



**Report title:**

# Medieval deer parks and 'designed landscapes' in the High Weald

**Commissioned by:** High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee (JAC)  
**Commissioned from:** Dr N R Bannister  
**Funded by:** The High Weald JAC  
**Status and date:** Final report, July 2009

**Research purpose:** To identify and map medieval deer parks and other 'designed landscapes' within the High Weald and establish survival and loss of these locally distinctive features of the landscape.

**Research aims:**

- To use English Heritages Historic Landscape Characterisation product (HLC) to search for lost and surviving deer parks and designed landscapes across the High Weald and;
- To prepare a digital map 'layer' of lost and surviving deer parks and other designed landscapes to inform the AONB Management Plan.

**Research findings:** There is extensive evidence of former 'designed' parks, including deer parks, which are scattered across the High Weald and comprise a mixture of both formal and informal parklands. The main change for deer parks appears to occur in the medieval period and it is possible to identify a number of sites where there were former deer parks which existed in the medieval period. Initial analysis shows that the majority of designed landscapes in the High Weald were created and laid out in the post-medieval period. No medieval deer parks were identified in the current HLC because many have become incorporated into later designed parks or survive as 'ghosts' in the historic landscape, traceable by the pale boundary, veteran trees and place-names. Further research to provide a more detailed map using primary archives, current research and estate maps, extending across the whole of the High Weald with a significant re-analysis of the Kent area is recommended. Ground truthing of sites identified could also look for evidence of park pale boundaries, veteran trees especially pollards, further place-names and other features.

**AONB Unit comment:** Historic parkland, particularly medieval parks, and 'designed landscapes' are important locally distinctive features of the High Weald AONB, but which are under-represented in our understanding of the landscape due to their 'designed' character, which is often seen as being incompatible with a 'natural' landscape. Such ancient parkland is however a vital cultural component of the landscape that needs to be recognized and understood. Such areas of landscape contribute particularly to our understanding of the Field and Heath component of the Management Plan, with many of our heathland areas being related to medieval deer parks.

This research fills a gap in our knowledge of these locally distinctive elements of the landscape and provides a basis for providing more detailed advice on the protection, management and restoration of these ancient landscape features, especially where they may be threatened by development or further changes in management.

