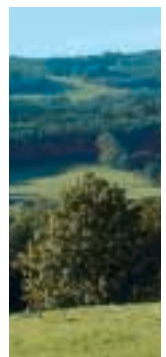
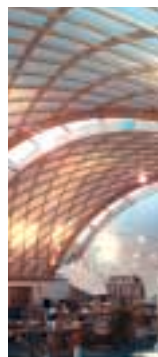
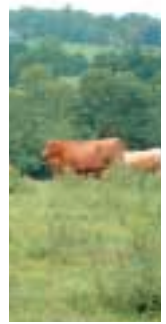


High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee Annual Review 2002-2003



Working together to care for a nationally valued landscape



The High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee is a partnership between East Sussex, West Sussex, Kent and Surrey County Councils, Horsham, Mid Sussex, Tandridge, Sevenoaks, Wealden and Rother District Councils, Tunbridge Wells, Hastings and Ashford Borough Councils, the Countryside Agency and organizations representing farming, forestry, community, business and recreation interests.

The High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

A nationally valued landscape



The High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is a historic countryside of rolling hills draped by small, irregular fields, abundant woods and hedges, scattered farmsteads and sunken lanes.

The High Weald covers parts of 4 counties – East Sussex, West Sussex, Kent and Surrey, in the rural heart of South East England. It is South East England's largest AONB and the seventh largest protected landscape in England and Wales, covering 563 square miles (1,457 sq km).

It was designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) by the Government in 1983 to conserve and enhance its natural beauty.

An estimated 121,000 people live in the AONB. At 0.8 people per hectare this makes the High Weald one of most densely populated protected landscapes.



It gives me great pleasure to once again reflect on the year's achievements and introduce the committee's annual review. The year has been busy, with three major projects engaging the Joint Advisory Committee (JAC); governance, the Management Plan and the new website.

On the governance front, two important steps were taken: at the July meeting JAC members signed up to a new Memorandum of Agreement, committing themselves in principal to financial support for the JAC and its dedicated Unit for the next 6 years, and at the November meeting, after much deliberation, the JAC made the decision that a Conservation Board would be the best governance option for the High Weald AONB. These are significant moves towards developing a structure that can promote support for, and delivery of, AONB Management Plan objectives. Though only the beginning of the process, the decisions provide clarity of purpose for the JAC, and will enable steps that develop new ways of working.

The other major occupation of the year has been an extensive programme of research and consultation to support the production of the draft AONB Management Plan 2004. This programme has been essential for developing clear, considered and supported AONB objectives for the statutory plan, which will set out local authority policy and guide the work of other public bodies. We are grateful to the enormous number of people who have already contributed their ideas and views through the website, public surveys and focus groups.

A major success of the year has been the provision of a wealth of information on the AONB through the area's new website. The site is a fantastic resource that I am sure will be appreciated by everyone who uses it.

Behind the scenes, partnership projects led by the Unit have continued to deliver action on the ground. The Weald Heathland Initiative in its second year is firmly established, with management on 15 of the 34 sites being supported by the Project officers, benefiting from Heritage Lottery Fund grants in 2002. The Weald Meadows Initiative continues to be a valued project, recognised by its existing and new funding partners who have offered to support its work for a further 3 years.

Lastly, the Unit has finally moved into its new office in the Woodland Enterprise Centre; the inspirational accommodation will provide a base from which I hope new ideas, partnerships and projects to benefit the High Weald AONB will continue to flow.



Councillor Mrs Elizabeth Kitchen
Chairman of the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee
July 2003



Councillor Mrs Elizabeth Kitchen

Effective structures and partnerships

Locally, regionally and nationally

Local Partnerships



JAC members signing the new High Weald Memorandum of Agreement

High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee (JAC)

In recognition of the value of partnership working across the AONB, JAC members signed a new Memorandum of Agreement at the committee's July meeting. Under the agreement all partners committed, in principal, to financial support for the JAC and its dedicated Unit for the next 6 years, a significant increase on previous commitments of 3 years.

Progress towards developing the governance structure for the AONB continued, when, at its meeting in November, the JAC made a decision to move towards a Conservation Board, following further consultation with the local authorities concerned. The decision followed advice from consultants KPMG and Land Use Consultants.

High Weald AONB Forum

The annual High Weald Forum meeting was held in April 2002. Attended by 34 Forum members the meeting focused on the Unit's projects; The Making of the High Weald, the Management Plan, the Weald Meadows Initiative and proposals for a new Governance structure.

Land Management Services

Advice to land management services has been provided where requested, in particular to the Kent High Weald Project and the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group through their respective steering groups. Guidance on AONB objectives has also been given to land management services seeking grants for delivering AONB objectives from the Countryside Agency's Finest Landscapes programme.



Regional Partnerships

Unit officers met quarterly with other members of the **South East AONB Officer's Group** to co-ordinate regional approaches to issues created by the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000.

A key success was the drawing up and signing of the **Joint Statement of Intent** by the region's 10 AONBs and key regional bodies; Department of Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA); Government Office of the South East (GOSE); South East England Development Agency (SEEDA), South East England Regional Assembly (SEERA) and the Countryside Agency.

The statement is an important step forward in achieving recognition by regional partners of the value of AONBs to the area and the role that AONB governance structures, and their supporting Units, can play in delivering actions that achieve sustainable management within the region.

Effective structures and partnerships

Locally, regionally and nationally

Regional working has also led to the establishment of the **South East AONB Woodlands Programme**. The High Weald, Kent Downs, East Hampshire and Surrey Hills were successful in bidding for a South East AONB Woodlands Officer, 100% funded by the Forestry Commission and Countryside Agency. The project was stimulated by the National Accord between the AAONB and the Forestry Commission and seeks to demonstrate how joint working between AONBs and the Forestry Commission can develop and achieve AONB woodland objectives. The High Weald was successful in negotiating the secondment of an experienced woodland ecologist from English Nature to implement the project. Patrick McKernan, whose base is with the Unit, started work in February.



South East AONBs are working together to develop understanding of woodland

The Unit has continued as a member of the **South East Walks Partnership** which continues to establish and market the region, including the AONBs, as a walking destination.

National Partnerships

Councillor Dr Angela Chapman has continued to represent the Joint Advisory Committee on the **Association of AONBs** (AAONB) executive committee, whose focus over the last year has been developing the structure of the Association to provide a stronger voice for AONBs.

The Association has continued to produce the bi-annual national AONB magazine *Outstanding* and held its 5th national annual conference attended by the Assistant AONB Officer and Consultation Officer. Technical seminars continue to be held at a national level and have provided an opportunity for information sharing amongst AONBs. The Unit's Rural Character Advisor led a training day on 'Landscape characterisation and history' in partnership with an independent consultant.

The AONB Unit continued to contribute to national activity by representing AONBs on the **National Branding Protected Landscapes Forum**, actively contributing to the Forum's development through participation in its supporting working group, and the **National AONB Management Plan Working Group**.



High Weald management planning

Developing a 20 year strategy for the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

An extensive programme of research and consultation to support the production of the draft AONB Management Plan 2004 was undertaken in 2002.

Research

In April 2002 **The Making of the High Weald** was published, the culmination of a two-year research programme to understand the origins of the High Weald landscape and define the fundamental building blocks that form its character. The paper takes a long historical view back to the last Ice Age and explains the main processes that have created the High Weald. As a result, it identifies the defining character of the AONB and underpins the High Weald AONB Management Plan 2004. *The Making of the High Weald* is primarily an electronic publication, since this allows updating with the latest research: it is available via the new website.



Between 1990 and 2000 the area of registered agricultural land declined by 10%

A number of external research contracts were placed during 2002-2003. A report on **Agriculture in the High Weald** (*Land Use Consultants, Jan 2003*) was produced using data from the June Agricultural Census and other sources to describe the contribution of farming to the AONB's landscape, economy and community. The report highlighted how the area is experiencing a greater rate of change than the rest of the SE Region. Between 1990 and 2000, the area of registered agricultural declined by 10%, and the number of holdings fell by 1%. The number of grazing animals fell, most dramatically in the dairy sector, and stocking densities (already lower than the rest of the region) declined. Average farm size declined (to 40 ha) and the reliance on family labour is increasing. Yet agriculture retains its central role in land management and is a significant feature of the area's economy: in 2002 the estimated gross farmgate output of the main farming sectors was £44.1 million, of which £7.2 million was from CAP receipts. Over half of the estimated £37.3 million spent by the AONB's farmers was recycled in the local economy.



Income from diversification keeps families on farms, preventing break-up of holdings and loss of agricultural land

This was supplemented by a study of the **Impact of Farm Diversification on Land Management in the High Weald AONB** (*Land Use Consultants, June 2002*), which explored whether there is any direct or indirect linkage between diversification on farms in the High Weald and the management of key habitats and the character of the area. The report drew on interviews with a sample of High Weald farms involved in different types of diversification. It concludes that the increased income keeps families on farms, preventing break-up of holdings and loss of agricultural land; and income from diversification is spent on land management across the holding. However, there is little evidence as to how focused this land management is, and though advice is widely taken, it is rarely used. The

High Weald management planning

Developing a 20 year strategy for the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

report suggests that there is scope to better inform and co-ordinate advice, to deliver specific High Weald land management objectives, and that where possible (e.g. at the point of a planning application) the undertaking of Whole Farm Plans is encouraged.

In recognition of the role of the river systems in forming the AONB's character the **High Weald AONB Integrated Catchment Management & River Restoration Study** (*Land Use Consultants and The River Restoration Centre, January 2003*) was commissioned to develop understanding of how the rivers in the AONB might best be managed in the future to sustain and enhance their natural characteristics. The study looked at the relationship between management to control flooding and management to enhance natural riverine ecology and provide opportunity for sustainable catchment land management. The study provided the basis for two of the three objectives for the section on geology landform, water systems, and climate in the consultation draft of the High Weald AONB Management Plan 2004.

Utilizing emerging objectives from the AONB Management Plan 2004 a **High Weald AONB Proposal for a Pilot Rural Revival Programme** (*May 2002*) was developed to provide an indication of how the rural economy could be revived based on the objective-led approach. As well as defining how co-ordinated and AONB-aware advisers could play a key role in delivering such a programme, this report has played a key role in identifying the need for the High Weald AONB Management Plan 2004 to adopt an objective-led approach.

A report on **Tourism Supply in the South East** (*South East Sustainable Tourism Project, March 2003*) provided information on tourist facilities and establishments in the High Weald. It concluded that there are over 680 tourism businesses within the High Weald, the largest number within an AONB in the region. Business confidence was high; 96% expected business to be the same or better in 2003 and 26% knew they operated in the High Weald AONB. The 520 accommodation providers have an annual occupancy figure of 57% and approximately 45% are in national grading schemes.



© Countryside Agency/Peter Greenhalf

There is significant potential in the High Weald for river restoration



Occupancy of accommodation establishments in the High Weald is around 50%

High Weald management planning

Developing a 20 year strategy for the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Consultation



Over 80% of residents walk in the High Weald countryside

Public consultation on the issues that should be addressed by the High Weald AONB Management Plan 2004 has been extensive and diverse. Key components have been the **High Weald Anvil 2002 Public Survey**; a 2 page questionnaire in the area's free newspaper. 444 self-completed questionnaires provided information on respondents' use of the area for recreation, the features of the area they are most aware of and most value, and the actions that they take/would consider taking to help care for the area.

The High Weald Public Survey built on the earlier High Weald Anvil survey and was undertaken in September 2002 using face-to-face street survey techniques. The survey was targeted specifically at residents and was designed to achieve a truly representative random sample: 722 residents were interviewed allowing statistical conclusions to be drawn from the data with 95% confidence $\pm 9\%$. The survey sought information on residents' use of the area for recreation, their understanding of its landscape and its products and the issues affecting the area which most concern them.

Focus groups and specialist questionnaires were used to ensure that the voices of key but small groups were heard. The groups included farmers and local producers (27), ecologists (37), tourism specialists (UK and overseas 6), visitor service representatives (15), representatives of organizations involved in promoting understanding and enjoyment of the AONB (14), local authority planners (15) and parish councils (16). Questionnaires were returned from local producers (27), hedgelayers and woodland workers (3) and parish councils (45).

The High Weald AONB awareness campaign continued to be unfolded across the AONB by the Unit and its Initiatives during 2002, supported by a number of communication projects.

New website

A new database driven website, to replace the very basic AONB website created in 1999, was published in November 2002. A linocut reflecting the AONB's character and people living and working in the landscape, was commissioned from a local artist and used as the basis for creating the look and feel of the site.

A primary objective of the new site was to develop a section to support the Management Plan consultation process. Early drafts of the Management Plan were therefore made widely available through the High Weald AONB website with on-line surveys and comment boxes allowing early feedback on policy and issues at the drafting stage. Comments posted to the site were also made viewable on-line. The opportunity for involvement was promoted by emailing over 200 e-alerts to individuals with known technical interest and expertise in management of the AONB, informing them of new additions to the Management Plan text.

A researcher was commissioned to write pages in the Conserving section of the site on Woodland archaeology, an area in which advisor and landowner understanding is very poor, and to provide guidance on historical research into land use in the High Weald, an area of considerable interest to the public.

High Weald Anvil 2002

Public feedback on the High Weald Anvil 2001 indicated that it was as popular as the 2000 edition and in May 2002 the Unit published a third edition. Content included articles promoting understanding of the iron industry, the value of local products and farmers markets, hedgerow management, sky glow issues and how the landscape inspires local artists, as well as pages dedicated to encouraging exploration of the area; events and walking and cycling routes. For the first time a 'News in Brief' section was included. The edition was used to raise awareness of the Management Plan and its production and included a 2-page questionnaire that sought residents' views on what they valued about the area and their views on its management.

Given its role in raising awareness of the AONB Management Plan, distribution was extended to all households in the AONB, with 80,000



Home page of AONB website

The site has eight sections –

Why it is outstanding – landscape origins, wildlife, facts and figures

High Weald community – a list of all AONB parishes with links to relevant local websites

Visitor information – searchable databases of attractions, events, walks and cycle rides

Local products – High Weald products, producer profiles and searchable database of local producers and products

What is an AONB – AONB designation, the boundary and planning

About us – JAC, Forum and Unit including all JAC agendas, reports and minutes

The High Weald's future – the draft Management Plan 2004 and all High Weald reports

Conserving – Rural grants, advice, land management guidance and projects

Communications

Furthering awareness and understanding



Pannage



Grazing Aurochs



Images commissioned to represent issues relating to climate change, development, routeways, recreation and local products

copies distributed through door-to-door delivery via Royal Mail and newspaper distribution services. A further 10,000 were distributed via the Unit at events and the remainder were handed out by visitor attractions and tourist information centres.

Events

The Unit attended East Sussex County Council's Wood Fair with the South East AONBs local products boards (produced by the Unit in 2001) display of timber furniture, trugs and baskets, apples, juice and wine and freshly picked hops. The display raised the profile of the AONB and provided an opportunity to discuss land management issues with High Weald residents and land managers, particularly local producers. In the latter part of the year the local products boards were on display at Wealden District Council and were also used by the Sussex Downs Conservation Boards at the South of England Show and the Kent Downs for a local products event.

Media activity

Three media releases were sent out in 2002, focusing on the Anvil 2001, signing of the Memorandum of Agreement at the July JAC and the introduction of grazing to Cinderhill Wood, one of the Weald Heathland Initiative sites. A September media familiarization trip, to promote the South East Walks Partnership, focused on the High Weald's character components around Burwash. It was attended by Sussex Life and Southern Counties radio. Interviews with the Unit's Information and Interpretation Officer and the East Sussex County County Archaeologist were aired on Southern Counties Sunday morning programme.

Artwork

To support the Unit's communication work, two watercolour images of the High Weald landscape were commissioned from Claire Jenkins and five graphic images to highlight AONB issues were commissioned from Jake Murray.

South East AONB Sustainable Tourism Project – High Weald AONB

Tristan Lavender, formerly of SEETB, took up the position of SE AONB Sustainable Tourism Officer for the High Weald and Kent Downs AONBs in May 2002. Over the year contact with key organisations, locally and regionally, was established, advice to local businesses on sustainable and rural tourism matters provided and two pilot projects, which aim to mitigate the impact of visitors on the environment and maximise their value to businesses and community services, were defined and set up.

High Weald ‘Green Visitor’ Project – Winchelsea & Rye Bay area

This project was set up in recognition of the potential for the historic town Winchelsea and surrounding countryside to attract ‘green’ visitors.

Facilitated by the Project Officer, an action group of representatives from the community, parish council, Town Corporation and local businesses, together with National Trust and Countryside Project Officers, developed and agreed an ambitious plan of activities targeted at visitors and integrating a number of elements of a ‘sustainable’ or ‘green tourism’ approach. Work by the group on the plan began in September with achievements listed opposite.

Planning for delivery of a number of projects in 2003 was undertaken including: mapping and assessment of walking routes around the parish prior to upgrading and promotion; development of Winchelsea’s first ever Food Fair; the first High Weald local produce training course; business, resident and visitor consultation; development of indicators to measure project social, economic and environmental sustainability and a local town map.

High Weald ‘Pathfinder’

The Project Officer secured £20,000 from the English Tourism Council to develop an AONB demonstration project as part of the national ‘Englandnet’ project to join up tourism information via the internet. The High Weald ‘Pathfinder’ project aims to improve access to information on what to see and do across the whole of the AONB, which people cannot currently access from one source. It will offer a complete visitor countryside experience, by combining information and data on all aspects of the High Weald’s countryside with tourism data on accommodation, tourist attractions and pubs, teashops and restaurants. It will raise the profile of businesses adopting ‘green’ practices and ways in which visitors can contribute to the areas care. Unfortunately, delays to the project nationally held back work on the project in 2002.



New Gate, Winchelsea

Achievements

- completed audit and SWOT analysis of countryside and tourism product
- 15 computers for the proposed information and community use centre above ‘The Little Shop’
- funding attracted from Leader+ and SEEDA cluster fund with applications pending from East Sussex County Council and INTERREG
- compilation of business losses in the parish and surrounding area
- completion of a project marketing strategy
- community representative attending East Sussex Local Access Forum

Weald Grazing Project

The Weald Grazing Project was developed by the Weald Meadows Initiative and Weald Heathland Initiative in 2002. As a first stage it aims to facilitate grazing for nature conservation by matching nature conservation sites with suitable livestock, overcoming the constraints that prevent sites from being grazed and providing training in conservation grazing for graziers and landowners.

As a starting point, a Conservation Grazing Survey was undertaken to develop understanding of the scale of the conservation grazing problem and identify the interest from graziers in conservation grazing. Six hundred grazing questionnaires were posted out through the High Weald Unit AONB (HWU), Kent High Weald Project (KHWP), Farming and Wildlife Advisory Service (FWAG), Kent Wildlife Trust (KWT) Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI) owners, Kent Small holders Association members, the Countryside Agency (to farmers having undertaken an Integrated Farm Assessments) and farmers listed on the DEFRA database with a TN17 postcode.



Longhorn cattle are valuable conservation graziers

47 questionnaires, 33 by landowners and 14 by potential graziers had been returned by March 2003. Of the sites requiring conservation grazing, only 27% were being grazed on a regular basis, the remaining 73% were only being grazed occasionally or not at all. The main obstacle to grazing was lack of livestock with sub-standard fencing and lack of water supply also a constraint. There was almost a 50/50 split between landowners who would be prepared to pay for a conservation service and those who would expect payment for letting their land for grazing. No graziers interested in conservation grazing were prepared to travel over 20 miles. When plotted on a map all sites in need of grazing could theoretically be covered by interested graziers. When asked about meat sales most graziers indicated that they currently had no problems selling their meat, 37% of them selling directly to consumers through the farm gate.

Land Management Initiative

Developing integrated rural support for a lowland pasture landscape

The remaining work programme of the High Weald Land Management Initiative has included the evaluation of its Integrated Farm Appraisal (IFA) approach through a contract let by the Countryside Agency. The effectiveness of this programme was investigated using the 43 IFA's undertaken between 2001-2002. The evaluation report includes findings showing that there has been progress made on 81% of the IFA's, with 34% of suggested actions either completed or in progress, and a further 30% that are intended or being considered. The final tranche of IFA's have now also been completed.

Weald Meadows Initiative

Action for valued grasslands, for now and for the future

The project continued to deliver practical support to landowners during 2002, despite a significant amount of time spent developing, submitting and chasing funding bids to secure a financial package that would allow the project to continue and develop for a further 3 years.

Management advice and support

During 2002 34 site visits were carried out to provide management, creation and enhancement advice, undertake grassland surveys, produce grassland management plans or applications for the Countryside Stewardship Scheme or for assessment for proposed designation. This was in addition to the 50 sites visited with a view to harvesting.

In addition to site visits, telephone advice and written information was supplied to a further 54 landowners interested in protecting and maintaining wildflower sites (5 SNCIs), 30 landowners interested in grassland enhancement and 40 interested in expanding & creating grassland.

Financial support was secured for 1 landowner; 1 restoration grant for interim management on a site prior to acceptance into the Countryside Stewardship Scheme and 4 other landowners were assisted with their Countryside Stewardship Scheme applications.

Demand for information on wildflower seed sources, contractors and advice on wildflower grasslands creation continued to be high with information supplied to a number of organisations and consultants including; English Nature, The Environment Agency, Local & County Councils, RSPB, FWAG, DEFRA, English Heritage, Landscape Designers, District Planners and 11 landowners.

Weald Native Origin Seed harvesting

The WMI harvested 400kg of mixed and single species Weald Native Origin Seed (WNOS) in the summer and autumn of 2002. All the harvesting went well, with 21 machinery operations carried out on 16 species-rich grassland sites, giving a total income to these meadow owners of £4000. Between September 02 and March 03, 39 landowners sowed 275kg of WNOS on 56ha. Analysis of the Weald Grassland Database indicates that over the life of WMI 298 sites have now applied 1478kg of Weald Native Origin Seed.



© Countryside Agency/Peter Greenhalf

Land Management advisors receiving training at the new education centre at St Dunstons Farm

Initiatives

Developing strategic and practical solutions



400kg of mixed and single species Weald Native Origin Seed (WNOS) was harvested in 2002

Publicity and training

The WMI's achievements were well publicised during 2002. Text on the Initiative was supplied for the Countryside Agency's 'Eat the View' website and to Christopher Lloyd for a book on Wildflower Grasslands and the project was also featured on the Flora Locale's web site as approved native collector and supplier of wildflower and grass seed.

English Nature consulted the project on the text for the winter and spring editions of its national magazine ENACT, which included a two-part feature on Options for Seed Harvesting Techniques. The magazine promotes best practice in conservation management and the WMI was featured as a wildflower seed supplier. DEFRA consulted the project on national guidelines it is producing on wildflower creation and enhancement.

The use of Weald Native Origin Seed in 2000 by the Ashurst McDermott Hall Trust helped contribute to the Trust winning the environmental section of the Village of the Year Competition. Press coverage included an interview with BBC Radio Kent and an article featured in the Courier.

Interest in setting up similar initiatives elsewhere in the country continues with information on the project's set up sent to Suffolk Wildlife Trust, Shropshire County Council & Manx & Mid Lothian Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group. A private farmer also requested information with a view to setting up a similar project based in Worcestershire.

16 advisors attending the 'Meadows In The Landscape' two-day training, 8 advisors attended from Sussex (including English Nature), 1 from Surrey, 4 from Kent and 3 from Hampshire.

Research

The Centre for Agriculture and Environmental Research R&D project, funded by DEFRA, is carrying out research on one of the WMI sites; a farm with a proportion of high quality SNCI grassland. This large-scale experiment is looking into methods of permanent pasture enhancement and arable reversion and will be used as a demonstration farm for Countryside Stewardship Scheme participants.

The WMI has worked with partner organisation (such as Kew) to investigate the economic uses of plants and their extracts; pictures were taken of the WMI harvest techniques in 2002 for a new book on the subject

Weald Heathland Initiative

Action for open and wooded heaths, for now and for the future

Management advice and support

The second year of the Weald Heathland Initiative saw a significant amount of practical heathland management and restoration work being undertaken on the 15 sites where HLF management agreements have been negotiated. The WHI submitted 5 Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CSS) applications with accompanying management plans to DEFRA in May 2002, all of which were successful. Two heathland agreements were also renewed under the Scheme. A further 19 sites requested and were given project officer support. Liaison with Forest Enterprise has resulted in a programme of heathland work that will be built into Forest Design Plans and used as a basis for future funding bids.

Events and demonstration days

The Weald Heathland Initiative partnership ran 16 events and training courses in 2002-2003. Two hundred and fifty-two children and adults participated in heathland events or presentations. An estimated 5298 people were reached by leaflet or through a WHI presence at larger events.

Over 1077 volunteer days contributed to practical heathland management on the project sites. This figure exceeded the project's target of 825 person-days for 2002.

28 contractors, countryside project/service staff and landowners attended a Mini Baler Demonstration on Southborough Common in October and staff from Forest Enterprise and other land management organisations attended a Forest mulcher demonstration at Leith Hill in Surrey

Monitoring and research

Fixed-point photographic monitoring on all the project's sites was undertaken during the year. An ecological monitoring report, which sets targets against which the progress of the management work can be measured, was also completed. Monitoring of a sample of six selected sites against these targets was completed in November 2002.

In addition to the project's ecological monitoring, a final-year student from John Moores University, undertook the first detailed GIS vegetation survey of Chailey Common and a researcher was employed to undertake historical mapping of heathland in the project area. The WHI map data together with the heathland inventories and the existing Ashdown Forest data provide a more accurate picture of the present heathland resource in the Weald.

Weald Heathland Initiative sites being grant-aided by the Heritage Lottery Fund

Ashdown Forest
 Bakers Common
 Buchan Country Park
 Chailey Common
 Cinderhill & Brenchley
 Crowborough Beacon
 Forrester's Cottage
 Isenhurst Estate
 Limekiln Woods
 Old Lodge Reserve
 Pembury Heath
 St. Leonard's Forest
 Southborough Common
 Tilgate Forest
 Tilgate Forest Lodge

Activity	Achieved
Boardwalk (m)	25 m
Bracken mowing (ha)	167 ha
Bracken spraying (ha)	30 ha
Bulldozing / Scraping (ha)	4 ha
Fencing (m)	718 m
Firebreak mowing/widening (m)	21,550 m
Grazing (ha)	557 ha
Path improvement (m)	1475 m

Resources

Securing financial support to deliver the High Weald AONB business strategy

AONB Unit staff resource



The Woodland Enterprise Centre, where the Unit's new office is located

A number of staff changes took place; Janina Holubecki, Information and Interpretation Officer, and Yvonne Riedel, Consultation Officer (to support the Management Planning process) joined the team in April 2002, whilst Ian Spindley, Communications Officer and Richard Clarke, AONB Officer (job share) moved on to new jobs in Wales and Wiltshire respectively. As the AONB job share post remained vacant throughout 2002, the Unit's core resource was 4.5 Full time equivalent (F.T.E.) rather than 5 F.T.E. for most of 2002.

New office



The Woodland Enterprise Centre became the Unit's new home in December 2002. The Centre, built by Woodland Enterprises Limited, a partnership between East Sussex County Council and a number of local timber related businesses, demonstrates how local hardwood, small dimension chestnut, can be used in building construction, and how such a building can be heated with local wood as fuel. A significant amount of Unit time was used in setting up and managing the IT, phone and removal contracts required for the relocation and developing the health and safety systems needed for the new building.

1st April 2002 to 31st March 2003

Project activity

AONB Management Plan

A total of £107,087 was spent on the management plan, with 75% of the funding coming from the Countryside Agency and the remainder from local authorities.

High Weald Governance Structure

A total of £7,430 was spent on consultants to consider options for a new governance structure in the area. The work was 100% funded by the Countryside Agency.

The following projects were developed and managed by the High Weald AONB.

Weald Meadows Initiative

A total of £21,284 was spent on the Weald Meadows Initiative between April and December 2002 with support from the Countryside Agency, English Nature and Wealden District Council. Since January 2003 a new, 3-year funding package has been in place as follows:

- DEFRA - Rural Enterprise Scheme
- The Rausing Charitable Trust
- Heritage Lottery Fund - Your Heritage
- The Countryside Agency
- Dennis Curry Charitable Trust
- English Nature - Sussex and Surrey

£5,461 was spent between January – March 2003

Weald Heathland Initiative

A total of £233,421 (excluding volunteers)* was spent under the Weald Heathland Initiative (February 2001 to February 2002). The following bodies contributed funding towards heathland activity in the High Weald AONB during 2002-2003 with £138,285* provided as a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

- Heritage Lottery Fund
- Ashdown Forest Conservators
- English Nature
- DEFRA
- Countryside Agency
- RSPB
- East Sussex County Council
- Hastings Borough Council
- West Sussex County Council
- Heathland landowners and managers of the sites listed on page 15.
- Kent High Weald Project

* Subject to HLF approval.

Carry Forward

Project income in advance includes income from the sales of the High Weald Landscape Trail guidebook. This income is being held to fund future reprints and development of the Trail. Other upfront income includes contributions from local authority partners for promotional activity 2001-2004 and the Management Plan.

Core activity

Expenditure	
Employee costs	152,564
Office costs	32,321
ESCC employment overheads	22,300
Joint Advisory Committee	10,009
Minor works	23,055
Total	240,249

Income	
Countryside Agency	163,369
East Sussex CC	17,879
Kent CC	10,435
West Sussex CC	7,649
Surrey CC	2,295
Wealden DC	5,703
Rother DC	5,703
Mid Sussex DC	4,413
Tunbridge Wells BC	5,315
Horsham DC	3,795
Sevenoaks DC	2,950
Ashford BC	765
Hastings BC	1,234
Tandridge BC	1,639
Other	7,105
Total	240,249

Office costs included rent, rates, electricity, water, office equipment, stationery, photocopying, postage and telephones.

Minor works included conference expenditure, consultant costs, printing and distribution costs and other promotional expenses.

Support services of £42,127 were provided in kind by ESCC.

The local authority contributions reflect the balance of their land area within the AONB.

High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee

Working together to care for a nationally valued landscape

Membership of the Joint Advisory Committee and Steering Group Officers

As at 31st March 2003

JAC Co-optees

Nature Conservation

Mr K. Hewitt, English Nature

Recreation/Leisure

Mr B. Jupp, Ramblers' Association, Sussex (until spring 2003)

Community/Economy

Mr J. Leggett, Sussex Rural Community Council

Landowners

Mr Rupert Ashby, Country Land and Business Association

Farming

Mr J. Siggs, National Farmers Union

Chair – Councillor Mrs E. Kitchen

Vice-chairs – Councillor Tom Veitch (until summer 2002)

& Councillor Mrs P. Stockwell

OSG Chair – Mr Graeme Kerr (until early 2003) & Ms Lisa Creaye-Griffin

East Sussex County Council

Councillor R. Tidy & Mr Simon Hickmott

West Sussex County Council

Councillor Ms A. Chapman & Ms Lisa Creaye-Griffin

Kent County Council

Councillor T. Veitch (until summer 2002) & Councillor Mrs P. Stockwell

Mr Tony Atkinson (until summer 2002) & Ms Val Hyland

Surrey County Council

Councillor Mrs E. Sampson & Ms Katherine Harrison

Wealden District Council

Councillor Mrs S. Tidy & Mr David Phillips

Rother District Council

Councillor B. Kentfield

Mr Les Robinson (until spring 2003) & Mr Frank Rallings

Hastings Borough Council

Councillor Ms D. Kent (until summer 2002)

Mr Paul Lewis & Mr Murray Davidson

Mid Sussex District Council

Cllr A MacNaughton

Mr Ian Burton; Ms Alma Howell

Horsham District Council

Councillor Mrs E. Kitchen

Ms Louise Gibbons

Crawley Borough Council

No member representative & Mr Aidan Booth

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council

Councillor T. Veitch (until summer 2002) & Councillor R. Bullock

Ms Gill Harris

Sevenoaks District Council

Councillor M. Whitehouse

Mr Dennis Stevenson (until summer 2002) & Mrs Maggie Williams

Ashford Borough Council

Councillor J. Kemp MBE (until summer 2002) & Councillor M. Gray

Mr Richard Alderton & Ms Kerry Culbert

Tonbridge & Malling District Council

No member representative & Mr Phil Linskey

Tandridge District Council

Councillor Mrs J. Maylam (until summer 2002) & Councillor M. Sydney

Ms Zoe Legg (until summer 2002) & Mr Paul Newdick

Contact

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Email: penny.murray@westsussex.gov.uk
Website: www.highweald.org

Terms of reference

- The JAC, advised by an Officers Steering Group, directs the AONB Unit's work. The JAC chair and vice-chair are elected for two years.
- It is composed of an officer from the Countryside Agency, councillors from 13 local authorities who fund AONB work, and five representatives co-opted from Forum member organisations to represent community, recreation, nature conservation, farming and forestry interests.
- Each local authority may choose to be represented by an officer or anyone else whom it feels appropriate, rather than a councillor, and is entitled to send a deputy. Non-funding authorities may be invited to attend as observers with no entitlement to vote.
- Each member has one vote, although co-opted members cannot vote on the annual budget. The chair has a casting vote. A meeting shall be considered quorate if there are at least seven members present, no fewer than five of which are from local authorities.
- It was established by the Forum in 1996. It has no executive role and is not bound by formal local government rules on membership, political balance, and access to the public etc. Constituent organisations may draw up any set of rules, but there is no clear mechanism for changing or interpreting rules.
- The JAC's main purpose is to advise and guide constituent authorities and other agencies about the achievement of AONB objectives. These were agreed by the Forum in 1996, namely to:
 - i) Conserve its natural beauty
 - ii) Promote its unique identity, recognising and respecting the individual landscape character and habitats of local areas in the implementation of planning and management policies
 - iii) Ensure that development is appropriate and soundly based on the principles of sustainability.
- Encourage, where appropriate, quiet enjoyment of it.

Forum organizations and their representatives

High Weald AONB President – The Rt Hon. Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith
Government Office for South East – Ms S Element; South East England Development Agency – Ms V Carter; English Heritage – Mr P Kendall and Mr P Roberts; Sport England – Mr J Wilkinson; South East England Tourism Board – Mr F Cabbage; DEFRA – Mr P Owens; National Farmers' Union – Mr S Leavey; Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group – Miss A Harper; Kent Rural Community Council – Mr C Davies; National Trust – Ms S Forster & Ms M Morgan; CPRE – Mr P Mumford (Sussex) & Mr H Barton (Kent); Ramblers' Association – Mrs J Bomber (Kent) and Mr G Butler (Surrey); Wildlife Trusts – Mrs E Hayes (Sussex), Mr J Bennett (Kent) and Mrs J Barton (Surrey); Sussex Association of Local Councils – Mrs C Swan; Southern Water – Mr P Hughes; Federation of Amenity Societies – Mr C Harris (Sussex); Ashdown Forest Conservators – Brigadier M Constantine (until spring 2002) and Dr H Prendergast; Uckfield/Crowborough Bridleways – Mrs J Bramwell; Wakehurst Place – Mr D Hardman; Environment Agency – Ms B Buckley (Kent) & Mr P Midgeley (Sussex); East Grinstead Town Council - Councillor A Brock (until early 2003) & Councillor M Collins; Forestry Commission – Mr A Betts; English Nature – Dr C Edwards (Sussex) & Mr Simon Richardson (Kent); West Sussex County Council – Councillor H Smith

High Weald AONB Unit

Advising on the management of a nationally valued landscape



Core functions of an AONB Unit

- Developing a vision and strategy for AONB management
- Preparing, with constituent local authorities, an AONB Management Plan as required by the CroW Act
- In the early stages of AONB development, promoting the vision and strategy to distinguish the AONB from adjacent countryside
- Implementing, and co-ordinating implementation by others, the Management Plan
- Co-ordinating or advising on local authority services in the AONB, to go beyond the normal level of countryside management
- Monitoring and reporting on progress against management plan targets
- Accessing resources for undertaking management activities, including external financing, project development and proposals, and providing matching funding for special projects
- Tapping into advice, and liaison with AONBs at a national level.
- Providing an internal management role to coordinate AONB protection
- Promoting the value of the AONB to the community
- Developing an involvement by the community in the management of the AONB
- Providing planning advice and related activities
- Seeking additional funds to assist with delivery of management activity

Extracted from Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty: a guide for AONB partnership members.

The Unit delivers the core functions in the context of the AONB Management Plan and in accordance with a three-year business strategy agreed by the High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee.

Core staff

As at 31st March 2003

AONB Officers – Sally Marsh & Richard Clarke (until 10th May 2003)
Assistant AONB Officer – Gerry Sherwin
Rural Character Adviser – Roland Harris
Communications Officer – Janina Holubecki
Office Manager – Kerry Baldwin

Project staff

Consultation Officer, Management Plan – Yvonne Riedel
Project Officers, Weald Heathland Initiative – Richard Allum and Caroline FitzGerald
Project Officer, Weald Meadows Initiative – Dawn Brickwood

Contact

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The annual review is published by the High Weald AONB Unit on behalf of the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee (JAC).