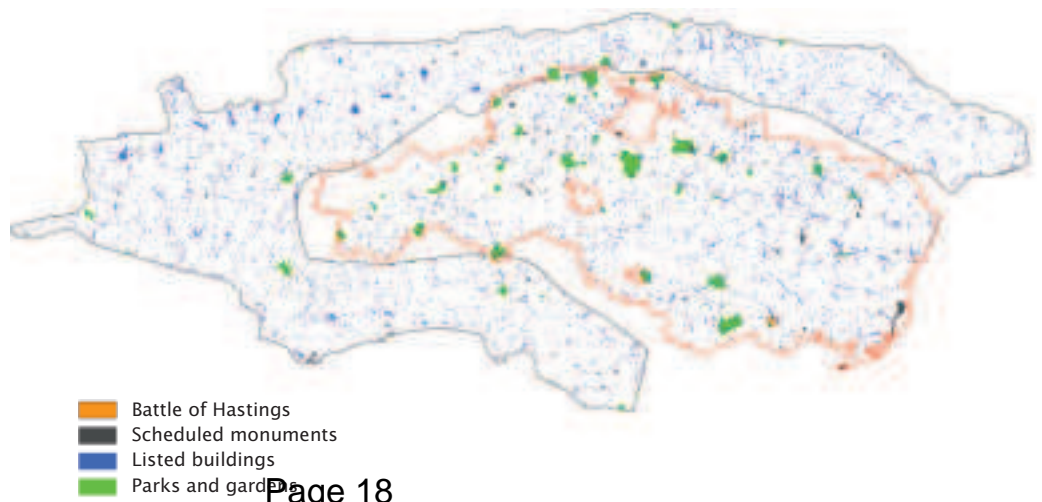
The High Weald covers part of the headwaters of eight river catchments.



### Historic environment

The High Weald is renowned for the site of the 1066 Battle of Hastings. There are 5274 listed buildings; 105 Scheduled monuments; 57 medieval parish churches and 50 registered historic parks and gardens.

Historic parkland especially medieval deer parks and 'designed landscapes' are a distinctive feature of the High Weald

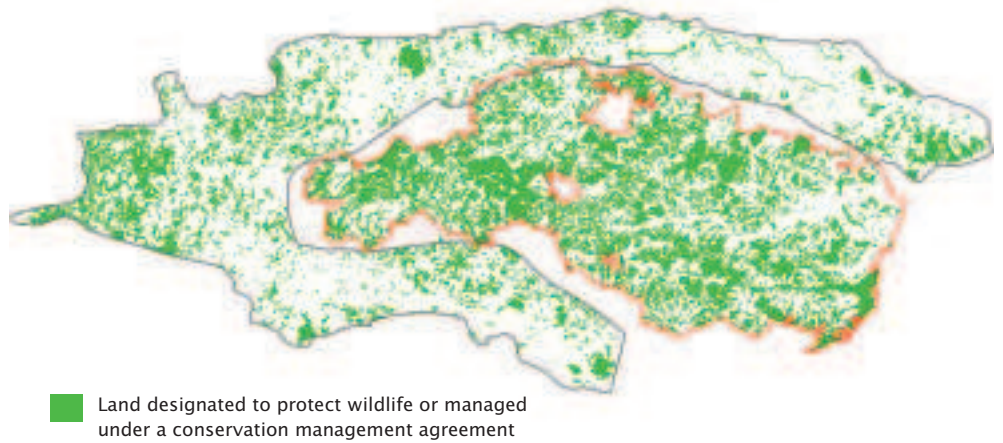




# Key facts

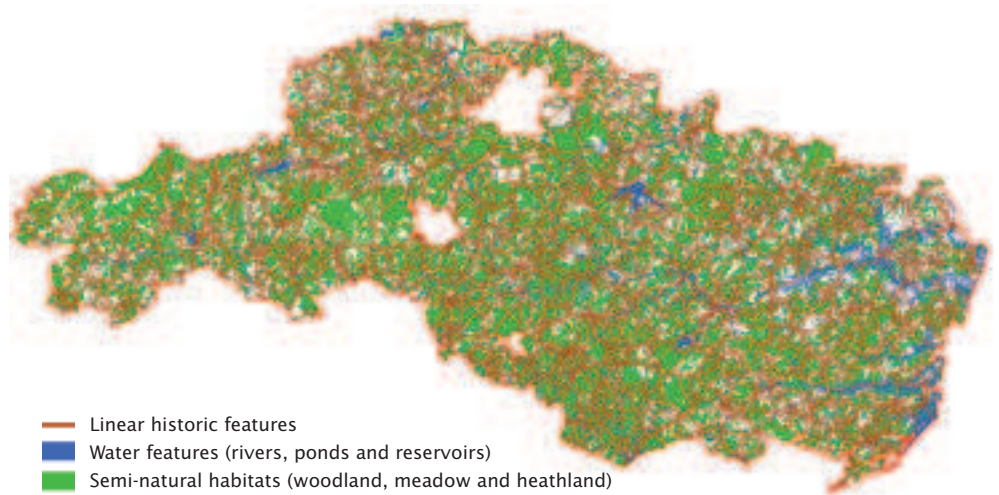
## Land owned or managed for nature conservation

Nearly 15% of the High Weald is either publically owned, owned by conservation organisations or designated under international or national law to protect wildlife. Internationally important sites for nature conservation (SPAs and SACs) cover 6415 ha of the High Weald compared with 437 ha of the Low Weald. In the High Weald 51 SSSIs cover 5538 ha and in the Low Weald 43 SSSIs cover 2670 ha.



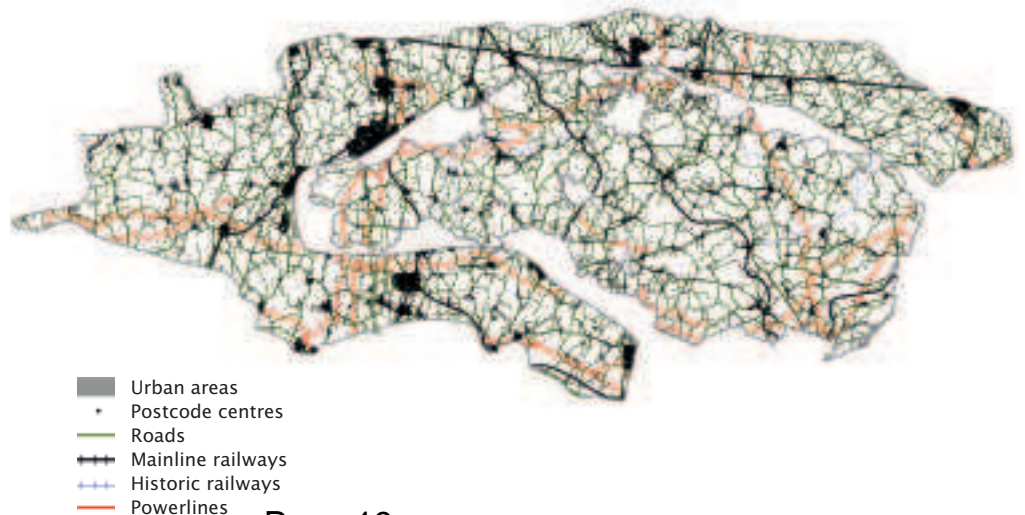
## Ecological connectivity

The High Weald AONB already offers a highly interconnected green, blue and brown infrastructure network with a mosaic of intermingled semi-natural habitat.



## Intrusions

There are 126,000 buildings in the High Weald (*Source: OS mastermap*). The High Weald has 1873km of roads compared with 3128km in the Low Weald; and 87km of railway compared to 194km in the Low Weald. Each area is crossed by 200km of high voltage power lines.



## Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000

**Section 82** reaffirms the primary purpose of AONBs: to conserve and enhance natural beauty.

**Section 84** confirms the powers of local authorities to take 'all such action as appears to them expedient for the accomplishment of the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of AONBs'.

**Section 85** places a duty on all public bodies and statutory undertakers to 'have regard' to the 'purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty'.

**Section 86** establishes a process for creating AONB conservation boards.

**Section 89** creates a statutory responsibility for local authorities and conservation boards to prepare and publish; and review on a five yearly basis AONB management plans.

**Section 92** clarifies that conservation of natural beauty includes conservation of flora, fauna and geological and physiographical features.

## AONB policy

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### 1.1 AONB Designation

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The *National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949* legislated for the designation of AONBs and National Parks. Their purpose was to be similar, to conserve and enhance natural beauty although National Parks were also to be areas that provided opportunity for open-air recreation and were to be close to centres of population. There have been minor changes to the aims of both types of designation since 1949: the primary purpose of AONB designation and subsidiary purposes – in effect, qualifications of the primary purpose – are those defined in a Countryside Commission statement 1991<sup>6</sup>, restated in 2006<sup>7</sup> (the basis for the wording of the subsidiary purposes can be found in the Countryside Act 1968, section 37):

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

The legal framework for AONBs in England and Wales is provided by the *Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CRoW) 2000* which reaffirms the primary purpose of AONBs: to conserve and enhance natural beauty, and sets out responsibilities for their management and for the production of AONB Management Plans.

Guidance on the legislation and its application in practice to assessing landscapes for designation as an AONB is provided by Natural England.<sup>8</sup>

### 1.2 'Natural Beauty' defined

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The primary purpose of AONB designation remains rooted in natural beauty. The term was enshrined in the 1949 act when a Romantic idea of scenic value still prevailed. Over the years qualification and amendment to the legislation has made it clear that natural beauty includes considerations such as wildlife, geological features and cultural heritage but is not restricted by them.<sup>9</sup> Government guidance relating to AONBs provides a useful non-technical definition: "Natural Beauty" is not just the look of the landscape, but includes landform and geology, plants and animals, landscape features and the rich history of human settlement over the centuries'.<sup>10</sup> More recently the *Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006* clarified that land used for agriculture, woodlands, parkland or with physiographical features partly the product of human intervention in the landscape, is not prevented from being treated as an area of 'natural beauty'.

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<sup>6</sup> Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty: A Policy Statement 1991. CCP 356 (Countryside Commission)

<sup>7</sup> Guidance for the review of AONB Management Plans (Countryside Agency, CA 221, 2006, p.6)

<sup>8</sup> *Guidance for assessing landscapes for designation as National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in England*, Natural England, March 2011

<sup>9</sup> *A draft statement on natural beauty*, The University of Sheffield, January 2006

<sup>10</sup> *Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty: A guide for AONB Partnership members*, Countryside Commission, CA24, November 2001, p.6



**IUCN Category V Protected Landscape/Seascape** is a protected area where the interaction of people and nature over time has produced an area of distinct character with significant ecological, biological, cultural and scenic value: and where safeguarding the integrity of this interaction is vital to protecting and sustaining the area and its associated nature conservation and other values.

## The European Landscape Convention

### General measures

- Recognition of landscapes in law as an essential component of people's shared heritage;
- Implementation of landscape policies aimed at landscape protection;
- Procedures established for participation of the general public and local authorities in landscape protection;
- Landscape integrated into planning and other policies.

A range of other measures on identification and assessment of landscape; raising awareness and European cooperation

*The European Landscape Convention*, Council of Europe Treaty Series no. 176, 2004

AONBs are defined as areas not in a National Park but considered to be of such outstanding natural beauty that it is desirable to protect them. Government has confirmed that the landscape qualities of National Parks and AONBs are equivalent<sup>11</sup> and current guidance makes it clear that the practical application of the natural beauty criterion is identical for both National Parks and AONBs.<sup>12</sup>

### 1.3 Designation enacted

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The first AONB in the United Kingdom was designated in 1956 and the most recent in 1994. The Designation Order for the High Weald AONB is dated to 4th December 1980, and the date of the Confirmation Order is 23rd October 1983. It is the fourth largest AONB and has the second highest number of local authority partners.

## National and international context

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### 1.4 International protected area policy

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Protected areas remain the fundamental building blocks of virtually all national and international conservation strategies supported by governments and international institutions such as the Convention on Biological Diversity. They provide the core of efforts to protect the world's threatened species and are increasingly recognised as essential to the provision of ecosystem services, biological resources and climate change mitigation strategies.

AONBs are recognised as Category V Protected Landscapes under IUCN's (International Union for Conservation of Nature) global protected area framework.<sup>13</sup> They offer a unique contribution to the conservation of biological diversity particularly where conservation objectives need to be met over a large area with a range of ownership patterns and governance; acting as models of sustainability and promoting traditional systems of management that support particular species.

The importance of all landscapes is recognised by the *European Landscape Convention*, ratified by the UK government in 2006.

Article 1 defines "landscape" as 'an area perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and human factors'.

UK government policy reflects these aspirations through an implementation strategy drawn up for Defra by Natural England and English Heritage and through documents such as Natural England's position statements on landscape.<sup>14</sup> The European Science Foundation proposes that landscapes offer a new and unifying way of approaching the major challenges facing our society in the future and could become the basis for sustainable development.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty*, written answers, Hansard, 13.06.2000

<sup>12</sup> *Guidance for assessing landscapes for designation as National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in England*, Natural England, March 2011

<sup>13</sup> *Guidelines for Applying Protected Area Management Categories*, IUCN, 2008

<sup>14</sup> *Landscape Position Statements*, Natural England 2009

<sup>15</sup> *Science Policy Briefing 41: Landscape in a Changing World*, European Science Foundation, October 2010



## 1.5 Protected landscapes in England, Wales and Northern Ireland

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Protected landscapes – eight National Parks, the Broads and 34 AONBs – cover 23% of England. There are a further four AONBs wholly in Wales and eight in Northern Ireland. On national and international issues the AONB family is represented by the National Association for AONBs (NAAONB)<sup>16</sup> which works with the National Parks UK<sup>17</sup> to promote the importance of protected landscapes. Under the NAAONB umbrella protected landscape partnerships work collaboratively to further the socio-economic and ecological wellbeing of the UK's finest landscapes. Four common aims unite AONBs partnerships and AONB Management Plans reflect these ambitions:

- Conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the UK's AONBs ensuring they meet the challenges of the future
- Support the economic and social well-being of local communities in ways which contribute to the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty
- Promote public understanding of the nature and culture of AONBs and encourage people to take action for their conservation
- Value, sustain and promote the benefits that UK's AONBs provide for society including clean air and water, food, carbon storage and other services vital to the nation's health and well-being.

## Responsibility for the AONB

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### 1.6 Government, public bodies and agencies

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Governmental responsibility for AONBs is substantial and takes several forms: designating AONBs; providing a legislative and policy context wherein the purposes can be met; and direct involvement, guidance and funding of AONB partnerships.

The *Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000* sets out the procedure for future designation (by Natural England) and incorporates significant measures designed to address increased pressures on protected landscapes that had rendered the provisions of the 1949 act inadequate. Government policy reaffirms the special treatment for AONBs in other major policy areas: the significance of AONBs in the context of land use planning is considered in the *National Planning Policy Framework*, 2012; the Rural Economy Growth Review (Defra, 2011) supports the important role of AONBs in economic development and rural tourism; Making Space for Nature, 2010<sup>18</sup> and subsequently the *Natural Environment White Paper*<sup>19</sup> recognises the role protected landscapes play in reconnecting people with nature and the contribution they can make to a coherent and resilient ecological network requiring more and bigger sites that are better managed and joined. Other public bodies such as English Heritage and the Forestry Commission focus their activities through protected landscape strategies or joint accords to ensure their work reflects the distinctive nature of each AONB and helps deliver the priorities identified in AONB management plans.

From 1st April 2011 resources and responsibility for funding and strategic oversight of AONB Joint Advisory Committees, Conservation Boards and the National Association for AONBs transferred from Natural England to Defra. Natural England retains a role in delivering protected landscapes policy and a statutory role in respect of AONBs including powers to designate AONBs and vary their boundaries.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> [www.landscapesforlife.org.uk](http://www.landscapesforlife.org.uk)

<sup>17</sup> [www.nationalparks.gov.uk](http://www.nationalparks.gov.uk)

<sup>18</sup> *Making Space for Nature: A Review of England's Wildlife Sites and Ecological Network*, Chaired by Prof John Lawton, September 2010

<sup>19</sup> *The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature*, Defra, 2011

<sup>20</sup> Natural England Designations Strategy, July 2012



## 1.7 Local Planning Authorities

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Unlike National Parks, AONBs do not have authoritative bodies with their own planning or development control functions and other executive powers. Instead, responsibility for the designated purposes is concentrated in the hands of the local authorities – 15 in the case of the High Weald. Since the 1949 act, local planning authorities have been central to achieving the purpose of AONB designation, and their responsibility has been reaffirmed by Section 84 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act, in which they are empowered to **‘take all such action as appears to them expedient for accomplishment of the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB’**.

Local authorities have developed their responsibility in regard to the High Weald AONB to include:

- Local Plan formulation and development management that takes account of the purpose of AONB designation;
- Pursuing the purposes of AONB designation through other policy and work areas, such as rural economic strategies; biodiversity action plans; green infrastructure strategies; landscape and building design; grants; land purchase; countryside management services; Rights of Way maintenance and provision of affordable housing;
- Establishing, and part-funding, a partnership and staff unit to provide advice and focus action on caring for the AONB;
- Production of an AONB management plan.

## 1.8 Public bodies and the duty of regard

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Public bodies are expected to be able to clearly demonstrate that they have considered the purposes of AONB designation in their decision making.<sup>21</sup> Section 85 of the CROW Act requires that relevant authorities should ‘have regard’ to the purpose of AONBs ‘in exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land’ in these areas. These include statutory undertakers, regulators, parish councils, and holders of public office in addition to government and local planning authorities. AONB Management Plan policies can be used to help assess the relevance of proposals to the designation purpose, the extent of their impact, and if necessary to formulate a *proportional* response.

## 1.9 The High Weald Joint Advisory Committee (JAC)

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The need for active measures to conserve and enhance AONBs led to the setting up of partnerships of representatives, Joint Advisory Committees (JAC). A JAC was established for the High Weald AONB in 1996, evolving out of the High Weald Forum – a wide representative group set up in 1989. The High Weald JAC is a partnership of all 15 local authorities covering the AONB, Natural England, and organisations representing wider AONB interests. These partners work together building an understanding that crosses administrative boundaries and delivers national objectives in a way that reflects local needs and strengths. The main role of the High Weald JAC and its small staff unit is to prepare the AONB Management Plan and co-ordinate its implementation. This includes promoting the purpose, significance and character of the AONB; providing

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<sup>21</sup> *Duties on relevant authorities to have regard to the purposes of National Parks, AONBs and the Broads: Guidance Note*, Defra, 2005



advice and guidance to stakeholders on its sustainable management; promoting best practice; raising funds to assist management activity; undertaking research; and monitoring the condition of the AONB.

## **1.10 Land managers**

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The beauty of the High Weald is largely the result of how the land has been shaped by farmers, land managers and skilled craftsmen and women over centuries. Land managers continue to exert the greatest influence on the AONB's condition and quality although their decisions may in turn be influenced by external factors including regulation and policy. The impact of land managers on the High Weald predates the AONB designation by millennia, and has long been linked to a conscious sense of responsibility for the countryside, the rural society and the economy. The future of the High Weald depends upon the active support of land owners, their advisers and those engaged in land based businesses, crafts and countryside management.

## **1.11 Residents, visitors and businesses**

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Although not bound by a formal duty of care everyone who comes into contact with the AONB can contribute to its conservation through everyday actions. With one of the highest populations of any protected landscape and many visitors drawn to the area by its beautiful landscape, individual choices about purchasing local products; travelling sustainably; using renewable energy sources or actively managing gardens for wildlife, will help secure the High Weald's future.



# Approach and principles

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**Time depth analysis** explores the historic depth of the present day landscape: researching the extent, integrity and coherence of surviving features. It is not concerned with the fleeting moment and does not try to describe the purely visual qualities of the landscape. Instead it seeks to understand how people have created the landscape in response to its underlying geology, landform and the prevailing climate focusing on the historical processes that have changed the High Weald from the relatively unpopulated area it was 10,000 years ago to the very human and cultural landscape we see today.

**Landscape character** – a distinct and recognisable pattern of elements in the landscape that makes one landscape different from another.  
The Countryside Agency, *Landscape Character Assessment, Guidance for England and Scotland* (2002)



<sup>22</sup> *Landscape Character Assessment, Guidance for England and Scotland*, Countryside Agency, 2002

## 2.1 Scope of the Plan

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The primary purpose of designation and the secondary purposes, or qualifications of the primary purpose all refer to *natural beauty*. The scope of this Plan is dictated by its role and the purpose of designation. This translates to a focus on the *natural beauty* of the High Weald – its character and the special qualities we associate with it – and the needs of rural industries, the community and visitors in relation to that natural beauty.

The approach of the Plan is underpinned by systematic investigation of the history of the landscape and the forces that have shaped it. 'The Making of the High Weald' and other studies in support of this plan have provided **time-depth and objective analysis, conforming with the key principles of Landscape Character Assessment**<sup>22</sup> so that the management priorities for the AONB are firmly based on an understanding of the fundamental and defining character of the whole area – that is, those components of natural beauty that have made the High Weald a recognizably distinct and homogeneous area for at least the last 700 years and that will continue to define it in the future.

## 2.2 Natural beauty: character

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The Plan identifies five key components of character that combine in a distinctive pattern and form the fabric of the landscape we see today:

- Geology, landform, water systems and climate
- Settlement
- Routeways
- Woodlands
- Field and Heath

These are described in the Statement of Significance (page 26) and the policy of the Plan is structured around them. The character of these components was formed by the interaction of man and nature over time and has survived major historical events and technological changes leaving us a landscape which appears essentially medieval yet encompasses surviving features from many different time periods. The loss, damage or deterioration of any of these key components would fundamentally alter the character and quality of the natural beauty of the High Weald.

The AONB Management Plan focuses on the components of character that define the High Weald's *natural beauty* in line with the purpose of designation. A broader description of environmental character can be found in the High Weald Natural Character Area Profile produced by Natural England and descriptions of landscape character areas identified across the counties and districts that intersect with the AONB are provided by County and District landscape character assessments.

## 2.3 Natural beauty: perceptions and special qualities

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The form and pattern of physical components in the landscape can be described objectively while our perceptions of it and the special qualities **Page 25** tend to be more subjective and address how we respond to this character through our senses, emotions and intellect.



## National and internationally important features include

- Ashdown Forest SPA & SAC
- Hastings Cliffs SAC
- Listed buildings e.g. Battle Abbey
- Scheduled monuments
- SSSIs and NNRs
- UK Biodiversity Action Plan species
- Registered parks and gardens

## Locally distinctive features include

- Hop gardens and orchards
- Oast houses and windmills
- Abbeys, castles, churches
- local shops and services
- Veteran trees and local wildlife sites
- Historic houses and designed landscapes,
- Ponds, pits, archaeological features and rock outcrops
- Relics of the iron industry
- The cliffs and coast
- Building details such as traditional weatherboarding, clay tiles, catslide roofs
- Timber frame farm buildings and 'hall houses'

The value we place on our perceptions are shaped by many factors including taste, culture, background and understanding. These values may change over time even if the intrinsic character or natural beauty of the landscape does not. Special qualities encompass our sense of tranquillity or appreciation of dark skies; the values we place on views, memories and associations; and on the physical experiences of engaging with landscape through travel or activity.

The idea of scenic beauty plays a significant role in the designation of AONBs and National Parks. In 1949 society collectively decided that these landscapes possess a 'natural beauty' that is nationally significant, embodying scenic qualities so highly valued that they should be preserved for the nation. Legislation was passed to protect them: the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act.

## 2.4 Nationally important and locally distinctive features

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Interweaving and enriching the fundamental character of the AONB's natural beauty are a myriad of details that form people's everyday experience of the High Weald. Many of these features have a value that is not intrinsically related to their location in the High Weald – such as sites important at a European level for wild birds (SPAs) or nationally important battlefields – while others – such as hop gardens – appear to be quite transitory when set against the long history of the High Weald, yet have a value that often lies in their lifelong familiarity to individuals.

This Plan seeks to assist communities identify what features they value in their local countryside and participate in setting priorities for their management.

## 2.5 The importance of the setting of an AONB

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AONBs are not isolated units. They are connected to surrounding landscapes ecologically, economically, socially and through the action of natural processes such as hydrology and pollination. Development and other activities within the setting of an AONB may have an impact on all these processes as well as affecting views into and out of the AONB.

The High Weald is surrounded on three sides by the Low Weald with which it shares many environmental and socio-economic characteristics. To the east the main rivers drain into the contrasting reclaimed landscape of Romney Marsh. Conservation practices and economic ties with these areas can support the AONB vision.

## 2.6 Landscape (or ecosystem) services and natural resource management

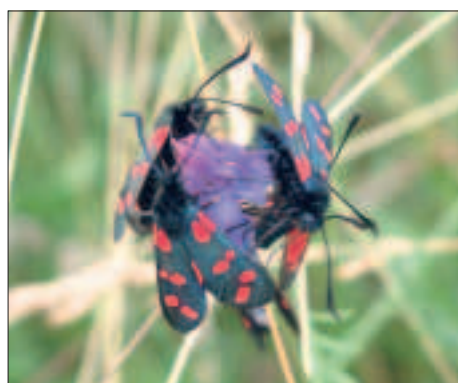
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The Management Plan adopts what the Convention on Biological Diversity terms an 'Ecosystem Approach': integrated management of air, water and living resources to promote the conservation and sustainable use of the AONB in an equitable way (although in a cultural landscape like the High Weald the term 'socio-ecological' system, which gives greater recognition to the critical role people and their social systems play in shaping the landscape, is preferred as a better description of the complex system of dynamic inter-relationships between the human, social and natural assets of the AONB).

The concept of 'Ecosystem Services' as set out in the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment offers a framework for considering the role of nature in providing life-support and life-fulfilment to people. It is used in the management planning process as a tool to assess the condition of those functions of a working landscape that are valued by people as services (or 'benefits') and to identify where changes in management can improve the quality or flow of these services. These services include provision of clean air and water; maintenance of liveable climates; production of food, fuel and fibre; pollination of crops; control of pests; provision of genetic resources and provision of cultural, spiritual and intellectual experiences.

## Climate regulation

Improving carbon storage is a multi-dimensional process. Currently the High Weald's ancient woodlands and the people who manage them help 'lock up' over a fifth of residents' carbon dioxide emissions every year, contributing to UK climate regulation targets.



## 2.7 Biodiversity

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Biodiversity underpins healthy ecosystems and the services they provide. It enhances the quality of AONB character components and is valued by people in its own right for cultural reasons and for its contribution to our well being.

The Plan does not address the particular needs of rare species or individual sites rather it articulates management objectives for improving biodiversity at a landscape scale across the AONB. These objectives seek to maintain or restore viable populations of species in their natural surroundings through the appropriate management of what is already a highly interconnected, coherent and permeable mosaic of semi-natural habitats and small scale agriculture. It also seeks to enhance ecosystem resilience and small scale heterogeneity through restoring traditional management practices that have sustained the landscape over generations. The Plan's objectives and targets are consistent with the Government's Biodiversity 2020 mission to halt overall biodiversity loss and support healthy ecosystems.<sup>23</sup>

## 2.8 A cultural landscape: economic land management and sustainable exploitation

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A long term view in both directions – past and future – is vital to policy. All of the UK's landscapes are predominantly cultural landscapes modified to a greater or lesser extent by people and this is reflected both in the European Landscape Convention definition of landscape and in the IUCN Category V designation for protected areas along with a recognition that these landscapes rely on continuing intervention to maintain their qualities, including biodiversity.

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<sup>23</sup> Biodiversity 2020: A Strategy for England's wildlife and Ecosystem Services, Defra, 2011



The High Weald has been beautifully shaped by people over millennia. Its landscape is pockmarked with successive eras of exploitation and evidence of human activity is everywhere. Understanding these processes allows us to draw some important conclusions of direct relevance to the management of the High Weald today, particularly the need to support traditional interactions between people and their landscape. It is likely that intervention in the form of public subsidy or support will continue to be needed to safeguard the most precious and vulnerable wildlife and cultural assets. But securing conservation of the majority of the AONB will depend on the economic viability of appropriate land management and the ability of people to make a reasonable living from the land and its resources. Providing advice and guidance on the best way to foster these traditional interactions as part of a modern and dynamic rural area lies at the heart of this management plan.

## 2.9 Sustainable development in dispersed settlement landscapes

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Sustainable development was defined in Resolution 24/187 of the United Nations General Assembly<sup>24</sup> as 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'. This principle is relevant to all government policy and operations.<sup>25</sup> Despite an on-going debate on the actual meaning, a few common principles are relevant:<sup>26</sup>

- A commitment to equity and fairness with account being taken of the impact of decisions outside the locality, and priority being given to improving the conditions of the world's poorest;
- The precautionary principle;
- Integration: understanding and acting on the complex interconnections between the environment, economy, and society not a balancing act or trading one issue for another.

Dispersed historic settlement landscapes like the High Weald have proved their sustainability over centuries and their settlement pattern can be an asset for communities seeking sustainable development in their locality. Understanding of the inherited character of landscape can contribute to a new framework for sustainable development decision making which goes beyond generic sustainability criteria to include criteria that relates to the type of place and to the aspirations of local communities.<sup>27</sup>

## 2.10 Objective-led management

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The plan articulates a consistent and reasoned series of management objectives based on the components of character reflecting the need for a focused, positive, and comparatively simple objective-led approach to management planning at an AONB scale. This approach allows the management plan to be used by all stakeholders as an objective and non-political tool for assessing the AONB perspective on wider matters, such as large-scale development, and for major policy changes. It provides a framework for partners and the wider community to generate their own ideas and projects in the knowledge that they are meeting the objectives of the AONB.

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<sup>24</sup> Our Common Future, Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987. Published as Annex to General Assembly document A/42/427

<sup>25</sup> <http://sd.defra.gov.uk/>

<sup>26</sup> Sustainable Development: From Brundtland to Rio 2012, United Nations, 2010

<sup>27</sup> *Sustainable development of dispersed settlement in the High Weald AONB*, Countryside and Community Research Institute, 2007



# Role and relationships

## Development in the AONB

The AONB Management Plan complements but does not duplicate the development plans of constituent local planning authorities. It does not itself propose policy to address development issues. Instead it sets out a 'criteria-based'<sup>28</sup> framework (the objectives and indicators of success for conserving and enhancing natural beauty) against which the impact of development on the purpose of designation can be assessed.



## 3.1 Policy structured around purpose and character

The Plan does not follow the format of other documents such as development plans and rural strategies that perform different functions. Instead it is tightly focused and structured around the purpose of AONB designation and the requirements of the CRoW Act. Thus, the main part of the plan is devoted to conserving and enhancing natural beauty. Within this, there are themes concerned with each of the five defining characteristics of the AONB. These sections cover geology, landform, water systems and climate; settlement; routeways; woodland; and field and heath. A second part of the plan focuses on 'public understanding and enjoyment'. This phrase was coined by the CRoW Act<sup>29</sup> and serves as an effective term for, and a reflection of current interpretation of, the recreational purposes of AONB designation and an assessment of the special qualities and important features valued by people.

This focus of the management plan means that it also has a role as an advocate for what is best for the AONB within the strict terms of its designation. While aware of the wider realities – such as pressure for major development – it does not attempt to balance the purposes of designation against non AONB concerns such as national defence, or regional economic regeneration. Judging the merit of competing interests for land is the responsibility of government, its agencies and planning authorities in conversation with stakeholders. The management plan provides such bodies with an objective, evidence based tool articulating what matters in terms of AONB purpose and the fulfilment of their statutory duties.

## 3.2 Role in relation to other plans

This focus on the primary purpose of designation needs emphasis, for it is the key to understanding the relationship between the AONB management plan and other plans and strategies that influence management of the AONB.

Local planning authority development plans, and the national policies and guidance that shape them such as the National Planning Policy Framework already provide a considerable level of protection for the AONB. The AONB management plan will inform future development plan policy, and assist in the implementation of existing policies, especially those that seek to conserve and enhance hitherto undefined 'character'. This relationship applies to some other plans (such as local waste plans), whereas with others (such as River Basin Management Plans under the Water Framework Directive; Natural England's National Character Area profiles; Local Nature Partnership (LNP) strategies and local biodiversity action plans) it has an advisory role and is in turn informed by them.

## 3.3 An evidence base

The AONB Management Plan provides an evidence base to support one of the core planning principles outlined in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF): that planning should take account of the different roles and character of different areas. This principle of understanding and utilising the character of places to inform decision making is relevant across all policy areas that relate to land

<sup>28</sup> *National Planning Policy Framework*, DCLG, 2012, Para 113

<sup>29</sup> *Countryside and Rights of Way Act, 2000, Section 87 (1)*, (clarification of duties in respect of AONB Conservation Boards)



and resource management. The Plan can also inform and support local plan and NPPF policies concerning:

- the requirement for good design which responds to local character and improves the quality and functioning of areas;
- the creation and management of ecological networks and green infrastructure;
- strategies for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment;
- a strong rural economy, housing and tourism developments which respects the character of the countryside.

### 3.4 AONB Management Plans and the planning system

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The Management Plan has a specific role to play in relation to Town and Country Planning (the 'Planning' system). As a statutory document, local planning authorities (LPA) must take the AONB Management Plan into account when formulating their development plans (including the Local Plan and any neighbourhood plans) and in the assessment of planning applications.

The long established 'Silkin'<sup>30</sup> test for major development in National Parks and AONBs forms part of national guidance to local authorities.<sup>31</sup> Because of the serious impact major development may have on these areas the test requires that all such applications be subject to rigorous examination and planning permission refused except in exceptional circumstances and where it can be demonstrated they are in the public interest. The Test suggests consideration of such applications should include assessment of:

- the need for the development and impact on local economy;
- the cost of, and scope for developing elsewhere;
- the detrimental effects on the landscape and any moderation.

The plan and its supporting information can assist in the application of these tests.

In terms of decision taking and determining planning applications the Management Plan is a 'material consideration' and has been tested through the appeal system. The plan can thus be very influential in the planning process and also assist LPAs in fulfilling their duty under section 85 of the CRoW Act to have regard to the designation when deciding planning matters.

### 3.5 Duty to cooperate

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Public bodies have a duty to cooperate on planning issues that cross administrative boundaries, including those that relate to strategic policies such as conservation and enhancement of the natural and historic environment.<sup>32</sup>

The AONB Management Plan process involving ongoing joint working between the 15 local authorities covering the High Weald provides evidence of effective cooperation meeting the requirements of this duty.



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<sup>30</sup> Hansard, HC Deb 31 March 1949 vol 463 cc1461-568

<sup>31</sup> NPPF, 2012, Para 116

<sup>32</sup> National Planning Policy Framework, DCLG, 2012, Para. 178-181



## Role of the AONB vision

- The vision for the AONB describes how the High Weald could look in the future.
- It takes a realistic and practical view that faces up to the likely demographic changes that increase demand for housing, lifestyle and technological changes, increase in traffic, climate change, and the decline of traditional farm businesses.
- It envisages environmental, social, and economic developments in the High Weald that support the primary purpose of designation: the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty.
- Environmental sustainability is at the heart of this vision. This means maintaining the capacity of natural systems; minimising resource consumption; protecting biodiversity and improving the quality of the natural and historic environment.

Our vision for the High Weald AONB in 20 years is a landscape which:

- Retains its remarkable character and scenic beauty, and is functioning successfully as an attractive place to live and work.
- Is adapting well to changing economic and climatic conditions.
- Is recognised and valued by those living, working and visiting the area as a nationally important protected landscape championed by the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- Is maintained under 'traditional' land management practices, carried out by people connected to the land through work, lifestyle and leisure.
- Displays the benefits of appropriate management in its highly interconnected and biodiverse ancient woodlands, meadows and heathland; and the improving condition of its routeways, sandrock and more naturally functioning river systems.
- Is embracing a low-carbon future with green technologies underpinning a strong rural economy and thriving communities.
- Accommodates an increasing number of households without compromising the characteristic historic settlement pattern as a result of strong planning policies and a sound understanding of the dynamics of sustainable communities.
- Celebrates its woodland history and nurtures a woodland economy whose timber products are highly valued.
- Sees land managed by a myriad of different people through diverse activities that are supported and nurtured where they deliver public benefits.
- Encourages active participation by people, their communities and businesses, in conserving the area and managing change.
- Provides a warm welcome and high quality experience for residents and visitors seeking inspiration and enjoyment of its landscape and rich, well understood and celebrated cultural heritage.



# Statement of Significance

The **Statement of Significance** defines the natural beauty of the High Weald AONB, its character and the special qualities we associate with it. It provides the criteria against which impacts on this nationally designated landscape can be judged.



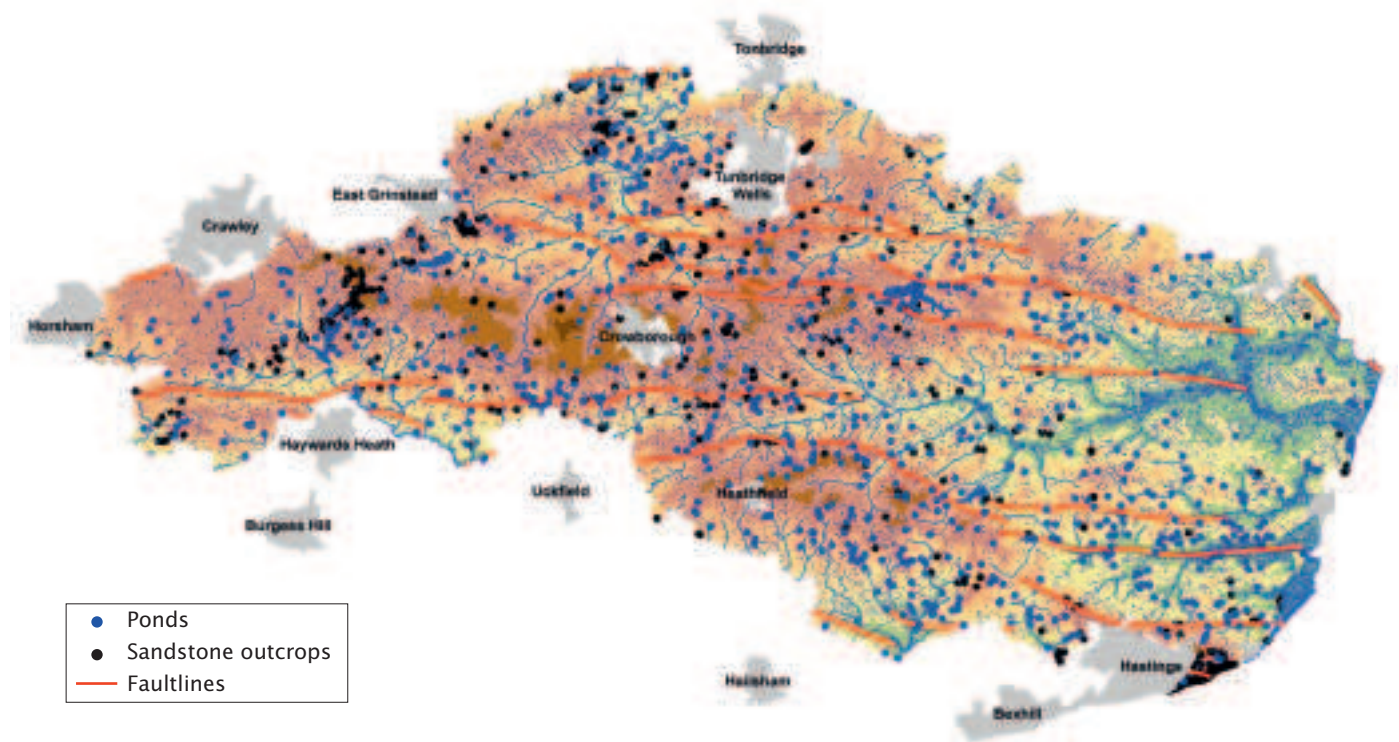
Time depth and objective analysis<sup>33</sup> has defined the High Weald AONB as characterised by dispersed settlement particularly historic farmsteads; ancient tracks and routeways; an abundance of ancient woodland, wooded heaths and shaws with a heritage of woodland industries and iron working and small, irregularly shaped and productive fields which combine in a distinctive pattern and form. These are all draped over a deeply incised and ridged landform of clays and sandstones with numerous gill streams, and are closely related to socio-economic characteristics that have roots extending deep into history. The essential character of the High Weald was established by the 14th century and has survived major historical events, and social and technological changes. It is considered to be one of the best surviving coherent medieval landscapes in Northern Europe: This fundamental and largely immutable character is the essence of the natural beauty of the AONB and the AONB Management Plan is structured around the five key components of this character:

- **Geology, landform, water systems and climate:** deeply incised, ridged and faulted landform of clays and sandstone. The ridges tend east-west, and from them spring numerous gill streams that form the headwaters of rivers. Wide river valleys dominate the eastern part of the AONB. The landform and water systems are subject to, and influence, a local variant of the British sub-oceanic climate.
- **Settlement:** dispersed historic settlements of farmsteads and hamlets, and late medieval villages founded on trade and non-agricultural rural industries.
- **Routeways:** ancient routeways (now roads, tracks and paths) in the form of ridge-top roads and a dense system of radiating droveways. These routeways are often narrow, deeply sunken, and edged with trees, hedges, wildflower-rich verges and boundary banks.
- **Woodland:** the great extent of ancient woods, gills, and shaws in small holdings, the value of which is inextricably linked to long-term management.
- **Field and heath:** small, irregularly shaped and productive fields often bounded by (and forming a mosaic with) hedgerows and small woodlands, and typically used for livestock grazing; small holdings; and a non-dominant agriculture; within which can be found distinctive zones of heaths and inned river valleys.

These fundamental components of character of the High Weald AONB are enriched by locally distinctive and nationally important details. These include castles, abbeys, historic parks and gardens; hop gardens and orchards; oast houses and parish churches; veteran trees, a rich and varied biodiversity, and local populations of key threatened species.

People value the scenic beauty of the landscape: its ancientness and sense of history around every corner enhanced by the rich array of appealing historic buildings and wonderful views. They appreciate the dark skies; enjoy the relative sense of tranquility and intimacy that this human scale landscape provides; the ability to get out and about through the landscape; the public rights of ways and the opportunities to get close to nature.

<sup>33</sup> Roland B. Harris, 'The Making of the High Weald' (2004)



*The High Weald has an unusually high density of ponds at 9 ponds per sq km many of which originated as small scale extraction sites for clay, stone and marl.*

## Character defined

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

## Vision

A landscape in which sustainable land management takes care of the natural resources of geology, soil, landform, and water systems, whilst delivering a wide range of social, economic and environmental benefits. The approach to land management will take account of, indeed will be partly stimulated by, climate change and rising sea levels.

Since the entire AONB is an important water catchment, much of the vision can be realised through the adoption of river restoration policies that seek to maximise opportunities for natural processes to reduce flooding; improve water quality; reduce soil erosion; increase biodiversity and amenity value; and encourage environmentally responsible land management and agriculture.



## Top five issues

- Understanding the capacity for small scale mineral extraction to support conservation of heritage buildings and assist rural businesses without damaging the AONB;
- Managing multiple interests on the sandstone outcrops – soft rock climbing and cryptogams – in the face of threats to the integrity of the sandrock and its humid microclimate from invasive species such as rhododendron; mechanical damage and the use of drying agents for climbing; and climate change (increase in rainfall intensity with longer dry periods);
- The need to find a long term plan for the drained landscapes of the Eastern High Weald river valleys which unites the interests of profitable agriculture and conservation of historic assets with sustainable water management and biodiversity;
- Pressure on groundwater supply and threat of damage from engineering solutions to meet the growing demand for water across the South East from increased households and changes in agriculture and horticultural practices;
- Understanding and responding to the affects of climate change on key landscape features and biodiversity.

### **G1 Objective: To restore the natural function of river catchments.**

**Rationale:** *To protect the built-environment and human life by safe water conveyance within river catchments, whilst increasing the range of ecosystem goods and services (e.g. improving the aquatic ecosystems and water resource provision and mitigating the effects of increasingly frequent and high peak flows) provided by the river catchments of the AONB.*

#### **Indicators of success**

- i) Reduction in the rate at which flood waters pass down the middle and upper reaches of the AONB's catchments, and reduction of excessive sedimentation due to water run off and flood flows;
- ii) Shift in the balance between the quantity of floodwater conveyed directly to the outfalls and the quantity diverted into temporary storage on the floodplains.

#### **Targets for 2019**

- a. Integrated water and land management strategies for river catchments within the AONB, identifying the potential for restoring natural functions and complementary with the Water Framework Directive;
- b. Sites which demonstrate river restoration techniques developed and promoted ;
- c. Review and supplement if necessary advice and support provided to ensure development and land management delivers sustainable water management;
- d. Integration of AONB policy objectives with Environment Agency's River Basin Management Plans, Shoreline Management Plan, Catchment Flood Management Plans and Water Companies' Water Resource Management Plans to ensure they fulfill their statutory duty to the AONB;
- e. Integration of environmentally responsible water policy objectives into other policy areas, such as the Common Agricultural Policy (including agri-environment schemes), water resource and land use planning to ensure a sustainable balance between water demand and supply;
- f. Land use measures fully attuned to the requirements of river restoration, contributing to an ecosystem services approach;
- g. Consultation facilitated on medium and long term objectives for the local areas of the Rother and Brede.



## **G2 Objective: To protect the sandstone outcrops and other important geological features of the AONB.**

**Rationale:** *To maintain the nationally important geological exposures; to conserve the fern, moss and liverwort communities they support; and to protect their value as some of the most significant sites of prehistoric archaeology in the AONB.*

### **Indicators of success**

- i. No change in extent of sandstone outcrops from 2012 baseline;
- ii. Favourable ecological condition achieved at important sandstone outcrops.

### **Targets for 2019**

- a. No loss of sandstone outcrops;
- b. Environmental management plan for the Brightling Gypsum mine and works complex reflecting AONB priorities;
- c. A coordinated campaign to promote the unique geological heritage of the High Weald with publically owned sites providing a lead in line with Geodiversity Action Plan;
- d. Integrated management plans in place for popular sandrock sites with vegetation management informed by the needs of key species; reflecting the views of all users and linked to climbing good practice guides;
- e. Guidance provided to allow small scale utilisation of the geological resources of the High Weald where this does not damage the AONB.

## **G3 Objective: Climatic conditions and rates of change which support continued conservation and enhancement of the High Weald's valued landscape and habitats.**

**Rationale:** *To reduce locally arising greenhouse gas emissions and allow the High Weald to play its role in mitigating climate change, whilst ensuring the landscape is best prepared for the impacts of climate change including enhancing habitat interconnectivity and developing adaptable land management systems.*

### **Indicators of success**

- i. A low carbon economy in the High Weald;
- ii. Adoption of appropriate land management practices that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and store carbon.

### **Targets for 2019**

- a. Use of renewable energy appropriate to the local landscape encouraged;
- b. Site specific design briefs for new development seeking zero carbon standards and use of materials with low embodied energy;
- c. Support in place for businesses seeking to encourage the meeting of local needs through local networks (e.g. food, materials, energy);
- d. Guidance on transition to a low carbon landscape promoted;
- e. Climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies taking account of AONB features;



# Settlement



*The High Weald has over 3,500 historic farmsteads with a third incorporating at least one building dating from the seventeenth century or earlier.*

## Character defined

**The High Weald AONB** is characterized by dispersed historic settlements of farmsteads and hamlets, and late medieval villages founded on trade and non-agricultural rural industries.

## Vision

A landscape in which the distinctive and historic pattern of settlement of the High Weald is protected in a way that positively contributes to the natural environment and improves the connections between settlements and the countryside. Appropriately worded land use planning policies within relevant development plans ensure that settlements retain their distinctiveness and individual historic buildings and conservation areas and buried archaeological remains are conserved and enhanced as appropriate.

This vision can be realised through new resources, and the application of planning policies and guidance that seek to control development on the basis of an understanding of rural sustainability; promote the traditional pattern of High Weald villages; maximise environmental design and construction quality including, where appropriate, by the use of traditional and local construction materials; minimise resource consumption and promote alternative forms of energy; support appropriate businesses (especially those based on and supporting productive use of land, and community objectives); and the enhancement of the historic environment.





## Top five issues

- Threats (both individual and cumulative) to the character of the AONB from increased development pressure for housing within and adjacent to the AONB;
- Pressure for residential intensification unrelated to land management outside of towns and villages, resulting in suburbanisation of the AONB countryside;
- The erosion of character as a consequence of development (including large new and replacement properties, building modifications and boundary treatments) which fails to respect AONB character in terms of scale, form, design or materials, and is unrelated to local needs;
- The need to address the declining affordability of housing and the provision of workspace for rural businesses as part of the sustainable development of settlements, in order to maintain rural function;
- The need to have regard to historic settlement form together with sustainability considerations in the planning process, in order to inform development options and enhance design quality.

### **S1 Objective: To reconnect settlements, residents and their supporting economic activity with the surrounding countryside.**

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

#### **Indicators of success**

- i. Increase in the range of skills and economic activity related to local landscape products;
- ii. Facilitation, through farm diversification and other mechanisms, of affordable workspace and yards supporting land based economic activity.



#### **Targets for 2019**

- a. Needs analysis to understand the built development requirements of land based and traditional craft businesses across the High Weald;
- b. The important role land based enterprises play in maintaining the attractiveness of the South East Region as a location for business fully reflected in Local Enterprise Partnership programmes;
- c. The provision of affordable housing tailored to the needs of rural key workers embedded in housing policy and programmes;
- d. New initiatives and methods to reinforce or rebuild capacity for land management;
- e. Opportunities for the imaginative re-use of rural buildings to be explored, including to revive local markets, support economic activity and provide seasonal outlets for local produce;
- f. Community growing schemes; social forestry initiatives, and other activities promoting engagement with local land managers facilitated and supported;
- g. Schools, colleges and public institutions in active partnership with local land based businesses e.g. supplying local food; wood fuel; utilising wood in construction or mentoring rural skills training;
- h. Initiatives to improve rural settlements as habitats for wild species including support for wild flower gardening; bird and bat boxes; and the nesting sites lost from old farm buildings and information on managing land for invertebrates.

## S2 Objective: To protect the historic pattern of settlement.

**Rationale:** *To protect the distinctive character of towns, villages, hamlets and farmsteads and to maintain the hinterlands and other relationships (including separation) between such settlements that contribute to local identity.*

### Indicators of success

- i. Development schemes respecting and reinforcing the historic settlement pattern;
- ii. Increase in character-based evidence and guidance informing development proposals and enhancing the design of rural development.



### Targets for 2019

- a. Dispersed historic settlement character including their hinterlands, functional relationships and separation reflected in local development plan documents and supporting reports including green infrastructure strategies and landscape character assessments;
- b. Guidance produced on re-use of historic farmsteads in the Weald;
- c. The preparation of local settlement form and building design studies facilitated for villages and small settlements without an Extensive Urban Survey, with support provided for community engagement;
- d. Investigate the incorporation of 'character' as a dimension within assessments of sustainable development;
- e. Information on the historical development of settlements and their surrounding landscapes, including access to historic maps, readily accessible online;
- f. Settlement character and relationships within the setting of the AONB, and crossing the AONB boundary, reflected in planning policy documents;
- g. Explicit regard to be given to the core components of natural beauty in the planning of development in and adjacent to the AONB.

## S3 Objective: To enhance the architectural quality of the High Weald.

**Rationale:** *Materials as a means of protecting the environment and adding to this distinctiveness.*

### Indicators of success

- i. Increased uptake of building conservation advice and advice; on layout and spaces reflecting High Weald character
- ii. Wider use of local materials in development.

### Targets for 2019

- a. Request prioritisation of a review of listed buildings in the Weald with all historic rural and farm buildings to be included on the Historic Environment Register (HER) as heritage assets and provision of building conservation advice and funding support extended;
- b. Widespread use of local materials particularly timber (reflecting the traditional of timber frame building) in construction, with coordinated support for good design and specification; improving the supply chain and fusing traditional skills with new technologies;
- c. Improved design quality supported by production of High Weald specific design guidance on built form, architectural detail, composition and layout of spaces, and local materials;
- d. Design of highways, hard landscaping and the Public Realm associated with development to have regard for local distinctive character and avoid over-suburbanisation.

# Routeways



*96% of High Weald roads and a high proportion of Public Rights of Way are historic communication routes.*

## Character defined

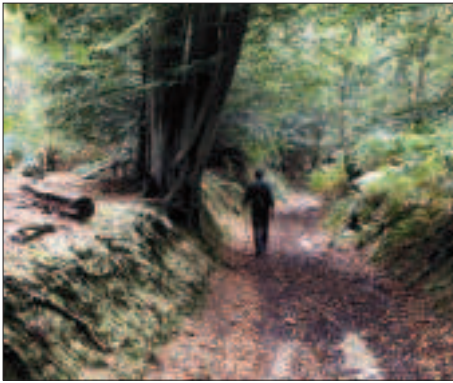
**The High Weald AONB** is characterized by ancient routeways (now roads, tracks and paths) in the form of ridge-top roads and a dense system of radiating droveways. Ancient routeways are often narrow, deeply sunken, and edged with trees, hedges, wildflower-rich verges and boundary banks.

## Vision

A landscape in which the character of the distinctive lanes and Rights of Way is protected and a balance achieved between the comparative quietness and rurality of the roads of the High Weald and their function as communications central to the economic and social well being of the area. The management will take account of, and indeed is partly stimulated by increasing road traffic, safety concerns, increased leisure activities (riding, cycling, walking and off-road driving), under use of many Rights of Way, and expanding development.

The vision can be realised through refinement of existing policies and designations that seek to protect archaeology and ecology, and that restrict ribbon development, and through refinement of policies and guidelines that seek to respect the character of lanes and Rights of Way by encouraging use of sympathetic surfacing materials and boundary types; reducing unnecessary use of highway furniture; and by promoting selected walking, cycling and riding routes.





## Top five issues

- Origin, function and archaeology of ancient routeways remaining under-researched and poorly understood leaving irreplaceable historic assets vulnerable to unintentional damage;
- Damage to routeway character from increasing use of large agricultural machinery, footpath diversions, and the suburbanising effects of highway improvement schemes; access road realignments and inappropriate gates and boundary materials;
- Species rich road verges damaged by inappropriate management activity such as poorly timed mowing regimes and dumping of chipped arboricultural arisings;
- Meeting the challenge of declining local government budgets for highway and rights of way maintenance which may exacerbate the impact of poorly informed management but offers opportunities for reducing the intensity of use along some roads;
- Virtual cessation of traditional management of trees and ancient laid hedges along sunken roads and paths with over mature stems liable to break and damage stools and boundary banks.

### **R1 Objective: To maintain the historic pattern and features of routeways.**

**Rationale:** *To maintain routeway boundaries that form a part of the habitat mosaic of the High Weald; to maintain this key component of what is a rare UK survival of an essentially medieval landscape; to maintain a routeway network that has a symbiotic relationship with settlement location, hinterlands, and identity; and to protect the individual archaeological features of the historic routeways.*

#### **Indicators of success**

- i. Increased protection for the best preserved examples of networks of ancient routeways;
- ii. Reduction in footpath diversions along ancient routeways;
- iii. The undeveloped nature of rural lanes maintained.



#### **Targets for 2019**

- a. Baseline mapping of the ancient routeway network extended to cover public rights of way, private tracks and abandoned paths; utilising community initiatives where possible;
- b. Formal identification of ancient routeways as a heritage asset within the planning system with the best designated for further protection at a local level;
- c. Partnership working with Highways Authorities, parish councils and others to develop a design code for rural lanes promoting the use of characteristic boundaries and minimising the impact of intrusive highway engineering and signage;
- d. A Weald wide initiative to support the retention and restoration of turnpike features (e.g. milestones, toll houses); finger posts and boundary stones;
- e. An understanding of ancient routeways and their associated settlements informing rights of way planning and management including footpath diversions;
- f. Archaeological research to better understand the origin and function of ancient routeways and their associated features;
- g. An awareness campaign targeted at all users of the network, motorised and non-motorised, to raise awareness of the sensitive character of ancient routeways;
- h. Parish councils and community groups increasingly engaged in conserving and protecting ancient routeways.



## **R2 Objective: To enhance the ecological function of routeways.**

**Rationale:** *To improve the condition and connectivity of habitats along routeways for wildlife.*

### **Indicators of success**

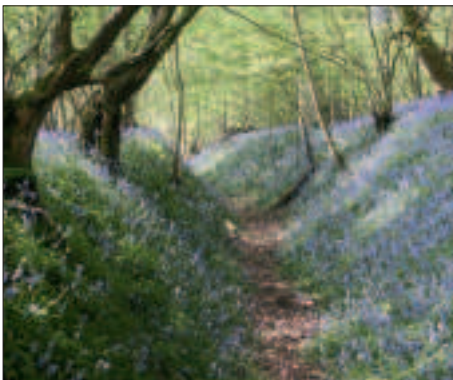
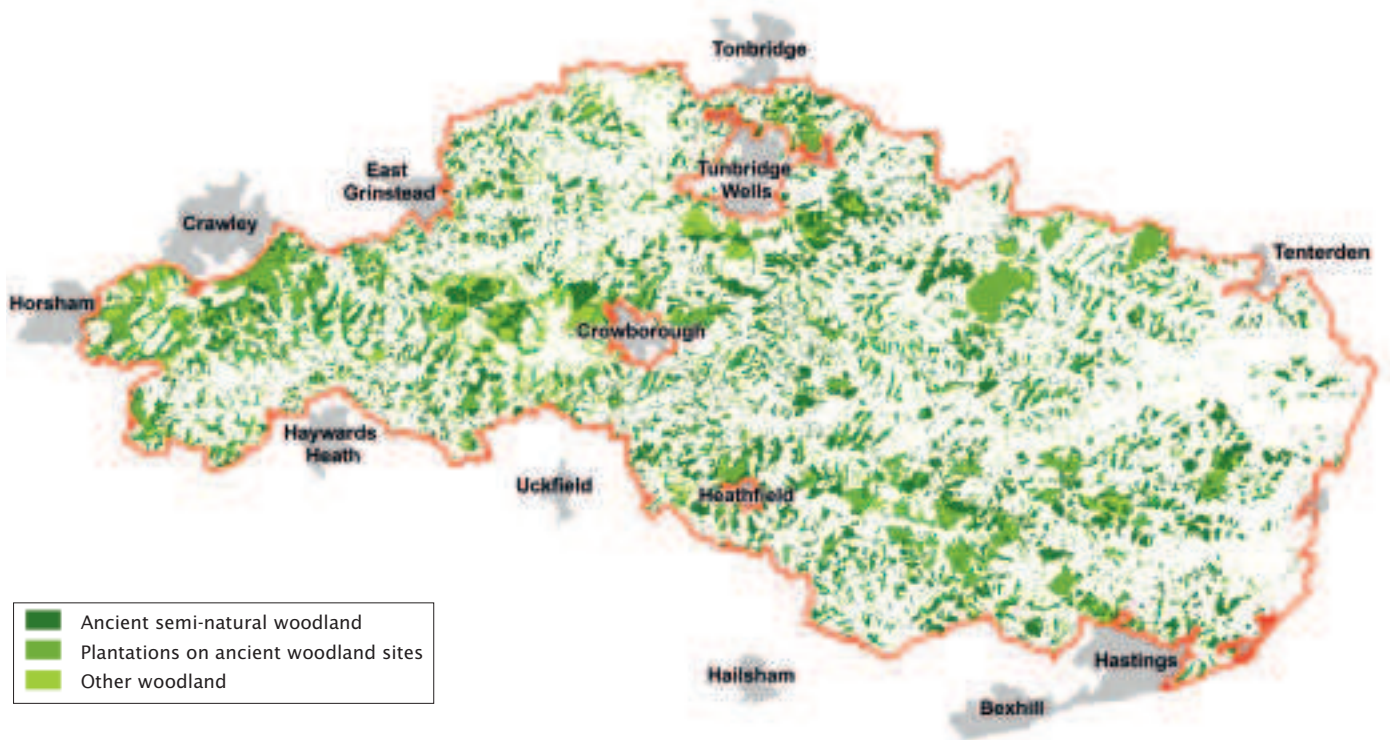
- i. Increase in highway management schemes tailored to the needs of species rich road verges.

### **Targets for 2019**

- a. Community and expert led initiatives to identify the ecological features of routeways supported and baseline mapping of species rich routeway verges completed across the AONB;
- b. A designation programme of roadside nature reserves or equivalent extended across the AONB with guidelines for their conservation and enhancement informing the actions of highways authorities, land owners and other managing agents;
- c. The contribution ancient routeways make to a well-functioning ecological network, particularly for ancient woodland species, informing green infrastructure planning;
- d. Partnership working with highways authorities, landowners and relevant experts to review and develop approaches to the management of roadside trees and overstood coppice.



# Woodland



*The High Weald has 27% woodland cover, nearly three times the national average.*

*Over two-thirds of this is Ancient Woodland (19% of the area) representing 8% of England's Ancient Woodland resource.*

## Character defined

**The High Weald AONB** is characterized by the great extent of ancient woods, gills, and shaws in small holdings, the value of which is inextricably linked to long-term management.

## Vision

A landscape in which the nationally important assemblage of ancient woodland in the High Weald is managed in a sustainable way to maximise its full wildlife, landscape and historical value. Within this, connectivity between woodland and other habitats is enhanced, archaeology protected, sensitive use for leisure and recreation encouraged, and traditional woodland management active in producing high-quality timber and valued underwood to supply the local markets.

This vision can be realised through strategic focusing of management on key woodland areas (built on better understanding); through new initiatives and policies that seek to support the development of a thriving woodland industry; stimulating new markets for bulk use of coppice; supporting better marketing of local timber and coppice products; increasing understanding and enjoyment of the High Weald's woodland and providing expert advice to land managers.



## Top five issues

- Increasing threat to the viability of small scale coppice businesses vital to the long term management of sensitive ancient woodlands from a combination of socio-economic factors including the lack of affordable rural housing and secure work space; the focus of policy and support on industrial forestry practices;
- Ongoing decline in the species associated with managed coppice including woodland butterflies such as fritillaries mirroring the decline in coppicing and ride management;
- Increasing incidence of fungus like pathogens and insect diseases affecting trees and woodlands increasing economic risk for the industry and requiring rapid adaptation of management practices;
- Ancient woodlands including gill woodlands under threat from eutrophication; trampling, disturbance and invasive species such as rhododendron;
- Deer browsing an increasing threat to woodlands and discouraging active coppice management, with the growing of higher quality timber trees also at risk from bark stripping by squirrels.

### **W1 Objective: To maintain existing extent of woodland and particularly ancient woodland.**

**Rationale:** *To maintain irreplaceable habitats for biodiversity, to maintain a key component of the cultural landscape, and to maintain contribution to carbon storage.*

#### **Indicators of success**

- i. No further loss of ancient woodland from 2004 baseline; (including woodlands under 2ha now identified in the Revised Ancient Woodland Inventory completed in 2012 for the High Weald).

#### **Targets for 2019**

- No loss of ancient woodland;
- An understanding of the national value of the woodland network as a whole, with its density of core sites supplemented by mosaics of small sites, recognised in ecological network mapping, green infrastructure and carbon management strategies;
- Any proposed increase in woodland cover to be informed by knowledge of the historical ecology of the landscape with small scale woodland creation buffering high value sites such as gills and enhancing landscape connectivity without ‘cutting across the grain’ of the historic landscape taking precedence over large plantations on historically open land.

### **W2 Objective: To enhance the ecological functioning of woodland at a landscape scale.**

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

#### **Indicators of success**

- i. Increase in the proportion of ancient woodland designated as SSSI or equivalent;
- ii. Increase in priority woodland sites under active management.

#### **Targets for 2019**

- a. Public bodies and charities owning woodland taking the lead, supported by targeted grant and advice mechanisms, in securing active management across large areas in multiple ownerships to i) maintain interconnected ride and open habitat systems across more Page 43 blocks of woodland particularly wooded heaths

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- and ii) provide appropriate conditions to reverse the decline of key priority species such as the Pearl-bordered Fritillary;
- b. The under-representation of the High Weald's Ancient Semi-natural Ancient Woodland (ASNW) resource in the national network of protected sites, remedied through complexes of small ancient woodlands, either independently or in association with larger ancient woodlands, designated as SSSIs or equivalent with support for appropriate management;
- c. Active interventions in place to control rhododendron with rhododendron eliminated in the most sensitive sites e.g. gill woodlands, with public bodies and charities taking a lead;
- d. Integration of habitat, species and management data across the Weald and support for landscape scale programmes targeted to reverse the decline in key species and protect vulnerable habitats such as gill woodlands; wet woodlands; veteran trees; wood pasture and parkland;
- e. Continuing support for the restoration of planted ancient woodland sites (PAWS) building on the success of the High Weald Ancient Woodland Restoration Project with public bodies and charities taking a lead;
- f. Establishment of a long term ecological monitoring and research programme to assess the management status of woodlands, and the impact of pests and diseases such as Ash dieback; climate change; deer browsing pressure and increased mechanisation on the woodland resource to inform future policy;
- g. Rural development support targeted at woodland businesses that can deliver small scale and sensitive management of ancient woodlands, with support also provided for businesses developing a supply of 'local seed' tree planting stock;
- h. Planning policies and decisions taking account of the low resistance and longer recovery times of woodlands; recognising the significance of incremental damage from trampling and disturbance by livestock, machinery and recreational pressure;
- i. Woodland owners and managers, and woodland contractors able to access specialised advice and training to support management of sensitive ancient woodland habitats and associated species;
- j. Felling licences and woodland grant schemes considering the potential impact on woodland ecology in the wider landscape, connected and adjacent woods as well as other habitats;
- k. Application of Natural England's Standing Advice on Ancient Woodland applied across the AONB in all relevant land use decision making with a minimum 15m<sup>33</sup> buffer and having regard for individual context;
- l. Support for veteran tree surveys to establish a baseline for monitoring and protecting such trees;
- m. Implement developing UK tree and plant health biosecurity policies and ensure effective liaison and communication between forest managers and plant health specialists.



<sup>33</sup> Standing Advice for Ancient Woodland, Natural England, May 2012



## **W3 Objective: To protect the archaeology and historic assets of AONB woodlands.**

**Rationale:** *To protect the historic environment of the AONB woodlands.*

### **Indicators of success**

- i. Increase in Historic Environment Records (HER) records for woodlands;
- ii. Increase in woodland managers and contractors trained in woodland archaeology.

### **Targets for 2019**

- Support provided for archaeological survey and research to remedy the under-recording of the woodland archaeological resource and inform its future management; integration of woodland archaeology data with the Historic Environment Records (HER), and improved dissemination of information online;
- Public bodies and charities owning ancient woodlands leading on proactively identifying and promoting the archaeology and historic assets of woodlands;
- Training in soil conservation and woodland archaeology accepted by forestry bodies and land based training providers as a minimum standard for machinery operators in ancient woodlands.

## **W4 Objective: To increase the output of sustainably produced high-quality timber and underwood for local markets.**

**Rationale:** *To achieve the most effective management that will deliver the other objectives for woodland, to contribute to sustainable domestic timber production, to support a working countryside, to contribute to UK and international targets for renewable energy.*

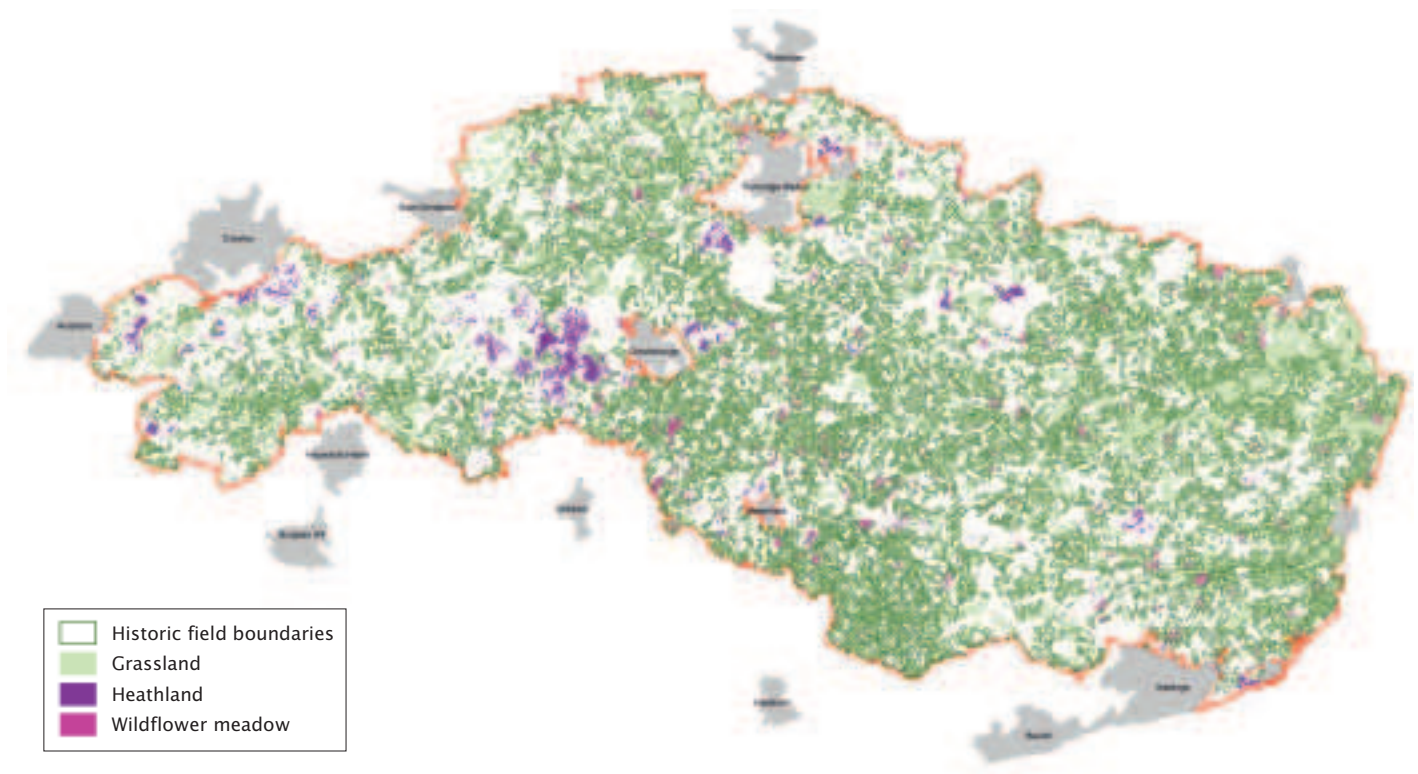
### **Indicators of success**

- i. Increase in number of skilled woodland workers;
- ii. Increase in residential dwellings utilising locally sourced wood fuel and/or timber in construction.

### **Targets for 2019**

- a. Public subsidy and support mechanisms for biomass and wood fuel tailored to the character of the High Weald, focusing on small scale residential and business log wood or mixed installations; local log wood networks and support for woodland businesses delivering sensitive management of ancient woodlands;
- b. The Deer Initiative expanded and effective deer control secured over large areas in multiple ownership with public bodies actively promoting venison consumption;
- c. Commitment by public bodies to promote and procure local wood products including chestnut fencing and timber in residential construction;
- d. Support for innovation and product development focused on utilising small diameter hardwood and softwood thinning for higher value local uses;
- e. Coordination with other bodies to lobby for tighter controls on the global trade in plants and improve biosecurity measures to minimise pest and disease threats;
- f. Investigate and consult on possible control and eradication proposals for grey squirrels;
- g. A partnership between forestry bodies, planning authorities and rural development initiatives to provide business support, training and planning advice in an integrated manner with a joint initiative established to tackle housing and yard space affordability;
- h. Training geared to efficient coppice harvesting and utilisation; programmes expanded to facilitate farmers and growers utilising wood on the farm, and vocational training in schools and colleges to support careers in woodland management and timber processing;
- i. Baseline assessment of the state of the woodland industry undertaken with special attention given to coppice workers and the extent of coppicing activity.





*There are 12,571km of historic field boundaries in the High Weald*

## Character defined

**The High Weald AONB** is characterized by small, irregularly shaped and productive fields often bounded by (and forming a mosaic with) hedgerows and small woodlands, and typically used for livestock grazing; small holdings; and a non-dominant agriculture; within which can be found distinctive zones of heaths and inned river valleys.

## Vision

A landscape in which the distinctive and historic pattern of fields is managed to maximise its full landscape, historic and wildlife value, and in which the special qualities of grassland and heathland habitats are enhanced and maintained by skilled land managers. Agricultural land is productive, whilst also contributing to sustainable land management and providing responsible access and enjoyment by the public.

This vision can be realised through new initiatives and policies that seek to maintain and expand traditional land-management skills, stimulate markets for local products, support a local infrastructure for productive farming, and provide expert advice to land managers.



## Top five issues

- The need to secure agricultural expertise and infrastructure through a period when small mixed farming systems are uncompetitive in the current market irrespective of their efficiency, resilience or wider benefits (such as resource protection and biodiversity) and with economic pressures currently favouring more industrial scale uses of fields, threatening ancient small scale field patterns;
- Reduction of capacity for land management within farmsteads as historic farm buildings and yards are converted to residential use and modern farm buildings are removed leading to pressure for new farm premises or processing space in the wider countryside;
- Excessive tidiness and lack of grazing animals providing traditional management of grassland and heathland resulting in fewer ecological niches and a less varied vegetation structure with the associated decline in biodiversity including insect pollinators such as bees, moths and butterflies;
- Climate change: the impact of unpredictable and extreme weather events, and outbreaks of new pests and diseases;
- Risk of significant loss of and damage to rare unimproved grasslands and recently enhanced flower rich meadows (and other older features which tend to have high biodiversity and carbon sequestration benefits) if CAP reform and proposed 'greening measures' do not properly address the needs of permanent grassland livestock farms or mixed farms with small arable areas.

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

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

#### **Indicators of success**

- i. Increase in grazing animals (cattle & sheep) contributing to land management;
- ii. Increase in business activity and numbers of people employed in agriculture, horticulture and related businesses;
- iii. Capacity for land management maintained within existing farmsteads and small settlements.

#### **Targets for 2019**

- a. Rural development funds better focused on support for livestock farmers and businesses associated with livestock farming including new technologies, dedicated support for new entrants and an increase in support for the maintenance and reinstatement of livestock infrastructure such as fences and gates, with a requirement to utilise local timber;
- b. Support provided for industry initiatives to match graziers with rented grazing at sufficient scale and tenancy length to offer sustainable businesses that are attractive to young farmers and new entrants;
- c. Facilitation and encouragement provided for expansion in collaborative farming projects such as meat producer organisations; area networks for communal Stewardship applications and producer/processor collaborations;
- d. A new High Weald initiative established integrating planning and land management support to foster small scale horticulture, community agriculture and innovative small scale processing activities.



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- e. Local authority and public body purchasing protocols reviewed to favour purchasing of local land management products where possible;
- f. Advice and assistance provided to small scale farmers and growers to help them utilise new media platforms to tell the landscape story of their products, and maximise niche marketing opportunities;
- g. Communication networks improved between farming and non-farming landowners, government agencies and specialist advisors to facilitate rapid adaptive responses to external events such as new pest outbreaks, and help maximise efficient production within environmental constraints;
- h. Wider benefits of permanent grassland and heathland recognised including soil conservation, carbon sequestration and water regulation and methods of valuing these services developed;
- i. The importance of diversified income streams to economic viability of small farm holdings in the High Weald recognised in policy and support mechanisms;
- j. Analysis of the built infrastructure needed to support profitable mixed farming in the High Weald informing planning decisions and pro-active assistance provided to existing markets, abattoirs and cutting rooms;
- k. A network of open heathland and wooded heath sites of varying sizes established with Ashdown Forest at the core to champion sustainable heathland management in the face of declining subsidy;
- l. Support for organic farming which has proven environmental benefits.

**FH2 Objective: To maintain the pattern of small irregularly shaped fields bounded by hedgerows and woodlands.**

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

**Indicators of success**

- i. Existing extent of surviving historic field boundaries maintained;
- ii. No loss of historic small fields;
- iii. Increase in hedges in appropriate management.

**Targets for 2019**

- a. Historic boundaries and areas of surviving medieval field systems recognised as significant heritage assets with protection embedded in planning and rural development policy;
- b. Agri-environmental schemes and other support mechanisms revised to provide a higher level of support for surviving medieval field systems and historic boundaries;
- c. Information about historic boundaries including data and maps made available to all landowners and land managers;
- d. A Weald-wide initiative established to record hedgerows; support hedgelaying and hedge management, and explore opportunities for the economic utilisation of hedge and boundary products including log wood, faggots and late summer fodder.



## **FH3 Objective: To enhance the ecological function of field and heath as part of the complex mosaic of High Weald habitats.**

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

### **Indicators of success**

- i. No further loss or degradation of known unimproved grassland sites;
- ii. Increase in area of enhanced flower rich grassland;
- iii. Increase in proportion of national and locally designated sites important for grassland and heathland in favourable condition.



### **Targets for 2019**

- a. Specialist advice provided to enhance the management of grassland for multiple benefits including expert advice on soil and nutrient management; agronomy; ponds and water courses; farmland birds and invertebrates; horse pasture management;
- b. Renewed support for a Weald Meadows initiative to foster the economic management of flower-rich grasslands; secure the supply of Weald Native Origin Seed and promote the uptake of cost effective grassland enhancement schemes;
- c. SSSI's and locally designated sites important for grassland and heathland assessed and support tailored to securing favourable condition in line with Biodiversity 2020 targets;
- d. Support provided for contractor training on conservation management techniques and use of specialist machinery;
- e. A campaign initiated to encourage non-farming owners to be less 'tidy' and manage fields for structural complexity and species diversity;
- f. Preparation of a High and Low Weald connectivity map to inform green infrastructure strategies and CAP targeting and greening measures, identifying location and management state of landscape elements that contribute significantly to soil, air and water quality and reversing biodiversity loss, such as permanent pasture; semi-natural habitats; land maintained out of production or managed for conservation purposes for continuous periods over successive years and longer established features that tend to have high biodiversity and carbon sequestration benefits;
- g. Agri-environment schemes refocused to:
  - i) better meet the needs of small scale mixed farms and focus on more extensive management of target features over larger patches of land, or groups of farms, to maximise biodiversity gain; resource protection, pollination and pest control benefits;
  - ii) focus on buffering and connecting the core unimproved grassland sites, encompassing support for management of grass margins/ patches to benefit invertebrates including reducing fertilizer inputs, improving structural complexity and enhancing the variety and seasonal range of nectar and pollen bearing plants;
  - iii) target support for heathland at large sites such as Ashdown Forest;
- h. Targeted business and rural development support provided for specialist conservation grazing enterprises including small capital grants or loans, and support for product development and niche marketing;
- i. Baseline mapping of all unimproved grassland and valuable species rich grassland completed with species recording carried out by experts and community initiatives where possible.

**FH4 Objective: To protect the archaeology and historic assets of field and heath.**

**Rationale:** *To protect the historic environment of the AONB other than the pattern of fields: i.e. the individual archaeological features.*

**Indicators of success**

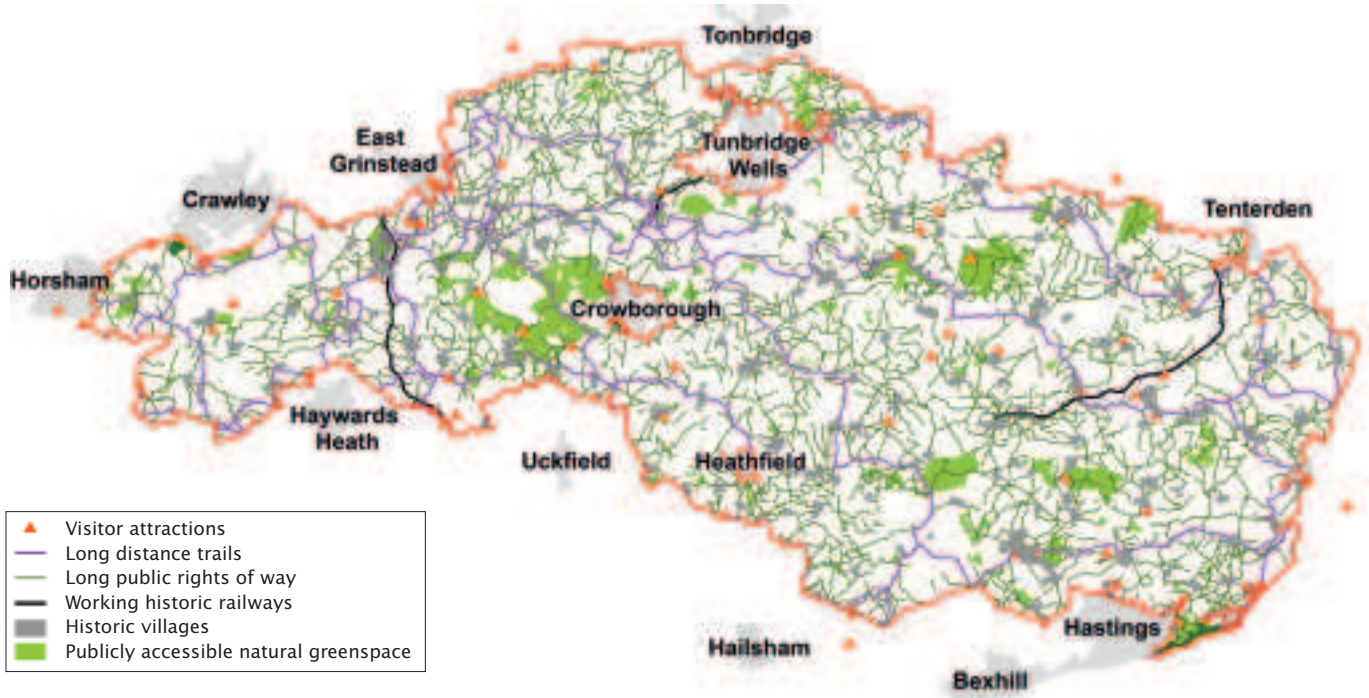
- i. Increase in archaeological surveys and Historic Environment Records (HER) for non-wooded sites;
- ii. Increase in assessments of significance or management plans for individual heritage assets.

**Targets for 2019**

- a. Recording and assessment of non-designated heritage assets carried out consistently across the High Weald, working with experts and community initiatives where possible, and contributing to a wider understanding of features such as historic parks and gardens; veteran trees; abandoned settlements; commons; military features; wharves and harbours;
- b. Understanding of the historic role of small quarries and pits in the socio-economic development of the High Weald recognised and informing decisions on future small scale extraction required to repair heritage assets.



# Understanding and enjoying the Area's special qualities



## Understanding and enjoyment today

**The High Weald** is valued as an area of scenic beauty that is attractive in which to live and work. Its rich array of appealing villages; historic castles, houses and gardens; reservoirs; cycleways; remnant medieval forests – Ashdown and Bedgebury – and coastline are well recognised. Most people use the AONB for open-air recreation. Visitors also value its distinctive accommodation. There is less appreciation of the landscape's wider antiquity, particularly its rich ecological and archaeological interest and knowledge of the wide array of smaller countryside sites is also more limited. Many areas of the High Weald retain a feeling of remoteness and tranquillity, including dark skies at night. Traffic, loss of rural character, decline in maintenance of the public rights of way network and uncontrolled pets are significant in marring enjoyment of the AONB.

## Vision



An AONB in which public understanding and the pursuit of enjoyment are increased in a manner that leads to more sustainable lifestyles and actions that protect and enhance the natural beauty of the High Weald.

This vision can be realised through promotion of leisure activities and education that increases understanding and enjoyment of the character of the High Weald and reconnects people with the land; stimulation of cultural activities that celebrate the character of the area and its icons – major historic events, artistic or literary creations, and famous people; support for conveniently and regularly available local products; curtilage design guidance for residences; initiatives that channel visitors towards locations with the capacity and infrastructure to support 'green' tourism activities; and support for non-car transport that reduces traffic on lanes and maintains the comparative tranquillity and remoteness of the area.

*The High Weald has 2126km of footpaths, 383km of bridleways and 61km of byway*

# Understanding and enjoying the Area's special qualities



## Top five issues

- Lack of knowledge about AONB designation and the benefits small changes in behaviours can bring;
- A focus on valuing views and visual enjoyment over maintaining the ecological and economic functioning of the landscape;
- The need to understand and recognise the role of knowledge and cultural tradition in how people value the aesthetic qualities of the landscape;
- Quality – the area's visitor services infrastructure requiring investment to meet demands for higher standards;
- Detrimental impacts of traffic and noise intrusion (including aircraft).

**UE1 Objective: To increase opportunities for learning about and celebrating the character of the High Weald.**

**Rationale:** *To help develop a commitment amongst residents, visitors and businesses to the conservation and enhancement of the AONB.*

### Indicators of success

- i. Increased participation of residents in community events that develop an understanding of the rural environment;
- ii. Increase in scope and coverage of character-based education and interpretation programmes and resources.

### Targets for 2019

- a. Joint working between tourism, countryside, education and arts sectors to develop innovative, celebratory countryside events and competitions for a wider audience;
- b. Increase in landowner-led events that further understanding of land management;
- d. Parish websites and magazines highlighting AONB character components within their area;
- e. Increased promotion of the AONB story and special qualities in tourism sector marketing activities and promoted through countryside sites, attractions and visitor information centres;
- f. Promotion of authentic experiences by the tourism sector based on local identity;
- h. High Weald introductory sessions/materials provided for training and education providers together with production of new videos and apps that promote AONB issues and development and promotion of character-focused heritage survey toolkits;
- i. AONB boundary project to raise awareness of the High Weald's location and character;
- j. Continuation of the AONB-focused primary school education programme, High Weald Heroes;
- k. Increase in Learning Outside the Classroom activities, for example Forest Schools initiatives that utilise local woodlands to teach personal, social and technical skills;
- l. Continued coordination of support for green tourism and tourism businesses through joint protected landscape initiatives such as 'Our Land'.





## **UE2 Objective: To increase the contribution of individuals to the conservation and enhancement of the AONB.**

**Rationale:** *The actions of the 127,000 residents of the High Weald, and the nearly one million people living within 5km of the AONB, have a significant impact on the AONB.*

### **Indicators of success**

- i. Increase in volunteering for countryside management activities;
- ii. Increase in membership of local ecological or heritage recording groups.

### **Targets for 2019**

- a. Awareness campaign focused on the Caring for the High Weald Charter issues and actions and support for projects that promote and enable residents and businesses to undertake such activities as: using less water; reducing, reusing, recycling;
- b. AONB introductory information provided for new residents
- c. production of AONB guidelines on maintaining the rural character of properties;
- d. Support for training events that offer opportunities for individuals to develop skills in countryside crafts; land management and heritage/ecological surveys and monitoring;
- e. Support for charitable trusts that support AONB work, for example the High Weald Landscape Trust.

## **UE3 Objective: To increase community involvement in conservation and enhancement of the AONB.**

**Rationale:** *The diverse communities with an interest in the AONB have a significant role in generating new initiatives, and protecting and enhancing local features and distinctiveness.*

### **Indicators of success**

- i. Increase in community led initiatives related to AONB conservation such as local character studies or conservation projects.

### **Targets for 2019**

- a. Continuing support for community environmental projects and maintenance of AONB character-influenced grant schemes;
- b. Support for community initiatives to record the AONB and manage threats such as Ash dieback;
- c. Support and facilitation provided for community projects that support AONB management objectives such as changing the behaviour of drivers; encouraging responsible dog behaviour; encouraging use of public transport;
- d. Support for parish and other community group led initiatives to identify and conserve locally distinctive features and characteristic sites.



## **UE4 Objective: To develop and manage services that support informal open-air recreation to facilitate 'green' use by all residents and visitors.**

**Rationale:** *To meet demand for recreation and ensure that this is consistent with the primary purpose of conserving and enhancing natural beauty through developing and promoting an infrastructure and services that maximise opportunities for everyone to enjoy, appreciate and understand the character of the AONB.*

### **Indicators of success**

- i. County Countryside Access Improvement Plans prioritising AONB works in recognition of their national role in enabling access and leisure use;
- ii. Increase in the range and extent of access opportunities to better meet the needs of the diversity of leisure users.

### **Targets for 2019**

- a. Quality of the Rights of Way (RoW) network prioritised in areas close to towns, villages, visitor attractions and within AONB rural tourism hubs (areas with a high concentration of visitor services and products);
- b. Public-sector promoted routes rationalised and updated against best practice criteria and maintained to high standards by Rights of Way teams;
- c. Strategic gaps in the High Weald ROW network for walkers, cyclists and horse riders identified with joint working to develop projects that address strategic gaps;
- d. Consultation exercises undertaken to understand the needs of existing and potential leisure users leading to improved welcome and orientation information at countryside sites to meet the user needs;
- e. A coordinated approach to improving the number of access projects that meet the needs of users with impaired mobility;
- f. Identification and promotion of viewpoints that enable appreciation of the High Weald landscape by people of all abilities;
- g. A requirement for new, and encouragement for existing, accommodation providers and attractions to produce and implement 'green' travel plans;
- h. Identification and promotion of themed High Weald character short breaks that can be taken using public transport;
- i. Increase in service providers achieving Green Tourism Business Accreditation or similar;
- j. Joint working to produce visitor management plans for sensitive sites and areas, for example Ashdown Forest;
- k. Networking events that enable sharing of best practice in the development of responsible tourism, behaviour of drivers; encouraging responsible dog behaviour; encouraging use of public transport;
- l. Support for parish led initiatives to identify and conserve locally distinctive features;
- m. Increase the variety of walking opportunities (self-guided and themed) to raise awareness of the positive health and wellbeing benefits of the AONB on your doorstep.



# Understanding and enjoying the Area's special qualities

**UE5 Objective: To promote the perceptual and aesthetic qualities that people value.**

**Rationale:** *To ensure that the special qualities people value are recognised and taken account of in AONB management.*

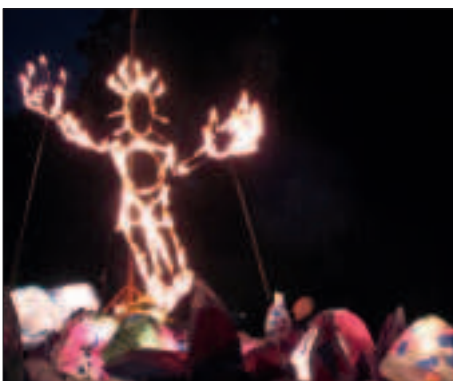
## Indicators of success

- i. Baseline information in place on the special qualities residents and users of the AONB value.



## Targets for 2019

- a. An understanding of cultural traditions that have shaped people's aesthetic appreciation of the landscape;
- b. Information on valued locally distinctive features generated by communities;
- c. Guidance on the conservation and management of special qualities and locally valued features produced such as:
  - tranquillity and dark skies
  - protection of views and assessment of visual impact
  - historic features – abbeys, hop gardens etc.
- d. Consultation exercises with residents, visitors and businesses to understand how people value the landscape;
- e. Support for projects that enable people to develop joint visions for their local landscape.



## 11.1 Implementing the Plan

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It is vital that the objectives of the management plan are embraced and acted upon by all those organisations and individuals that have a role to play in the management of the High Weald landscape and the well-being of its communities. Future plans, strategies and actions of key partners should reflect the vision and objectives of this statutory AONB management plan. For local authorities, it 'formulates their policy for the management of the area of outstanding natural beauty and their functions in relation to it'.<sup>30</sup> For government, public bodies, agencies and other 'relevant authorities', the AONB management plan is the key to their legal requirement to 'have regard' to the 'purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty' of the AONB: it is the only articulation of vision and objectives focusing on the High Weald as a whole.



*The Government's Independent Panel on Forestry visiting the High Weald in 2011*

## 11.2 Indicators and targets

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The plan includes Indicators of Success (IoS) and Targets for each of the plans objectives. These targets are ambitious and some run beyond the Plan period. Success will be limited by resources and in the current constrained financial environment a creative approach to delivery, adjusting existing operations to provide added benefits for the AONB will be key. Targets can only be met by organisations accommodating the plan's objectives into their own business plans, and by individuals, whether they own land or not, taking positive action to care for the area. The Indicators and Targets are not intended to be comprehensive. As yet unforeseen pressures and opportunities will require creative solutions and new partnerships in the future. Many of the non-AONB specific activities undertaken by partner bodies will make a positive contribution to AONB objectives, but gaps will remain. In order to meet some objectives there is an urgent need for new action and the forging of new partnerships.

## 11.3 The High Weald AONB partnership

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The JAC will have a key responsibility for promoting and encouraging co-ordinated action in support of the plan; for increasing awareness of and commitment to the management objectives; for seeking new funds and resources to assist implementation of key actions and for monitoring both the condition of the AONB itself and the achievement of the plan objectives. A three-year business plan (reviewed annually) will be prepared by the JAC setting out the key programmes where the partnership and its dedicated staff unit can make a significant impact. The JAC will need to continue its efforts to raise the profile of the High Weald amongst its partners, the wider community and government.

## 11.4 Government departments

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Support for AONB management plans as statement of public policy relating to the management of these nationally protected areas is integral to the aims and objectives of government departments and their agencies, particularly those with an influence over land and its management – Natural England, the Forestry Commission, the Environment Agency, Department for the Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), Department for Energy and Climate Change and



<sup>30</sup> *Guidance for assessing landscapes for designation as National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in England*, Natural England, March 2011





Department for Communities and Local Government. Ensuring staff are aware of AONB Management Plans and affording Plan objectives proper regard in decision making will be critical. Over this Plan period achieving AONB targets will depend on securing continued support for High Weald agriculture and forestry through the reformed EU Common Agricultural Policy and rural development scheme.

Government sponsored local partnerships such as Local Enterprise Partnerships and Local nature partnerships will play an increasing role in targeting funds for AONB purposes and integrating AONB objectives with other government priorities.

## **11.5 Local authorities**

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Consistency of planning policy and decisions affecting the AONB will continue to be promoted through the High Weald Officers' Steering Group. Further cooperation in ensuring AONB purposes and species protection issues are properly considered in planning decisions will be facilitated through continuation of planning protocols between AONB partner authorities, Natural England and the High Weald JAC.

In addition to the delivery of planning policy supporting AONB designation, local authorities can assist through continuing to support and fund the AONB partnership; developing community services such as countryside management projects across the AONB; the delivery of educational materials rooted in AONB character themes; a proactive approach to the procurement of local products and support for pilot initiatives such as wood fuel. Critical to achieving AONB Management Plan targets in this plan period will be a focus on support for the rural economy with coordination between planning policy approaches and interventions by economic development departments and Local Enterprise Partnerships.

## **11.6 Landowners and managers**

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Landowners and managers have a crucial role to play in the long term conservation and management of the AONB. Without their support the natural beauty of the AONB is at risk. Landowners and managers will be vital partners in action targeted particularly at key features or important habitat mosaics. Their response to national economic and land use policy pressures, CAP reform and changes in rural development policy will have a major impact on the AONB. Understanding landowner aspirations for their land, supporting cooperation between landowners where this is necessary to deliver wider environmental benefits, enabling change which contributes to AONB character and affirming good stewardship of the land will be important principles for public bodies.

*Support for livestock farming is essential to secure meadow and heathland conservation*





*Utilising local logwood helps achieve woodland conservation objectives*

## **11.7 Parish Councils, amenity organisations and community groups**

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These will be important partners driving projects on the ground, particularly those related to increasing public understanding and enjoyment, but also community initiatives to identify and protect locally distinctive features. The Localism Act and changes to the planning system may herald increasing involvement of parishes and community groups in determining the future shape of built development in the High Weald. Securing conservation of the AONB through these changes will be helped by engaging communities in developing understanding of the historic character of High Weald settlement and buildings. Communities developing neighbourhood plans have an opportunity to embed consideration of AONB character in decisions shaping the future of their communities.

## **11.8 Individuals, visitors and businesses**

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Through individual actions residents, visitors and businesses can contribute significantly to the care of the High Weald AONB and the achievement of management objectives. Formal and informal community groups and volunteer organisations have already contributed much to understanding the history of the AONB, and recording and managing its special features. Support and resources from partner bodies can help strengthen these partnerships.

A vibrant rural economy and confident rural businesses are vital to the future of the area. Rural businesses will be important partners in delivering the aspirations of the Plan. Understanding the needs of rural businesses, particularly small scale enterprises, and enabling change which contributes to AONB character will be important.



# Monitoring and evaluation



## 12.1

For the review condition monitoring has adopted an approach that focuses on analysing the drivers of change and their impact on the components of natural beauty over time, rather than the use of headline indicators for which there is an absence of relevant, consistent and repeatable AONB wide data sets.

This approach is based on expert knowledge and informed judgment. For each component, and its constituent features, our best current knowledge of the state of the feature is assessed. This is informed by any statistical or objective evidence available and is subject to a peer review process. The drivers of change affecting each component are analysed to identify potential threats and risk factors together with the trajectory and rates of change; likely impacts and our ability to influence them. Condition is described as a set of values for both the current state of the component (ranging from 'poor' to 'good') and level of threat (ranging from 'vulnerable' to 'under threat').

The AONB can be judged to be in 'good' condition if the state of the components of natural beauty identified by the AONB Management Plan are moving in the appropriate direction. Or it may be judged to be in 'poor' condition if the drivers for change are moving the state of components in the opposite direction to the objectives and/or if current interventions or influences are considered unable or unlikely to reverse the trend (see table on next page).

A full report detailing this approach and results is available on the AONB website.

### Summary of AONB condition 2013

Component		Sub element	Condition assessment
Geology, landform, water systems and climate	G1	River catchments	'Poor' condition and 'under threat'
	G2	Sandrock	'Good' condition but 'under threat'
	G3	Climate change (CC)	'Poor' condition and 'under threat'
Settlement	S1	Reconnect settlements with surrounding countryside	'Average' condition and 'stable'
	S2	Dispersed settlement pattern incl. historic farmsteads	'Average' condition but 'vulnerable'
	S3	Historic built form	'Average' condition but 'under threat'
Routeways	R1	Tracks and paths	'Average' condition and 'stable'
	R2	Ecology of routeways	'Poor' condition and 'under threat'
Woodland	W1	Woodland extent	'Good' condition and 'stable'
	W2	Woodland ecology	'Average' but 'vulnerable'
	W3	Woodland archaeology	'Good' condition but 'under threat'
	W4	Timber economy	'Poor' Condition and 'under threat'
Field and Heath	FH1	Agriculturally productive use of fields	'Poor' and 'vulnerable'
	FH2	Historic field boundaries	'Good' condition but 'under threat'
	FH3	Unimproved & semi improved grassland	'Poor' condition and 'vulnerable'
	FH4	Heathland	'Good' condition but 'under threat'
	FH5	Archaeology of field and heath	'Average' condition and 'under threat'



Completion of a revision of the Ancient Woodland Inventory has contributed towards achieving the Plan's targets for woodlands

## 12.2 Performance monitoring

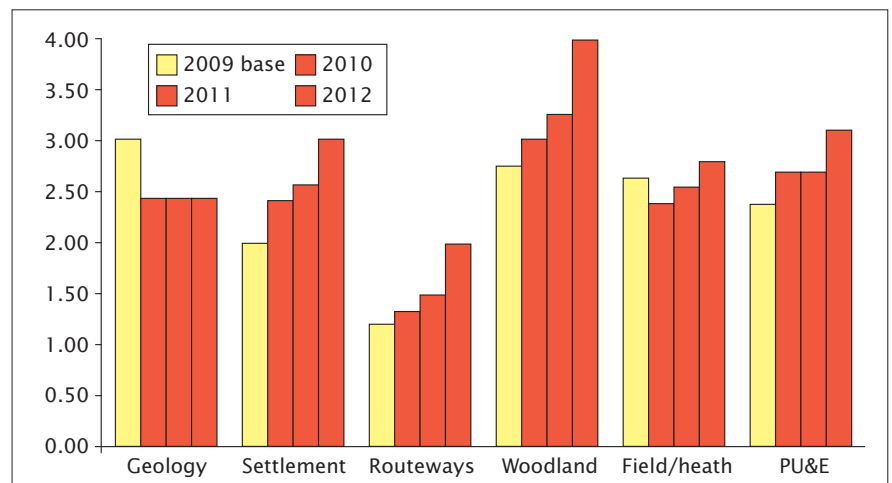
The High Weald AONB Management Plan is more than just a statement of character, and it is essential that the objectives and actions are evaluated. Performance monitoring of the plan has been designed to inform the review process. Plan monitoring has been ongoing since the 2009 plan review through an assessment of progress in meeting the reviewed plans indicators and targets.

The indicators have been assessed to show where they are being met or where progress is being made. Each Indicator of Success is scored against a scale of values:

- no change
- minor improvement
- improving
- partially met
- currently met

Comparing these across years, shows a steady increase in the delivery of the indicators, from 47.7% in 2010, up to 58% being achieved by 2012 (based on average scoring across all indicators). The plan continues to steadily meet its own indicators of success.

### Performance monitoring average results



Each Target in the plan has been assessed taking account of any projects, activity or stakeholder involvement that indicates whether the target is being achieved. The scoring is a simple and uses a 1 to 3 point scale for degree of success (1 = poor, 3 = high). The total points scored and maximum score possible is calculated for each separate objective and a total score derived. As shown in the table below.

Progress towards Plan targets for naturally functioning rivers remains a challenge







### Interim progress towards Plan targets (2012)

Objective	Scored	% (2012)	Change (2009-12)
G1	3 out of 15	20	+7
G2	5 out of 6	83	0
G3	7 out of 21	33	+14
S1	8 out of 18	44	+11
S2	9 out of 12	75	+9
S3	9 out of 15	60	+40
R1	7 out of 21	33	+19
R2	3 out of 9	33	+11
W1	5 out of 6	83	+17
W2	24 out of 33	73	+9
W3	13 out of 15	87	+34
W4	9 out of 18	50	+11
FH1	5 out of 18	28	+17
FH2	11 out of 15	73	+13
FH3	23 out of 36	64	+11
FH4	8 out of 18	44	+28
UE1	25 out of 30	83	+26
UE2	13 out of 30	43	+13
UE3	9 out of 21	43	+15
UE4	11 out of 48	23	+17
UE5	5 out of 9	56	+45
	<b>212 out of 414</b>	<b>51%</b>	<b>+17%</b>

A full report detailing the performance monitoring and results is available on the AONB website.

**BAP** – Biodiversity Action Plan.

**Biodiversity** or *biological diversity* is a term used to describe the variety of life on earth and the diverse patterns it forms. It includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems or ecological interactions.

**Coppice with standards** – a two storey woodland management scheme where some trees are left to grow on to a larger size among coppice (trees cut regularly back to their base so they will shoot again).

**Cryptogams** – Plants that have no true flowers or seeds including ferns, mosses, liverworts, lichens, algae, and fungi.

**Dispersed settlement** – a pattern of rural settlement where individual farmsteads and hamlets are set apart from each other.

**Droeways** – a route for driving livestock on foot from one place to another.

**Ecosystem** – dynamic natural systems operating between living things and their non-living environment which function at a range of scales.

**Ecosystem Services** – the benefits people obtain from ecosystems.

**Eutrophication** – enrichment of the environment with nutrients.

**Gill** – steep sided ravine.

**JAC** – Joint Advisory Committee

**Landscape permeability** – describes the quality of a landscape that allows wildlife to move freely across it.

**Perception** – the way our brains experience, organise and interpret information from the outside world gathered from our senses: touch, sound, smell, sight and taste.

**Policy** – a course of action.

**Routeways** – communication routes of roads, tracks, lanes and paths.

**Semi-natural vegetation** – vegetation not planted by humans but influenced by human actions either through deliberate or inadvertent management.

**SAC** and **SPA** – Special Area of Conservation and Special Protection Area (for birds) are European designated sites.

**SSSI** and **NNR** – Site of Special Scientific Interest and National Nature Reserve.

**Statutory duty** – An obligation imposed by Act of Parliament. Councils are legally obliged to fulfil statutory duties.

**Symbiosis** – a mutually beneficial relationship.

**Transhumance** – the seasonal movement of people and their animals from one grazing area to another.

**Underwood** – woody shrubs or small trees growing under larger ones.

**Wealden anticline** – the geological structure underpinning the Weald; a dome of layered rock cut through by weathering.



# A Charter for Residents and Visitors

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

■ **Use less water**

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

■ **Reduce, reuse and recycle, and dispose of all litter responsibly**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

■ **Have a say**

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

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

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



# The High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2014-2019

