

**SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL**

**NAME AND TITLE OF CABINET MEMBER:** MARISA HEATH,  
CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT

**DATE:** 28 May 2024

**LEAD OFFICER:** KATIE STEWART, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR  
ENVIRONMENT, INFRASTRUCTURE AND GROWTH

**SUBJECT: ADOPTION OF HIGH WEALD AREA OF OUTSTANDING  
NATURAL BEAUTY (AONB) MANAGEMENT PLAN 2024-29**



**SURREY**

**ORGANISATION**  
**STRATEGY** Enabling A Greener Future  
**PRIORITY AREA**

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| <b>SUMMARY OF ISSUE:</b> |
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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 County Council, along with all the Local Authorities, is now being asked to adopt the plan for 2024-29.

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| <b>RECOMMENDATIONS:</b> |
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It is recommended that Cabinet Member agree to adopt the High Weald AONB Management Plan for 2024-2029.

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| <b>REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:</b> |
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If the County Council does not adopt the plan as proposed, then the Council would be in breach of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 and would have to produce its own review of the management plan to cover the area of the AONB in Surrey.

## **Executive Summary:**

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 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, have 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 2024 to 2029 which is the fourth review of the 2004 plan. The document 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 27 March 2024 to be recommended to the constituent authorities for formal adoption. The AONB have requested that the County Council now adopt this revised plan for the next five years from 2024-2029.
10. The reviewed Management Plan focuses on the key features that make the High Weald an AONB. The County Council can 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 business plans.

#### **CONSULTATION:**

11. 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.

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

12. If the County Council does not adopt the Plan, then it 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.

#### **Financial and value for money implications:**

13. 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.
14. The County Council currently contributes £2,987 per annum to the High Weald AONB unit.

#### **Section 151 Officer commentary:**

15. The Council continues to operate in a very challenging financial environment. Local authorities across the country are experiencing

significant budgetary pressures. Surrey County Council has made significant progress in recent years to improve the Council's financial resilience and whilst this has built a stronger financial base from which to deliver our services, the cost of service delivery, increasing demand, financial uncertainty and government policy changes mean we continue to face challenges to our financial position. This requires an increased focus on financial management to protect service delivery, a continuation of the need to deliver financial efficiencies and reduce spending in order to achieve a balanced budget position each year.

16. In addition to these immediate challenges, the medium-term financial outlook beyond 2024/25 remains uncertain. With no clarity on central government funding in the medium term, our working assumption is that financial resources will continue to be constrained, as they have been for the majority of the past decade. This places an onus on the Council to continue to consider issues of financial sustainability as a priority, in order to ensure the stable provision of services in the medium term.

17. The annual Surrey County Council contribution of £2,987 from the Environment budget to the High Weald AONB is expected to cover the costs of preparing the management plan, and of implementing its recommendations. The cost will be met out of the existing budget. It is not anticipated that the revised Management Plan will place any additional obligations on the County Council in terms of resources. As such, the Section 151 Officer supports the recommendation in this report.

#### **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.

#### **Other implications:**

20. The potential implications for the following council priorities and policy areas have been considered. Where the impact is potentially significant a summary of the issues is set out in detail below.

| <b>Area assessed:</b>  | <b>Direct Implications:</b>                          |
|--|--|
| Corporate Parenting/Looked After Children  | No significant implications arising from this report |
| Safeguarding responsibilities for vulnerable children and adults                         | No significant implications arising from this report |
| Environmental sustainability   | No significant implications arising from this report |
| Compliance against net-zero emissions target and future climate compatibility/resilience | No significant implications arising from this report |
| Public Health  | No significant implications arising from this report |

**WHAT HAPPENS NEXT:**

21. If the Cabinet Member agrees the High Weald AONB Management Plan will be adopted for 2024-29.

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**Report Author:**

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**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 2024–29.  
[AONB Management Plan - High Weald](#)

**Sources/background papers:**

The High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2024-29.  
[AONB Management Plan - High Weald](#)

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