



High Weald AONB Management Plan Review 2019: Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

Environmental Report

November 2018

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Table 1: Quality Assurance Checklist for Environmental Report

Non-Technical Summary

Consultation on the scoping report for the SEA took place between 26th April and 31st May 2017 and comments received from that consultation informed the environmental report. Objectives were taken from the SEA of the previous Management Plan with some slight variation in wording as recommended by Natural England at the scoping stage. These objectives were then used to assess the proposed objectives in the draft Management Plan against their reasonable alternatives. At this stage these alternatives include not having an objective on the subject area and the original wording of the objective where this is proposed to be changed. In the case of new objectives LBE1 and 2 they also include the first draft wording and that proposed for the public consultation.

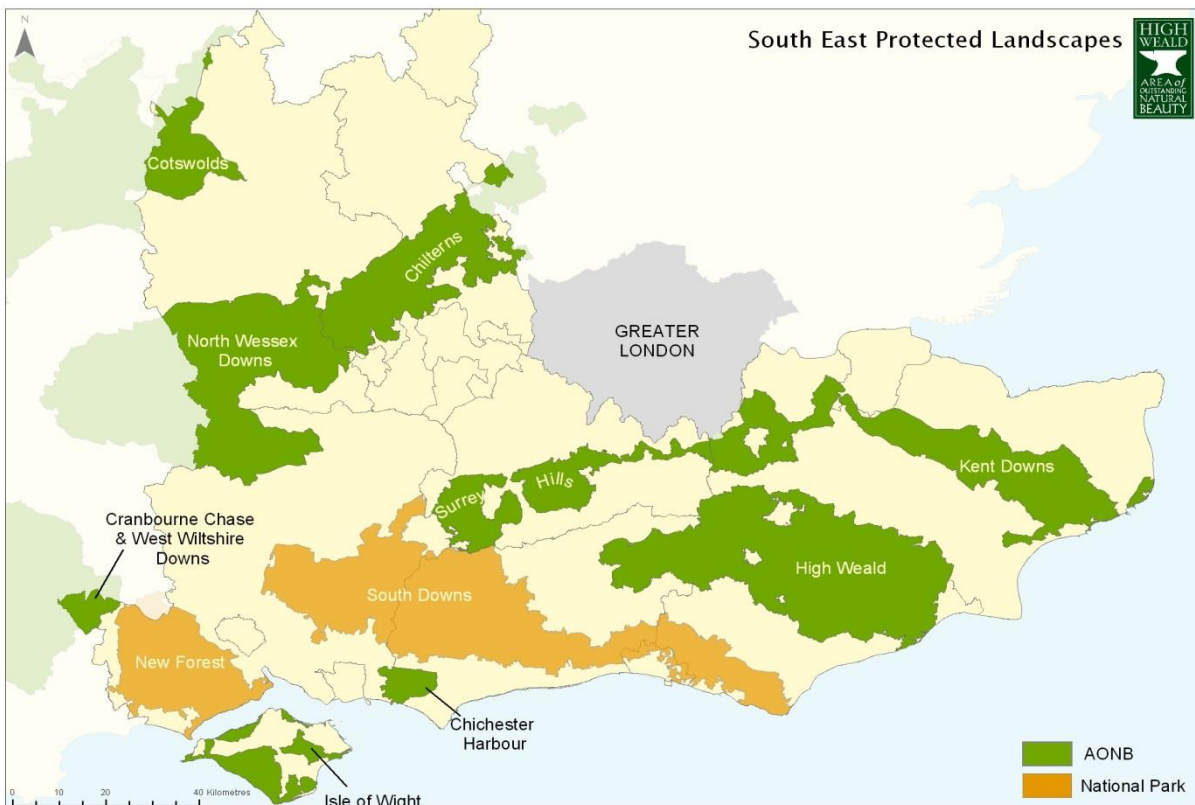
Consultation on the draft Environmental Report took place alongside the Consultation Draft Management Plan between 13th June and 25th July 2018. Comments were received from Natural England and have been addressed in this version.

In all cases the SEA concludes that the proposed objectives in the Management Plan Review have the most or equal positive environmental effects compared to their reasonable alternatives. In considering cumulative impacts and mitigation, the following conclusions were drawn:

W4	To increase the output of sustainably produced high-quality timber and underwood for local markets (wording unchanged from existing Management Plan).	Avoid adverse effects by providing guidance from the AONB Unit on woodland management that does not damage archaeology or ecological assets of woodland.
FH1	To secure agriculturally productive use for the fields of the High Weald, especially for local markets, as part of sustainable land management (wording unchanged from existing Management Plan).	Avoid adverse effects by providing guidance from the AONB Unit on agricultural land management practices that protect and enhance habitats, water systems and soils. Colour and design guidance can mitigate impact of new buildings.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) lies at the heart of South East England, covering 1,457km² (570 sq miles), across four counties. It is an historic countryside of rolling hills draped by small irregular fields, abundant woods and hedges, scattered farmsteads and ancient droeways and sunken lanes. The distinctive character of the High Weald arises from a long history of human interaction with the natural environment, and the exploitation of its resources – wood, iron and food. The landscape of the High Weald is essentially medieval and its present form was fundamentally established by the 14th century, and has survived major historic social and technological changes. Its future evolution and conservation is dependent on understanding and reinforcing the traditional interactions between people and nature that are responsible for the landscape we value today.
- 1.2 Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 requires local authorities to have regard to ‘the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of AONBs’ in making decisions that affect the designated area. Local authorities with land in an AONB, acting jointly in the case of AONBs crossing administrative boundaries, are legally obliged under the same Act to prepare and publish a plan which ‘formulates their policy for the management of the area and for the carrying out of their functions in relation to it’, and to review this plan every five years. To assist the local authorities in meeting these statutory duties a High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) was established. This is a partnership of the 15 local authorities covered by the designation plus Natural England and other organisations representing farming, forestry, business and recreation interests. The Partnership is supported by the High Weald AONB Unit, a strategic, specialist team that advises on the management of this nationally valued landscape.



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2.0 The High Weald AONB Management Plan

- 2.1 The High Weald AONB Management Plan was first published in 2004 as a twenty year plan until 2024. It was reviewed in 2009 and 2014 but these reviews were limited in scope and did not change the fundamental basis of the Management Plan.
- 2.2 The High Weald AONB Management Plan identifies and sets management goals for the key features of the landscape that have survived and form the essential basis of its natural beauty. These key components of Natural Beauty are being actively researched and understood to inform best practice in caring for and managing them, and to inform the choices for its future conservation and enhancement. The High Weald AONB Management Plan identifies the key issues for the High Weald landscape and defines what Natural Beauty means in this local context.
- 2.3 Each component has specific features and sub elements defined for it which exist in the landscape - sandstone outcrops, historic farmsteads, scattered settlements, droveways and sunken lanes, ancient woodland, meadows and heathland, for instance. These are the features that uniquely combine to create the special, locally distinctive character of the High Weald. By concentrating effort on the management, conservation and enhancement of these features, the High Weald AONB will be best preserved and protected.
- 2.4 When assessing the impacts of an action on natural beauty, those impacts should be assessed against the criteria and guidelines for management of each of these components. The Plan sets objectives for the conservation and enhancement of each of these features which other plans and stakeholders should be seeking to integrate with their own programs to meet their obligation under Section 85 to have regard to the designation. The Plan also includes objectives for the land-based economy and the perceptual qualities of the AONB.
- 2.5 In this way the Management Plan seeks to set the framework against which stakeholders and decision makers can set their own actions and programs. Where their activities meet and complement the objectives of the Management Plan then natural beauty should be conserved or enhanced. Activities that conflict with the Management Plan objectives are likely to have a negative effect on the quality and integrity of the natural and historic environment and hence the landscape and overall environment. The High Weald AONB Unit produces guidance and expert advice on the care and management of the AONB to inform and guide stakeholders.
- 2.6 The Management Plan does not set explicit policies about individual issues such renewable energy or flooding etc, but sets the context and background against which these issues can be judged in terms of their impact on natural beauty. Thus the plan does not set planning policy or rules for land management but gives a framework against which decisions can be assessed. This allows stakeholders and agents to measure their activities against these components and effectively audit their actions against the duty under section 85 of the CRoW Act.

Components of High Weald Natural Beauty

- ◆ Geology, & Water Systems;
 - Sandrock outcrops
 - Ghyll streams
- ◆ Settlements;
 - Dispersed settlement pattern
 - Historic farmsteads
- ◆ Routeways;
 - Droveways
 - Sunken lanes
- ◆ Woodland;
 - Ancient woodland
 - Archaeological remains
- ◆ Field and Heathland
 - Unimproved grassland (meadows)
 - Heathland
 - Historic Field boundaries

3.0 Scope of Management Plan Review 2019

- 3.1 The High Weald AONB Management Plan 2004 was reviewed in 2009 and 2014 as required under the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000. As the 2004 Management Plan was a twenty year strategy, the 2009 and 2014 reviews were 'light touch'.
- 3.2 Similarly the 2019 Review does not seek to significantly change the fundamental vision, statement of significance or the five key landscape components identified in the 2004 Plan. The main changes are:
- Updated baseline information, evidence and key issues for the period 2019-2024;
 - Expanded character statements for each landscape component and minor changes to the objectives;
 - Minor changes to some existing objectives;
 - Updated indicators and targets / aspirations for action;
 - A new section on the land-based economy including two new objectives to guide agri-environment interventions and other investment post-Brexit;
 - A refreshed version of the previous 'public understanding and enjoyment' section under the heading of 'other qualities'; and
 - A summary of the legal and policy context for AONBs produced by the National Association of AONBs.
- 3.3 This Strategic Environmental Assessment:
- Reviews the relevant plans, policies and programmes;
 - Updates the baseline information;
 - Updates the key issues and environmental problems; and
 - Tests the proposed Management Plan objectives and their reasonable alternatives against the environmental objectives as set out in section 8.

4.0 Methodology and Timetable for Strategic Environmental Assessment

- 4.1 The requirement to undertake a Strategic Environmental Assessment is set out in the European Directive 2001/42/EC ‘on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment’, known as the Strategic Environmental Assessment or SEA Directive. This was incorporated into English law via ‘The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (Statutory Instrument 2004 No.1633)’.
- 4.2 In broad terms a SEA requires;
- consultation on the scope of the SEA, including the policy context and baseline environmental data available, the identification of environmental issues and problems and the proposed framework for the SEA; and
 - the preparation of an environmental report which will test the proposed Management Plan Review and its reasonable alternatives against environmental objectives. This report will be consulted on, in parallel with the Management Plan, and will be finalised and published alongside the final Management Plan.
- 4.3 Consultation on the scoping report for the SEA took place between 26th April and the 31st May 2017. Consultation on the first version of this environmental report took place between 13th June and 25th July 2018. Comments received from both those consultations have informed this environmental report. The expected timetable for subsequent stages is as follows.

Dates	Plan Review	SEA process
September 2018	Final draft MP revisions agreed by Officer Steering Group	Revise and complete Environmental Report to inform decisions on the Plan.
October 2018	Consultation with Natural England on final draft MP revisions and agreement by Management Board	Consultation with Natural England on Environmental Report revisions.
November 2018	Present final report of modifications / draft revised Plan to Joint Advisory Committee for approval.	Environmental Report to inform decisions on the Plan.
December 2018 – February 2019	Local authority & partner adoption of revised Plan.	Environmental Report to inform decisions on the Plan.
March 2019	Send to Secretary of State. Publication and dissemination of revised MP.	Send Environmental Report to Secretary of State.

5.0 Policy Context – Relevant Plans, Policies and Programmes

5.1 In preparing, developing and reviewing the Management Plan, regard will be had to the objectives and directions of other relevant plans, policies and programmes. The following policies are relevant in setting the context and parameters for the scoping stage of this strategic environmental assessment and setting out the areas in which the Management Plan may have an impact or needs to respond to, in setting the management guidelines and issues for Natural Beauty.

Title	Date	Purpose of Document and Links with Other Documents	Relevance to Management Plan & SEA
International			
Ramsar Convention	1971	An international treaty for the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands. Under this convention, wetlands sites are designated for their international importance.	Part of The Pevensey Levels Ramsar Site is located within the High Weald and therefore consideration of this legislation should be included in the management plan.
UNESCO World Heritage Convention	1972	Defines cultural and natural heritage, imposes a duty on member states of ensuring the identification, protection, conservation, presentation and transmission to future generations of the cultural and natural heritage and sets out measures for protection.	The Management Plan will need to recognise the cultural and natural heritage of the High Weald and set out measures for its protection.
Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe	1987	This set the framework for an accurate conservation approach within Europe.	The Management Plan will need to have regard to this Convention.
The European Convention on the Protection of Archaeological Heritage	1992	The aim of this (revised) Convention was to protect the archaeological heritage as a source of the European collective memory and as an instrument for historical and scientific study	The Management Plan will need to have regard to this Convention.
Agenda 21	1992	Adopted by more than 178 governments at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Promotes a balanced and integrated approach to environment and development issues.	The Management Plan will need to have regard to this Agenda by considering the social, economic and environmental impacts of its objectives, policies and targets.
The EU Habitats Directive 92/42/EU (amended 2001)	1992	To conserve habitats in Special Areas of Conservation (SAC)	Ashdown Forest SAC and the Hastings Cliff Site SAC are within the High Weald AONB and the Management Plan will need to avoid damaging these areas.
Convention on Biodiversity	1993	The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) entered into force on 29 December 1993. It has 3 main objectives: 1. The conservation of biological diversity 2. The sustainable use of the components of biological diversity 3. The fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out	The Management Plan will need to have regard to this Convention in its biodiversity objectives, policies and targets.

		of the utilization of genetic resources	
The Aarhus Convention - UNECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters	1998	Acknowledges the need for public participation in environmental issues and grants the public's rights to access to justice and information on the environment.	Public participation in the preparation and implementation of the Management Plan will be required.
Water Framework Directive 2000/60/EC	2000	To promote cleaner rivers, lakes, groundwater and promotion of sustainable water management and use	The Management Plan will need to have regard to this Directive as watercourses are one of the key landscape components of the High Weald.
The Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive 2001/42/EC	2001	Aims to identify and mitigate significant environment effects arising from certain plans and programmes.	The Directive requires that an SEA be carried out on the Management Plan and an Environmental Report produced.
EC Directive 2003/4/EC on public access to environmental information	2003	Sets out the right of the public to view environmental information held by public authorities.	All environmental information relating to the Management Plan must be disseminated and made available to the general public.
European Landscape Convention	2006	To integrate landscape considerations into any policies with possible impacts on landscape.	Defines landscape as "an area perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and human factors". The Management Plan should take account of people's perceptions and how the landscape is affected by people.
Guidelines for Applying Protected Area Management Categories, IUCN	2008	Promotes the conservation of biological diversity particularly where conservation objectives need to be met over a large area with a range of ownership patterns and governance.	AONBs are recognised as Category V Protected Landscapes under IUCN's (International Union for Conservation of Nature) global protected area framework.
Birds Directive 2009/147/EC	2009	It aims to protect all European wild birds and the habitats of listed species, in particular through the designation of Special Protection Areas (SPA). This directive is transcribed through the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (As amended).	The High Weald has two SPA sites: Ashdown Forest SPA; and Dungeness, Romney Marsh and Rye Bay SPA Under this legislation, the Management Plan will need to ensure that there will be no detrimental impacts to these designations.
2020 European Biodiversity Strategy	2011	To halt the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services in the EU by 2020.	The Management Plan will need to have regard to this Strategy in its biodiversity objectives, policies and targets.
National			
National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949	1949	Statutory basis for AONBs and National Parks	Sets purpose of AONB designation to conserve and enhance natural beauty, which the Management Plans defines for the High Weald.
Ancient Monuments & Archaeological Areas Act	1979	Principal legislative mechanism for the protection of archaeology.	The Management Plan will need to have regard to this Act.
Wildlife and Countryside Act (as amended)	1981	Principal legislative mechanism for the protection of wildlife in Great Britain. Affords certain protection to Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).	The Management Plan will need to have regard to this Act in its biodiversity objectives, policies and targets.

Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act	1990	Principal legislative mechanism for the protection of listed buildings and conservation areas.	The Management Plan will need to have regard to this Act.
Town and Country Planning Act (as amended)	1990	Legislative mechanism for the planning system	The Management Plan will need to have regard to this Act.
Planning and Compensation Act	1991	Legislative mechanism for the planning system	The Management Plan will need to have regard to this Act.
The Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000	2000	Statutory basis for AONBs	Gives public bodies the 'duty to have regard to conserving and enhancing the AONB'. Sets statutory requirement for AONB Management Plans.
Securing the future: Delivering UK Sustainable Development Strategy	2005	Sets out sustainable development principles and priority areas for action. It gives five 'guiding principles' of sustainable development: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •living within the planet's environmental limits; •ensuring a strong, healthy and just society; •achieving a sustainable economy; •promoting good governance; and <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •using sound science responsibly. 	This Strategic Environmental Assessment focuses on the significant environmental effects of the AONB Management Plan. However, the Plan itself will also take into account the wider social and economic effects.
Climate Change – The UK Programme	2006	Details approach to meeting targets for the UK.	Management Plan should complement this programme and consider how the High Weald can make a positive contribution.
The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act	2006	Sets up Natural England and the Commission for Rural Communities and imposes a duty on public bodies to have regard to conserving biodiversity.	Management Plan should have regard to this Act, particularly in relation to its biodiversity objectives, policies and targets.
Principles Policies and Guidance for the Sustainable Management of Historic Environment	2007	To support the quality of decision-making, creating a management regime for all aspects of the historic environment.	Management Plan should have regard to this guidance in its historic objectives, policies and targets.
Climate Change Act	2008	Makes provision for the development and promotion of a sustainable energy policy.	Management Plan should have regard to this Act and consider how the High Weald can make a positive contribution.
Securing Biodiversity - Natural England	2008	To enhance the recovery of priority habitats and species in England.	The Management Plan should consider this guidance in relation to its biodiversity objectives, policies and targets.
Marine and Coastal Access Act	2009	Principal legislative mechanism for the protection of marine and coastal areas.	The Management Plan will need to have regard to this Act.
Defra's Climate Change Plan	2010	Sets out the actions Defra is taking to reduce greenhouse gas emissions across its policy areas.	Management Plan should have regard to these actions and consider how the High Weald can make a positive contribution.
The Natural Environment White Paper	2011	To support a more integrated landscape scale approach to the protection of wildlife.	Management Plan should complement this strategy particularly in relation to its biodiversity objectives, policies and targets.
Biodiversity 2020: A Strategy for England's	2011	Provides aims for reducing biodiversity loss, improving	Management Plan should complement this strategy particularly in relation to in

wildlife and ecosystem services		networks and guiding development.	its biodiversity objectives, policies and targets.
Localism Act	2011	Sets out new community rights including neighbourhood planning and community land trusts.	The Management Plan should consider whether any of these new mechanisms can help to achieve its objectives.
Healthy Lives, Healthy People White Paper - Department for Health	2011	Sets out the key principles for supporting the public to make better and more informed choices with regards to their health.	The Management Plan should consider whether and how the AONB can contribute to people's health and wellbeing.
UK Forestry Standard - Forestry Commission	2011	Sets out the standard for sustainable forest management in the UK.	The Management Plan should have regard to this standard in relation to its approach to woodland management.
Marine Policy Statement	2011	Government Policy in relation to marine areas until the South East Marine Plan is approved.	The Management Plan should have regard to this statement in relation to the High Weald's coastal areas around Hastings.
The National Pollinator Strategy: for bees and other pollinators in England	2014	Sets out the importance of pollinators in ecosystem functioning and food production and how they are supported by both meadows and heathland habitat.	The Management Plan should have regard to this strategy
National Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)	Ongoing	To provide further detail and application of policies in the NPPF.	The Management Plan should have regard to this guidance.
Defra Strategy to 2020	2016	Sets out Defra's strategy	The Management Plan should have regard to this strategy
Natural England Conservation 21 Strategy	2016	Sets out how Natural England will work to protect England's nature and landscapes for people to enjoy and the ecosystem services they provide	The Management Plan should have regard to this strategy
Improving Natural Capital Natural Capital Committee	2017	An assessment of progress Fourth report to the Economic Affairs Committee	The Management Plan should take account of this report.
Housing White Paper	2017	To set out proposals for 'fixing the broken housing market'.	The Management Plan should take account of the direction of travel of Government housing policy.
The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations	2017	Consolidates the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 with subsequent amendments.	Under the Regulations, competent authorities have a general duty, in the exercise of any of their functions, to have regard to the EC Habitats Directive.
UK Climate Change Risk Assessment	2017	To complement the inclusion of Defra's Climate Change Plan (2010)	The Management Plan should take account of this report.
A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment	2018	To set out the Government's plan to improve the environment.	The Management Plan should take account of the Government's environmental policy
National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)	2018	To set out the government's planning policies.	The Management Plan should have regard to these policies.
Regional/Local			
Environment Agency Catchment Flood Management Plans for the Cuckmere and Sussex Havens; the Ouse; the	2009	Considers all types of inland flooding, from rivers, groundwater, surface water and tidal flooding. Shoreline management plans consider	Management Plan should have regard to but also influence these plans.

Rother and Romney; and the Medway.		flooding from the sea.	
National Character Area Profile:122 High Weald	2013	Describes the character of the area and identifies issues	The Management Plan should have regard to this NCA Profile.
Countryside Stewardship statement of priorities: High Weald	2015	Sets out management priorities for the High Weald.	The Management Plan should have regard to these priorities.
Local Plans produced by the 15 local planning authorities in the High Weald and their supporting assessments and evidence.	Various	Set out local planning policies for the area.	The Management Plan should have regard to but also influence these plans.
Local Transport Plans produced by the 4 local highway authorities in the High Weald.	Various	Set out the transport strategy and priorities for the area.	The Management Plan should have regard to but also influence these plans.
Kent Great Crested Newt Conservation Strategy	2017	Will set out strategic approach to GCN mitigation	The Management Plan should have regard to this Strategy

6.0 Baseline Environmental Information

6.1 Extensive data and GIS resources are used regularly to develop the understanding and advice relating to each of the features of the components of natural beauty. A wider range of statistical and data sources are available to assist in our understanding of the features and qualities of the landscape. The following data is available to inform the SEA process and Management Plan review in general.

Data sources for Management Plan review and SEA		
<i>Landscape - Key components of natural beauty from AONB Management Plan</i>		
Geology , Water Systems & Climate	Sandrock outcrops Geology Gill Streams	British Geological Survey Environment Agency – Flood Maps and Water Quality High Weald AONB datasets Soil Classification System for England and Wales The water companies’ water quality sampling and analysis Natural Flood Management Opportunity Mapping – Environment Agency
Settlement	Built development (settlement pattern) Historic Farmsteads Listed Buildings Historic Parkland	Heritage England – Extensive Urban Surveys High Weald AONB datasets Historic Landscape Characterisation Ordnance Survey Tithe Maps Historic Farmstead mapping
Routeways	Historic Droveways Public Rights of Way Roman roads	High Weald AONB datasets Ordnance Survey Tithe Maps
Woodland	Ancient Woodland Other woodland (not ancient) Woodland Archaeology	Ancient Woodland Inventories
Field and Heath	Unimproved/semi-improved grassland (Meadows) Heathland Historic field boundaries Archaeology of field and heath	High Weald AONB High Weald AONB datasets Fieldsapes Study Data on livestock numbers Restocking the Weald report by Bill Vorley Site Improvement Plan (SIP) for Ashdown Forest Special Protection Area (SPA) and Special Area of Conservation (SAC). This plan sets out major issue for the protected site and what actions and which organisations are required to help deliver solutions.
<i>Other data sources</i>		
Biodiversity	SSSI SAC SPA Sites nature conservation importance	Defra https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-environment-food-rural-affairs/about/statistics Natural England – MAGIC data sets and Monitoring Information http://www.magic.gov.uk/ Natural England http://www.sssi.naturalengland.org.uk/ Sussex Biodiversity Records Centre http://sxbrc.org.uk/ Kent Wildlife Trust http://www.kentwildlifetrust.org.uk/ Surrey Biodiversity Information Centre http://www.surreywildlifetrust.org/SBIC Kent and Medway Biological Records Centre (KMBRC)

		https://www.kmbrc.org.uk/ The Kent Habitat Survey 2012 http://www.archnature.eu/the-kent-habitat-survey-2012-final-report.html Protected Species data and distribution maps from NBN Gateway https://nbnatlas.org/ Great Crested Newt Kent Conservation Strategy data – Natural England Biodiversity 2020 priority habitat maps in addition to data on protected sites Natural England Designated Sites System for access to SSSI site monitoring data can be accessed via: https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/ Information on SPAs can be accessed via the JNCC website: http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-162 Information on SACs can be accessed via the JNCC website: http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-23
Cultural Heritage	Archaeological sensitive areas Scheduled ancient monuments	County Councils – Historic Environment Records Historic England – https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/
Material Assets	Farm Holdings Public Rights of Way Network	Defra June Agricultural Census Local Highway Authorities
	Farmed Area	Defra June Agricultural Census
	Farm Size	Defra June Agricultural Census
Population Statistics and Human Health	Population of the AONB Health of the population	Census 2011
Air Quality	Air quality information available via search function by grid reference.	Air Pollution Information System http://www.apis.ac.uk/

Summary of Baseline Information

Natural Capital

- 6.2 The High Weald can be considered as ‘natural capital’ in that it provides benefits to the wider population that can in some cases be measured. These benefits include the provision of drinking water, carbon sinks provided by woodland and grassland, and the health benefits of the natural landscape. These will be identified and where possible measured as part of the Management Plan.

Landscape

- 6.3 The High Weald was designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in 1983. It is one of 34 AONBs in England, which cover nearly 15% of the land area. The High Weald lies almost entirely within the High Weald National Character Area, which in places extends beyond the AONB boundary.
- 6.4 Time depth and objective analysis has defined the High Weald AONB as characterised by dispersed settlement particularly historic farmsteads; ancient tracks and routeways; an abundance of ancient woodland, wooded heaths and shaws with a heritage of woodland industries and iron working; and small, irregularly shaped and productive fields. These are all draped over a deeply incised and ridged landform of clays and sandstones with numerous gill streams, and are closely related to socio-economic characteristics that have roots extending deep into history.

Geography

- 6.5 The High Weald AONB covers 1461 sq km. This includes land within 11 parliamentary constituencies, 4 counties, and 11 districts/boroughs. There are 44 parishes that are wholly within the AONB and a further 56 parishes that are partially in the AONB.

Population (Census 2011 figures)

- 6.6 The AONB has a population of 127,000 with a density of 87 people per sq km. An additional 80,000 people live in urban areas – Tunbridge Wells, Crowborough and Heathfield – excluded from the designation but within the outer AONB boundary. A further 873,000 people live in wards wholly or partly within 5km of the AONB boundary.

Settlements

- 6.7 The High Weald AONB has 17 market towns and villages with populations greater than 2000, the largest being Battle with a population over 6000.

Economy

- 6.8 13% of High Weald businesses are land based businesses compared with 3% in the South East. 38% of employment in the High Weald is in Micro-Businesses compared to 17% in the South East. 29% of the High Weald population are retired compared with 21% of the South East.

Agriculture

- 6.9 The High Weald has the second highest number of total agricultural land holdings than any other AONB with 1512. This is second only to the Cotswolds AONB which has a total number of 1646 holdings. The greatest numbers of holdings are for grazing livestock (lowland) where 763 holdings are designated as this type of farm. This is the greatest number of grazing livestock (lowland) holdings than any other AONB. The majority of farms in the High Weald are sized between 5 and 20 hectares. In general, the High Weald has larger numbers of small holdings than other AONBs.

Soils

- 6.10 The majority of High Weald soils are relatively poor and highly variable over short distances. There is no Grade 1 agricultural land in the High or Low Weald. Grade 2 covers 2.5% of the High Weald with 85% at Grade 3. 57% of soils are described by the British Geological Society (BGS) as “slightly acid loamy and clayey soils with impeded drainage” and a further 30% are described as “slowly permeable seasonally wet slightly acid but base-rich loamy and clayey soils”.

Water

- 6.11 The High Weald covers part of the headwaters of seven river catchments: the Arun; the Adur; the Ouse; the Mole; the Medway; the Rother; and the Cuckmere. Thirteen river catchments fall at least partly within the boundary of the AONB. There are 4613km of water courses in the High Weald, including 253km of main river channels. There are 13,401 ponds (many of which originated as small-scale extraction sites for clay, stone and marl), giving a density of 9 ponds per km² versus national average of 1.8 per km². Five reservoirs cover 744 ha, including Bewl Water, the largest body of inland water in the South East.

Cultural Heritage

- 6.12 The essential character of the High Weald was established by the 14th century and has survived major historical events, and social and technological changes. It is considered to be one of the best surviving coherent medieval landscapes in Northern Europe: this fundamental and largely immutable character is the essence of the natural beauty of the AONB.
- 6.13 The High Weald is also renowned for the site of the 1066 Battle of Hastings. There are 5274 listed buildings; 91 Scheduled monuments; 57 medieval parish churches and 50 registered historic parks and gardens. Historic parkland especially medieval deer parks and 'designed landscapes' are a distinctive feature of the High Weald.
- 6.14 The High Weald was a major iron producing district from at least the Roman occupation up to the nineteenth century. There are remains of 2000 bloomeries scattered across the area and 9 industrial scale sites. According to the Wealden Iron Research Group (WIRG), there are 639 recorded iron working sites distributed across the High Weald AONB, giving a density of 0.44 per km².

Biodiversity

- 6.15 The High Weald AONB offers a highly interconnected ecological infrastructure network with a mosaic of intermingled semi-natural habitat. There are a total of 227km² of sites designated for biodiversity value in the High Weald equating to 15.6% of its land area. 4.5% of the High Weald is owned by public trusts (Country Parks, National Trust, The Wildlife Trusts, Forestry Commission, RSPB and the Woodland Trust). The High Weald has the highest coverage of ancient woodland of any protected landscape at 18.6% of its land area. This equates to 19% of the ancient woodland in the South East and 7.5% of the ancient woodland in England. The High Weald's gill woodlands support internationally important communities of bryophytes and ferns.
- 6.16 The High Weald AONB covers a relatively large proportion of occupied newt ponds in Kent (c 1600; around one to two fifths of occupied ponds) and provides significant areas of deciduous woodland, a priority habitat for the species. This makes the High Weald landscape of significant importance within the Kent Great Crested Newts Conservation Strategy which defines the Favourable Conservation Status (FCS) of GCN at a County level.

7.0 Statement of Key Environmental Issues

7. The following key environmental issues are relevant to the High Weald landscape and its Management Plan. These are scoped in terms of the key components of natural beauty identified by the management plan, and then a range of other external factors that may have impacts on the environment of the AONB. Additionally any predicted trends that may occur in the absence of any intervention (or inappropriate intervention) are outlined.

Key Issues for High Weald Management Plan Strategic Environmental Assessment		
Topic	Key Issues	Predicted trends and impacts without intervention
Key components of natural beauty		
Geology , Water Systems & Climate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate change; the impact of rising temperatures and extreme weather events • Pressure on sensitive geological features from invasive species and recreation • Soil erosion and the need for soil conservation • Diffuse pollution - nutrient, pesticide and fine sediment run-off into ponds, streams and rivers • Non-native invasive species in rivers, water bodies and bankside vegetation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extended hard engineering management of rivers and flood defences with damage to environment and landscape quality around river basins • Degradation of river and stream quality, reduction in biodiversity and natural function of small scale water systems essential to gill woodland • Hard engineering river defences inappropriate in scale and function to the landscape and traditional interactions. Archaeological impacts • Loss of, or continuing damage to the resource leading to erosion of the features and soil quality • Pressure on drinking water resources caused by degradation from pesticides and nutrients.
Settlement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in greenfield development pressure, mostly for housing and associated infrastructure, as a result of the highest level of proposed housing growth of any AONB • Generic layout/ design of new developments and their surrounding spaces • Erosion of character through suburbanisation and overly large new and replacement dwellings • Lack of affordable housing, and housing suitable for land-based workers • Fragmentation of historic farmsteads and conversion of agricultural buildings to residential with the loss of agricultural/ economic function and relationship with land. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inappropriate development and expansion of key settlements to the detriment of AONB character. • Gradual decline in landscape quality and traditional indigenous species and distinctive features. • Loss of tranquillity due to increased traffic and recreational pressure.
Routeways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversions of public rights of way from the historic route • Damage from the erection of fences; flytipping, development and ploughing • Insensitive management of veteran trees and roadside coppice including practice of 'chip and smother'; and inappropriate management of flowery grassland on verges. • Insensitive highway engineering including passing bays, deep visibility splays to entrances, and suburban signage and lighting. • Damage to narrow roads and BOATs (Byways Open to all Traffic) by motor vehicles and wide agricultural machinery, particularly in wet conditions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Threat to localised habitats dependent on the routeway character and loss of biodiversity. Threat to the quiet enjoyment and character of the country lanes and paths through inappropriate management.

Woodland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low value bulk markets for timber improving but procurement practices and lack of investment restricting market growth for higher value locally-sourced wood products • Changing management, particularly cessation of traditional coppicing affecting groundflora • Predicted increase in tree diseases, partly through imported stock or soil • Invasive and damaging species including rhododendron, deer and grey squirrel • Impact of increasing mechanisation and machinery size on soils, small-scale habitat variability and archaeology. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Degradation of existing woodland, loss of biodiversity and development of scrubby woodland and inappropriate species • Spread of invasive species leading to degradation of biodiversity and decline in landscape quality • Reduction in quality and spread of woodland and links between them, further degradation of biodiversity value.
Field and Heath	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fragmentation of farm holdings due to an increase in non-farming land ownership • Loss of agricultural skills and knowledge, and reduction in livestock grazing leading to loss of farm infrastructure and degradation of pasture and soils • Increasing costs of managing associated habitats such as hedgerows, exacerbated by reduction in agri-environmental funding. • Loss to green field development and infrastructure, or conversion to other land uses such planting new woodlands • Difficulties of access to small, isolated sites, lack of grazing infrastructure including fencing and livestock 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of biodiversity, particularly plant species common to flower rich meadows, reduction in finite resource of unimproved grassland, particularly key habitats including habitats of principal importance (formally BAP habitats) which have been identified in the Kent Habitat Survey of 2012. • Continued scrubbing up of unimproved and biodiversity diverse fields, decline in biodiversity and loss of specialist habitats, heathland and unimproved grassland. Threat to field boundaries and historic and archaeological features of these landscape features. • Threat of trees and scrub to heathland as a result of lack of grazing; • Risk of fragmentation of habitats from development; • Risk to heathland from invasive non-native species i.e. Rhododendron poticum; • Impacts to heathland from nitrogen deposition; • Recreational disturbance to ground nesting birds on heathland, and • Impacts associated with inappropriate management of meadows, heath and woodland.
Land based economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low wages and lack of affordable housing and well-designed workspace affecting recruitment and retention of workers and constraining ability of local woodland, craft and agricultural industries to grow • Holdings which are typically small (by national standards) struggling to remain economic in the current market under traditional livestock management regimes • Lack of innovation and creative industries focused on developing new uses for the materials arising from traditional land management • High cost of land and decline in affordable farm tenancies a barrier to new entrants to agriculture • Loss of traditional skills due to aging workforce and contracting farm and woodland economies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduction in appropriate agricultural and forestry land management due to lack of skilled workers and economic purpose for land, leading to possible dereliction or more likely change of character of land through inappropriate management.

<p>Perceptual qualities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reducing connection and knowledge of the countryside, including where to go and how to manage it • Increasing visitor numbers with demand for more infrastructure around popular sites and tension between some countryside user groups • Reducing accessibility to some user groups due to poor public transport services and declining rights of way maintenance • Development including traffic, noise and light pollution, degrading the AONB's tranquil and dark qualities • Lack of awareness of AONB designation and the need for conservation management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased disconnect between residents and the countryside resulting in conflicts between users of the countryside and inappropriate or insufficient management.
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8.0 Framework and Methodology

Objectives

- 8.1 The following objectives have been mostly taken from the Strategic Environmental Assessment of the previous review of the Management Plan. This is because they remain relevant to present day environmental issues and it retains consistency of approach appropriate for a light touch review of a twenty year strategy. Additional wording suggested by Natural England for this review is in bold.
1. To protect and enhance the landscape
 2. To protect and maintain cultural heritage (inc. archaeology and architecture)
 3. To protect and where practical enhance diverse habitats
 4. To protect and enhance flora and fauna
 5. To protect water systems and promote sustainable flood **and drought** risk management
 6. To safeguard the quality of soil, air, water and maintain appropriate climatic conditions
 7. To protect natural resources and encourage sustainable energy **use and** production
 8. To safeguard human health, wellbeing and ensure no adverse effects on population
 9. To avoid significant adverse effects generated through the interrelationships or cumulative effects of the above criteria.

Potential conflicts between objectives

- 8.2 It is considered that the most likely conflicts are:
- Between 1 and 7, for instance where sustainable energy development has a significant landscape impact; and
 - Between 1-7 and 8, for instance where initiatives to support the health and wellbeing of the population of the High Weald cause other environmental effects such as loss of habitat, landscape or historical feature or other natural resource.

Scoring methodology

- 8.3 As part of the Environmental Report the High Weald AONB Management Plan objectives will be assessed against the nine environmental objectives listed above to identify their likely significant environmental effects. The possible outcomes used will be;
- | | |
|-----|-----------------------------|
| ++ | significant positive effect |
| + | partial positive effect |
| ? | uncertain effect |
| - | partial negative effect |
| -- | significant negative effect |
| n/a | not applicable |

Consultation

- 8.4 Consultation on the Scoping Report was carried out with the statutory bodies (Natural England, Historic England and the Environment Agency) and the local authority and other partners on the High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee. Consultation was carried out on the draft Environmental Report alongside the Consultation Draft Management Plan between 13th June and 25th July 2018. This Environmental Report will be published at www.highweald.org alongside the final Management Plan Review as set out in the timetable in section 4.

Table 1: Quality Assurance Checklist for Environmental Report

Strategic Environmental Assessment Requirements	Where These Are Met
Non-technical Summary	At the front of this document.
Objectives and Context	
The AONB Management Plan's purpose and objectives are made clear.	2.0 The High Weald AONB Management Plan; and 3.0 Scope of Management Plan Review 2019.
Environmental issues and constraints, including international and EC environmental protection objectives, are considered in developing objectives and targets.	5.0 Policy Context – Relevant Plans, Policies and Programmes; 6.0 Baseline Environmental Information; and 7.0 Statement of Key Environmental Issues and Problems.
SEA objectives are clearly set out and linked to indicators and targets where appropriate.	8.0 Proposed Strategic Environmental Assessment Framework.
Links with other related plans, programmes and policies are identified and explained.	5.0 Policy Context – Relevant Plans, Policies and Programmes.
Conflicts that exist between SEA objectives, between SEA and plan objectives and between SEA objectives and other plan objectives are identified and described.	8.0 Proposed Strategic Environmental Assessment Framework.
Scoping	
The assessment focuses on significant issues.	3.0 Scope of Management Plan Review 2019.
Technical, procedural and other difficulties encountered are discussed; assumptions and uncertainties are made explicit.	3.0 Scope of Management Plan Review 2019.
Reasons are given for eliminating issues from further consideration.	3.0 Scope of Management Plan Review 2019.
Baseline information	
Relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and their likely evolution without the plan or programme are described.	6.0 Baseline Environmental Information.
Environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected are described, including areas wider than the physical boundary of the plan area where it is likely to be affected by the plan.	6.0 Baseline Environmental Information.
Difficulties such as deficiencies in information or methods are explained.	6.0 Baseline Environmental Information.
Appraisal of Reasonable Alternatives	
What reasonable alternatives have been identified and on what basis? How they have been assessed and compared (including how sustainability issues have been considered)? What are the preferred alternatives and why they are preferred over other alternatives?	Appended Appraisal Tables
Consultation	
Consultation Bodies are consulted in appropriate ways and at appropriate times on the proposed content and scope of the Environmental Report.	4.0 Methodology and Timetable for Strategic Environmental Assessment.