

**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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