



**Report title:**

# The sustainable development of dispersed settlement in the High Weald AONB

**Commissioned by:** High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) and English Heritage  
**Commissioned from:** Countryside & Community Research Institute: University of Gloucestershire and the University of the West of England  
**Funded by:** High Weald JAC and Interreg 111B  
**Status and date:** Final report, October 2007

**Research purpose:** to understand sustainable development in the context of dispersed settlement landscapes such as the High Weald and draw examples of good practice from similar areas in Europe in order to meet objective S2 of the AONB Management Plan.

**Research aims:**

- To identify areas of dispersed settlement in Europe for which dedicated planning and/or rural development policies have been adopted;
- To propose criteria that could be used to assess the sustainability of dispersed settlement landscapes in spatial planning and rural development policy.

**Research findings:** The report identified that a dispersed settlement pattern is a 'normal' feature of some valued historic landscapes such as the High Weald and these dispersed landscapes have proven their sustainability over centuries presenting a challenge to current spatial planning policies focusing development on key settlements. It concluded that an understanding of landscape character and the processes that have shaped the settled landscape should underpin a new approach to achieving sustainable rural settlements and proposes a sustainable development 'framework' for spatial planning and rural development identifying three kinds of sustainability criteria – 'generic' reflecting national public policy aspirations; 'type' reflecting the setting or landscape characteristics and 'local' reflecting community generated criteria. Policies could combine the appropriate mix of criteria from each set and within protected landscapes more weight could be given to 'type' criteria.

**AONB Unit comment:** The report conclusion emphasizes the value of an understanding of inherited landscape character to the development of policies that foster modern sustainable rural communities. It helps us see the dispersed historic settlement pattern in the High Weald as an asset towards achieving a sustainable future and provides a simple but effective tool to allow government and local authorities to integrate characteristics of landscape and setting into spatial planning enabling a more locally tailored approach to sustainable settlement planning.

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