



Report title:

Sustainable Rural Settlement in the High Weald AONB

Commissioned by: High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) and the Countryside Agency (Natural England)
Commissioned from: Land Use Consultants
Funded by: The Countryside Agency (Natural England)
Status and date: Complete, 2006

Research purpose: To identify what the planning system and connected areas of policy and work, can do to make the settlements in the High Weald more sustainable.

Research aim(s):

- To develop rigorous, evidence-based definitions for settlement sustainability in the High Weald.
- To examine the sustainability of villages, hamlets and farmsteads in three case study areas.
- To develop a policy framework and guidance for sustainable settlements in the High Weald.
- To make broader recommendations for planning in all protected landscapes.

Research findings: Due to their relative isolation, smaller settlements in the south east of the AONB seem to be more functionally sustainable than those in the north and west.

The findings clearly warn against the dangers of simplification and generalisation so settlements should be considered individually. This research shows that the crucial task is to distinguish between settlements that have sustainability attributes and those that do not. Hamlets and isolated dwellings can also show certain sustainability strengths, e.g. a greater propensity to use and produce products associated with management of the High Weald landscape.

AONB Unit comment: The main task for future planning in High Weald settlements is to identify, reinforce and extend existing functional strengths, not to seek to transform them by new development.

The central aim is to identify the kind of development that will increase the sustainable characteristics of existing settlements. Planning should seek out those locations and those types of development which functionally encourage localised employment and service use **and** which have a link to maintenance of landscape character. There is an evolving understanding of the importance and detailed characteristics, of the AONB's landscape which should be used to help find the right locations for development.

For further information: director@highweald.org

