

High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee Annual Review 2003-2004



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

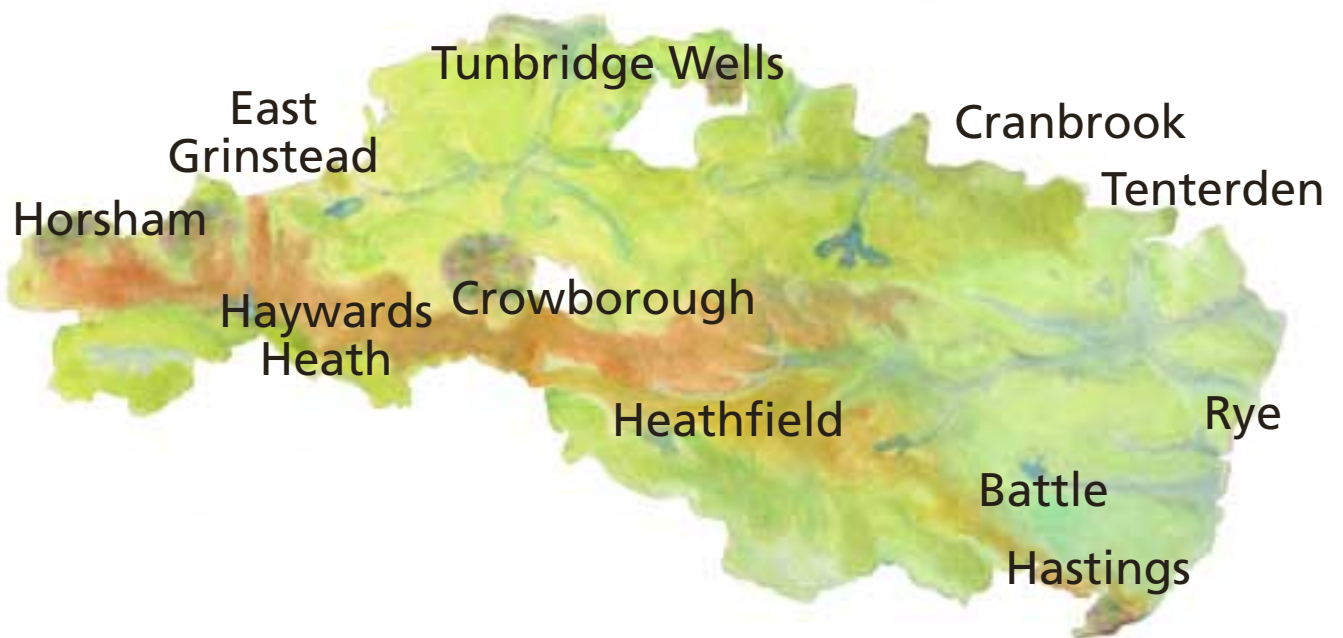


The High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is a historic countryside of rolling hills draped with small, irregular fields, abundant woods and hedges, scattered farmsteads and sunken lanes.

The High Weald covers parts of four 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 introduce the Committee's Annual Review. I would like to extend our thanks to all those partner organisations, communities and individuals who have worked with us and helped contribute to the many achievements.

This year has been a landmark year for AONBs nationally. The first statutory Management Plans have been produced for all 41 AONBs in England and Wales. The production of our own Plan for the High Weald AONB was a culmination of over 2 years research and consultation with very many agencies, communities and residents of the area. Early in 2004, all our 15 local authorities adopted the plan as their management policy for the High Weald AONB. We anticipate many fruitful partnerships emerging over the next year to begin to implement the Plan's objectives.

Despite the demands of the management planning process, I am delighted that important partnership projects to safeguard the area's most vulnerable habitats and features have continued to grow. Two new initiatives have taken off over the last year to address the threats to ancient woodland, one of the fundamental components of the High Weald's distinctive character: the SE AONBs Woodland Programmes and Weald Ancient Landscapes Project. Both are providing valuable new information to policy makers to assist in the protection and sustainable management of this irreplaceable habitat.

The Weald Meadows Initiative and Weald Heathland Initiative continue to provide an unrivalled specialist advisory service alongside research and development into new economic products and services: vital components of any strategy to prevent the abandonment of these valuable, small and often fragmented sites. One highlight is a revival of the ancient practice of transhumance through a winter exchange of animals between the South Downs and the High Weald.

With the public survey results indicating that 90% of residents recognise that they live both in the High Weald and an AONB, promotional work has concentrated on developing understanding of the area's special character and generating commitment to taking action to conserve it. The excellent 'Anvil' newspaper distributed to most households in the AONB continues to contribute to this understanding and has generated a new supporters group 'Friends of the High Weald' who, I am sure, will make a great contribution to conservation of the area in the years ahead.

I am particularly pleased to be working with schools, exploring and celebrating what is special about the High Weald's landscape. If we are to achieve the aspirations of the AONB Management Plan then it is to the next generation that we must look to ensure the area's distinctive qualities survive the demands of the 21st century.



Councillor Mrs Paulina Stockell

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Paulina Stockell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Councillor Mrs Paulina Stockell
Chairman of the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee
July 2004

Effective structures and partnerships

Locally, regionally and nationally

High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee (JAC)



Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith at the Ashdown Schools' Event

Two main issues dominated the JAC agenda in 2003: the AONB Management Plan and governance. A dedicated member working group was set up to consider governance issues and address the significant concerns of some partners. In the autumn representatives met DEFRA to discuss the preparing of a draft Establishment Order for the proposed High Weald Conservation Board.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith, Councillor Paulina Stockell and Councillor Angela Chapman represented the High Weald JAC at the **Association for AONBs (AAONB) Conference** at Guildford. High Weald Officers led a guided walk around Penshurst as part of the programme of AONB field trips focusing on planning and settlement character.

Local Partnerships

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.

The Unit's Rural Character Advisor provided support to the **Sussex Historic Landscape Characterization** project initiated by East and West Sussex to map the main historic attributes of every land parcel in the two counties.

The **tourism business clusters** developing in Ashdown Forest and Winchelsea continue to grow. AONB Unit officers have provided support and guidance to these groups, particularly focusing on marketing and promotion. A consultancy report on the opportunities for green linkages was commissioned to support the emerging business group focusing on the attractions and countryside around Lamberhurst and Bedgebury.



Walkers in a sunken droveway near Bewl Water

National and Regional Partnerships

The AONB Officer continues to meet on a regular basis with other SE AONB officers to co-ordinate the responses of protected landscapes to issues on the national and regional agenda. Of particular relevance this year have been the implications for AONB management of the Haskins review and changes in Countryside Agency project funding. Also important is the developing relationship between AONBs and regional agencies that have signed up to the **Protected Landscapes in the South East: Joint Statement of Intent**. The expansion of evidence-based research and analysis to underpin AONB objectives is one aspect being promoted by the High Weald.

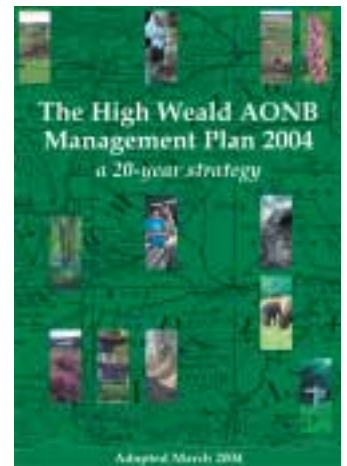
In September, the Assistant AONB Officer attended the **World Parks Congress** in Durban, South Africa on behalf of the Association of AONBs (AAONB). A key output of the Congress was recommendations to the Convention on Biological Diversity to be held in Malaysia next year.

Management planning programme

March 31st 2003 saw the successful culmination of a busy 2-year management planning programme when the adopted Plan was published by the JAC and sent to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs as required by the **Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000**.

The year began in May with publication of the Consultation Draft in printed form and on the website, accompanied by research reports and background information. The formal consultation period ran until 5th September. To promote the process, 4,300 fliers raising awareness of the draft plan and the formal consultation period were sent to individuals on the unit database and 84,000 copies of a special Management Plan edition of the *High Weald Anvil* were distributed, as were 30,000 promotional postcards. 960 copies of the printed plan were sent to named contacts within partner organisations, individuals requesting copies, and all parish councils and public libraries. Both the printed plan and the website had consultation feedback forms that many respondents used. Additional meetings and events took place during this period to promote the consultation and to assist those wanting to comment: a series of community arts events were held in May and June. Parish councils and amenity and conservation groups attended an information meeting in July; and 7 meetings took place with local authorities and regional agencies.

All responses submitted during the formal consultation period were collated and analysed in a structured and transparent manner. Recommendations on each of the comments were proposed and agreed by the Officers' Steering Group (OSG) on behalf of the JAC. A **report on the consultation process**, including a schedule of the consultation responses and approved modifications, was produced and is publicly available on the AONB website. Following endorsement at the meeting on 12th November, the JAC Chairman wrote to all local authority partners commending the AONB Management Plan to them for adoption within the prescribed timetable. All 15 local authorities covering the AONB then formally adopted the Plan. **Three authorities also adopted the Plan as Supplementary Planning Guidance.**



“The Countryside Agency, Defra, GOSE, SEEDA and SEERA are committed, by a joint statement of intent, to work together in support of AONB management plans”

Alison Parker
Defra Director, GOSE

Communications

Furthering awareness and understanding

The High Weald awareness campaign by the Unit and its Initiatives continued across the AONB during 2003, supported by a number of communication projects.

Draft Management Plan Promotion



Art activities celebrating the High Weald countryside



Some of the old folk love
the oak.
It all comes down to Nature.
People love nature,
Like people like fossils.
It's worth looking at for hours
and hours.

Thomas B
Colliers Green School

Events and exhibitions

A series of community arts events were held in May and June 2003. Artists from **Hands-on-Art**, helped by Unit staff, worked with children, teachers and parents of three High Weald primary schools (one from East Sussex, one from West Sussex and one from Kent) to raise awareness of the High Weald countryside – by working with locally found materials and helping them to express their thoughts about the landscape.

Eighty-eight children took part in making clay frames, painting pictures, writing poems and taking walks outside the school grounds to investigate landscape features of the High Weald (such as hammer ponds). They also attended an all-day celebratory **launch event** at the Ashdown Forest Centre, where all the work produced was on show and they were able to take part in several activities run by an Environmental Education consultant, again with help from Unit staff. (See also WHI – *furthering understanding and enjoyment*.)

Thirty-nine parents and teachers took part in **evening workshops**, which explained the Management Plan context and offered leaf lantern and wreath making – with 12 also attending the Ashdown launch event.

Through **media releases**, these events received coverage in three local papers.

The Unit attended the **Heathfield Show** in May with an AONB display to promote the consultation draft of the Management plan, together with arts activities by **Hands-on-Art**. These activities provided children with the opportunity to learn more about meadows and to use wildflower seed to decorate boxes and frames.

The Unit's draft Management Plan display then went on show for a month at the **Ashdown Forest Centre** during June/July.

Other Management Plan Promotion Activity

Sets of High Weald photographic images were compiled to illustrate the 6 themes of the Management Plan: Geology and Water Systems, Woodland, Routeways, Field and Heath, Settlement and Enjoyment. The images were cropped into a distinctive shape and carefully juxtaposed. These assemblages were then used for a set of **6 full-colour postcards** to promote the Website and Management Plan. 30,000 of these postcards were printed and selectively distributed (June). The assembled images were also used to illustrate each chapter of the Management Plan. The distinctive cropping now forms part of the Unit's branding.

Using a local artist, an illustration was produced to promote **Caring For The High Weald – A Charter for Residents and Visitors** (March). This takes the

form of two identical, fictional High Weald views – one showing positive and one negative actions by residents and visitors. It is anticipated that this highly detailed illustration will have many interpretive uses.

Other events

A 'drover' and a 'pig' (Unit staff and local actors in costume) appeared at **WoodFair 2003** (September) to develop understanding of dens and droving in the formation of the High Weald's character. They proved a popular alternative to display boards with the 300 visitors and 100 school children who were engaged in lively conversations about droving.

General publications

Using the new, distinctively cropped AONB photographic images together with existing branding, 1,000 AONB general purpose **Presentation Folders** were produced (September).

High Weald Anvil 2003 – 90,000 copies of the annual guide were published in April. 75,000 were distributed by door-to-door delivery to households in and around the AONB. The remainder were distributed via visitor attractions, Libraries and TICs. This, the 4th edition, focused on Management Plan issues and included facts and figures from the High Weald Public Survey 2002.

Media

Taking it in turns with the Kent Downs AONB to produce monthly articles for **Kent and Sussex Today Magazine's** 'In The Country' feature, the Communications Team wrote (and provided photographs for) articles interpreting the High Weald's distinctive routeways (November), the relationship between animals and the High Weald landscape (January) and monitoring the effects of climate change in the High Weald (March).

Partnership projects

In partnership with **Tourism South East**, the Unit produced an **Accommodation Providers' Welcome Pack** for the AONB (October). This colourful introduction to the area encouraged hosts to promote the special qualities of the High Weald further by adding their own local information to the pack in the pocket provided.

Members of the Communications Team subsequently gave presentations on **High Weald Local Distinctiveness** at special training events for B&B and hotel owners to launch the Accommodation Providers' Welcome Pack. These were run in the Ashdown Forest and Winchelsea areas.

In partnership with the **Ashdown Forest Forum**, The Unit produced a **Map and Guide to The Ashdown Forest Area** (published March 04). In addition to the useful listings and location map – promoting local businesses such as attractions,



"Caring For the High Weald" illustration



Pig and Drover at WoodFair 2003

Communications

Furthering awareness and understanding



places to eat and drink and producers – this comprehensive leaflet interprets the Forest’s heritage and explains how visitors can help to care for it. 70,000 were printed and distributed to attractions across the Ashdown Forest Area.

Enabling partners to interpret the High Weald

The Interpretation Officer took on an advisory role in the production of 5 **Interpretation Panels** to be located in car parks on Ashdown Forest (January).

Advice on the interpretation of High Weald landscape character (and AONB messages in general) was given to the **Kent High Weald Project (KHWP)** for several of their events and publications. In particular, the Unit provided KHWP with maps, photographs and background information for their **Routeways and Transport Schools Project**, which involved, amongst other activities, taking several classes from local schools to walk up a good example of a sunken driveway near Benenden. As part of this project, the KHWP also used a board game “Drove!” devised by the Interpretation Officer.



Kent High Weald Project and children driving up a routeway

Interpretation boards for the new **Francis Rose Nature Reserve** in the grounds of Wakehurst Place used artwork from the Unit’s **Sandrock in the Weald** leaflet.

An Educational Consultant was given a short contract to report on potential links between the **High Weald AONB and the Primary National Curriculum**. It is hoped that this report may form the basis for any future HLF bids to secure funds for a High Weald Educational Programme. In the meantime, it should act as useful guidance for Unit Officers and partners when developing educational projects and events.

High Weald image library

In the summer, Peter Greenhalf, the **Countryside Agency’s Contract Photographer** completed his work for the Unit. The final batch of images concentrated on the Western end of the AONB, including the **Ashdown Forest Area** and its many attractions. Many more **digital photographs** have been taken by Unit staff and added to the image stock.

Website

New pages added and updated this year:

- Caring for The High Weald Charter for Residents and Visitors
- Village shop/local product outlet listings
- How local products are made – Coppice industry
- Trugmaker Profile
- 3 Long distance walks
- Outstanding section rewritten and updated
- High Weald Community town descriptions updated
- National Heathland Conference
- Vacancies



Caring Charter page from the AONB website

Wealden Ancient Woods Survey

Sally Westaway joined the Unit in February 2004 as Habitat Survey and Mapping Officer to undertake this project working closely with Wealden District Council. Survey work is being tackled methodically Parish by Parish. Digital map data is being used, backed up by historical records and – where necessary – ground surveys of woodland flora and archaeological and topographical features. Areas of more recent and secondary woodland are eliminated prior to ground survey by examination of historical maps and aerial photographs. Woodlands under 2ha in size will be included for the first time and existing boundaries verified. The methodology developed for this pilot project will inform the anticipated updating of the Ancient Woodland Inventory across the whole country.

Achievements 2003/4

- 506 woodlands in 10 parishes in Wealden District have had their boundaries revised and mapped;
- Five experienced volunteer surveyors from the Sussex Botanical Recording Society have been recruited to assist in the collection of botanical data.
- Survey data has been provided to Wealden DC officers in support of the rejection of a planning application to develop an area of Ancient Woodland.

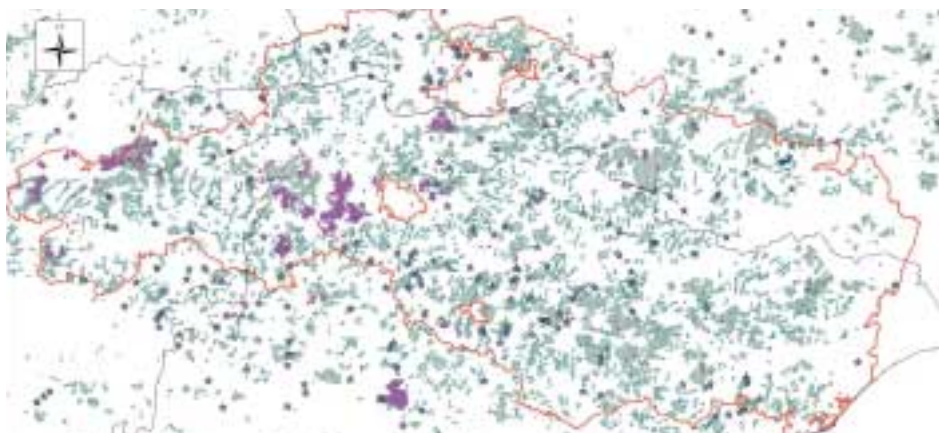
High Weald Ancient Landscapes Project

GIS based mapping and analysis of characteristic threatened habitats and features across the AONB is being undertaken to inform land management schemes (particularly ERDP schemes) and spatial plans and strategies.

Achievements 2003/4

- Working with both the WMI and the WHI officers, priority mapping of meadow and heathland sites within the AONB is underway. Existing site information is being collated and transferred onto a GIS. Any gaps in current knowledge can then be filled and site data cross-referenced with digital historic map data and current aerial photographs.

Meadow, Heath and Ancient Woodland sites within the AONB



Profile:

Wealden Ancient Woods Survey

Purpose

To update and enhance the existing Ancient Woodland Inventory for Wealden District

Partners

English Nature, Forestry Commission, Wealden District Council, Woodland Trust, East Sussex County Council, AONB Unit, Sussex Wildlife Trust and Sussex Biological Records Centre

Timescale

Start February 2004 to be completed in 2 years



First Series OS map (c.1870) showing the original Ancient Woodland boundaries and areas identified for possible inclusion on the revised Ancient Woodland Inventory



The SE AONB Sustainable Tourism Project

The SE AONB sustainable tourism project has continued to be active in the High Weald AONB. Roger Budden, the project manager and Tristan Lavender, project officer have been supporting the development and implementation of business-led action plans in Ashdown and Winchelsea with strategic steers and specialist input from Unit as required.



© Countryside Agency/Peter Greenhalf

Winchelsea

The Weald Grazing Network

The Weald Grazing Network provides advice on conservation grazing, undertakes site visits and puts site managers in touch with stock owners. The Network is required because there are fundamental problems in getting wildlife sites grazed: pasture of high biodiversity interest is low in agricultural value – post-flowering swards may be only half as digestible as ones that have not flowered. Heathlands offer some of the very worst grazing available; sites tend to be too small, scattered and uneconomic to be of interest to hard-pressed livestock farmers. Additionally the ongoing intensification of farming now favours the large continental breeds that will finish fast on highly nutritious swards. In particular the advent of BSE and the ban on cattle aged over 30 months from entering the human food chain has reduced the supply of local, hardy and traditionally reared animals. The Weald Grazing Network is establishing an integrated and partnership approach to provision and supply of livestock, equipment advice and support necessary to secure the required grazing on these wildlife sites.

Achievements 2003/4

- The following have benefited from the Weald Grazing Network: Conservators of Ashdown Forest, National Trust, RSPB, Southern Water, Matfield Parish Council, Kent Wildlife Trust, Sussex Downs Conservation Board, Sussex Police, Local Authorities, farmers, landowners and graziers.
- 21 graziers joined the scheme as a result of promotional activity undertaken by officers of the WHI and WMI. Some of these graziers were successfully linked with landowners seeking livestock.
- 44 wildlife sites are being grazed, an area of 1002 ha in total. These sites ranged from a 30 ha wildflower meadow at Bewl Water (which benefited from grazing by Sussex Cattle to achieve the targets set under its Countryside Stewardship Scheme) to an area of 0.25 ha near Hawkhurst in Kent (which required grazing by sheep as part of establishing a new wildflower meadows).
- The grazing for conservation information leaflet continues to be distributed, articles promoting the scheme have been published in the Netherfield Centre for Sustainable Food and Farming Newsletter and the Small Farm Training Group Magazine.

Profile: Weald Grazing Network

Purpose

To facilitate the grazing of wildlife sites across the AONB and support the grazing animal economy of the area

Partners

Countryside Agency, Weald Heathland Initiative, Weald Meadows Initiative

Timescale

Initiated Spring 2002, ongoing



Ungrazed land

- A web page has been created to explain grazing and grazing issues, **www.highweald.org**
- An exciting new partnership was forged with the Sussex Downs AONB. During winter 2003 there was an exchange of animals between the Downs (where there is a need for winter grazing to remove the thatch from Tor grass swards) and Ashdown Forest, where it is necessary to remove the animals from the heathland in the winter. A summer exchange in 2004, which will help to remove animals from the Downs, (thus letting the swards flower and set seed) and allowing the much needed restoration grazing of some parts of the Ashdown Forest, is also planned.



Transhumance in the 21st century at Devil's Dyke

Weald Meadows Initiative (WMI)

Action for valued grasslands, for now and for the future

As they are man made habitats, wildflower grasslands require ongoing traditional management (hay cutting and grazing) to maintain their rare flora and fauna. The WMI has been involved with partners Agrifactors since 1996 in a special meadow seed-harvesting project. The product, Weald Native Origin Wildflower and Grass Seed (WNOS) is local provenance seed harvested from the natural meadows resource and not only gives grassland owners an income (to aid traditional management) but also provides appropriately sourced seed for re-sowing projects in the Weald. This protects the genetic integrity of seeds and means the seeds being planted are genetically adapted to this local area. Sites are kindly provided by landowners with the Weald Meadows Officer and Agrifactors carrying out the seed harvesting.

Raising awareness of the value of species rich grassland, both with farmers and land managers and the general public, is fundamental to the continuing survival of meadows and pastures and during 2003 the WMI significantly extended its education programme.

Achievements 2003/4

This nationally acclaimed project was successful in achieving all of the targets set for year 1 of its 3-year funding package.

Conserving and enhancing the wildflower grasslands resource

- 50 site updates and 50 site visits carried out providing management advice and survey.
- 26 harvesting operations on 16 sites resulting in 600kg of seed. An income to meadow owner of £6000.
- 746 records of existing restored and newly created site records maintained on the grasslands sites database held at the High Weald AONB Unit.

Profile:

Weald Meadows Initiative

Purpose

To ensure the long term survival of the irreplaceable species rich grassland of the Weald and secure their productive and economic use

Funding Partners

It is supported by English Nature, the Countryside Agency, DEFRA – Rural Enterprise Scheme, Heritage Lottery Fund, EU Community Leader+ (EAGGF) fund and the Sigrid Rausing & Dennis Curry Charitable Trusts

Additional partners

The Weald Meadows Initiative is a unique public private partnership between the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Unit, Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) and Agrifactors (Southern) Ltd.

Timescale

Initiated 1994, ongoing

Initiatives

Developing strategic and practical solutions



New WMI brush harvester



Harvesting wildflower seeds



Making wildflower seed boxes at Heathfield Show



Schools' Event at Ashdown

Restoration and re-creation projects for landowners

- 45 people contacted the WMI for wildflower creation advice and 28 people for enhancement.
- New dedicated machinery purchased with support from a Defra – Rural Enterprise Scheme grant improving seed quality and harvesting efficiency: 1 new brush seed harvester, 1 hand seed harvester, 2 new seed racks and 24 seed trays.
- 344kg of WNOS (dry, cleaned and packaged) was replanted on 50 suitable sites totalling 97ha of creation and enhancement.

Research for wildflower grasslands

- Trial work undertaken comparing whole crop meadow cuttings and seed sown on a creation site (arable reversion) and enhancement (within an existing pasture) in partnership with the Beech Estate and Centre for Agricultural and Environmental Research (CAER).
- New funding has been identified and a contract has been awarded to Great Dixter for working with the WMI establishing single species wildflower & grass seed plots over the next 2 years growing. This area of the WMI work will be supported by Leader + EU EAGGF funding for the Wealden and Rother area.

Furthering public understanding and enjoyment

- 8 Public events, involving 110 people & 220 children were held.
- 7 specialist events, targeted at landowners and advisors, involved a further 78 people.
- 800 copies of the project's newsletter, the Daisy Chain, were distributed.
- 500 copies of the Wildflower Grasslands in The Weald leaflet were distributed at events and in response to information requests received by the Meadows Officer.
- 603 hits were received on the meadow pages of www.highweald.org
- National publicity was achieved through features on the project in two books released during the early part of 2004: 'Britain's Wild Harvest' by Huw Prendergast and Helen Sanderson, which looks at the variety of economic uses of wild plants and fungi and 'Meadows' by Christopher Lloyd.

Weald Heathland Initiative (WHI)

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

All the heathlands in the High Weald are vulnerable as they require continuous management if their biodiversity value is to be maintained. The Weald Heathland Initiative (WHI) continues to work closely with partners – local authorities, government agencies, conservation charities and private landowners in order to restore degraded heaths and promote sustainable management. Training events, research, site visits, volunteer activity and the annual Heathland Forum have all contributed to the continued success of the project. This year, the WHI secured £135,400 from the Heritage Lottery Fund via the national Tomorrow's Heathland Heritage programme. The partnership has secured contributions of £10,000 from the Countryside Agency, £4,000 from English Nature (Sussex and Surrey), £4,000 from the Forestry Commission and £1,000 from the High Weald JAC. The WHI

secured £62,150 matched funding from DEFRA as Countryside Stewardship Grants, £2,400 from the Forestry Commission as Woodland Improvement Grants, and a total of £20,150 from Sussex Wildlife Trust, the RSPB, and private landowners. Volunteers achieved a further £80,000 worth of work on the WHI's sites (as a contribution 'in kind'). **The total spend on heathlands in the Weald amounted to £319,175 this year (including the value of the volunteers' work).**

Achievements 2003/4

Conserving Weald heathlands

- Grants made to 15 sites (totalling 1565 hectares) exceeding target to restore and manage 1500 ha of Weald heathlands
- Management plans written and Countryside Stewardship Scheme grants applied for on two additional heathland sites.
- 60 advisory visits made providing specialist management advice.
- 1150 person/ days contributed by volunteers to restore heathland.
- 3300m new fencing erected to assist management.
- 4500m new footpaths created to improve public access.
- 63 hectares of under-managed heathland cleared of scrub, rhododendron and gorse.
- 138 hectares cleared of invasive bracken.
- 607 hectares of heathland restoration assisted by managed grazing.

Research and policy

- A report has been commissioned from the Records Centre Survey Unit to define the ecology and management of the woodland/ heathland mosaic, funded by Forestry Commission, English Nature and SE AONBs Woodland Programme. This work will make a significant contribution to the management of an under recognised habitat in the High Weald.
- Ongoing contributions made to revision of the ten-year Heathland Habitat Action Plan for the whole of Sussex; national Biodiversity Action Plan monitoring and RSPB's national heathland mapping project.

Furthering understanding and enjoyment

- 44 community events were held and the WHI have been represented at several shows such as the Bird and Wildlife Festival and the Heathfield Show.
- 5 specialist training events were held, including an entomological training day and machinery demonstrations.
- The WHI took part in the Draft Management Plan schools' launch event on 11th June. Three schools from across the AONB visited Ashdown Forest to celebrate the Fields and Heaths chapter (92 children plus teachers). The children undertook a heathland scavenger hunt, 'minibeasting' and a heathland nature walk.
- The Lord Mayor of Tunbridge Wells recently opened the new 4.5-kilometre Heathland Link Trail at Tudely Woods RSPB Reserve. This trail has linked a network of paths approximately 10 kilometres in length for the public to enjoy.
- Project officers produced the annual newsletter, the 'Whinchat' and **The Heathlands in The Weald** habitat leaflet was revised and reprinted.

Profile:

Weald Heathland Initiative

Purpose

To secure for the benefit of wildlife and the local community, a heathland matrix across the acid soils of the Weald – to include Ashdown Forest, the largest area of 'wildspace' in South East England.

Funding partners

Heritage Lottery Fund, English Nature, RSPB, West Sussex County Council, East Sussex County Council and the Countryside Agency

Additional partners

Hastings Borough Council, Forestry Commission, DEFRA and landowners

Timescale

2001 – 2006



OS Surveyors Draft Map (c.1800) showing Broadwater Forest (then Waterdown Forest) as mostly open land.



Tree clearing, Chailey Common

Profile:
SE AONBs Sustainable Woodlands

Purpose
 To identify important woodlands and their management needs at a landscape scale and promote understanding to influence strategic policy and the targeting of resources

Partners
 Forestry Commission, Countryside Agency, English Nature, Kent Downs, Surrey Hills, East Hants and High Weald AONBs

Timescale
 February 2003 – 2006

SE AONBS sustainable woodlands programme

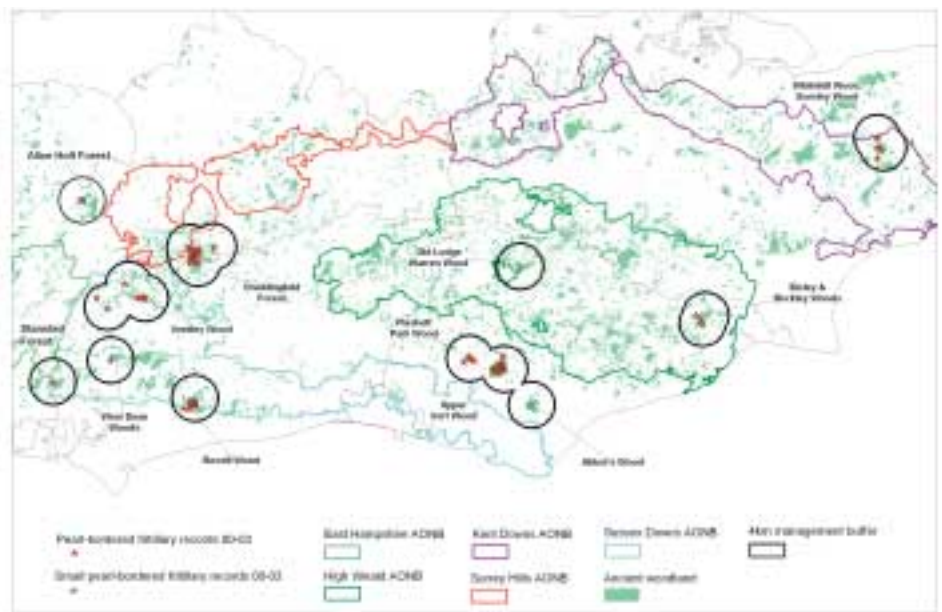
AONBs in South East England contain over 17% of the total ancient woodland in England. Much of this is under managed resulting in the catastrophic decline of some key species. In February 2003 Patrick Mckernan, a woodland ecologist, on loan from English Nature, started work on a programme of data gathering, mapping and analysis to underpin and take forward AONB management plan objectives aimed at enhancing the ecological functioning of this woodland at a landscape scale.

Achievements 2003/4

First year targets completed, including:

- Mapping 'flagship' woodland species in the region, particularly woodland butterflies and birds, focusing on woodland (BAP) fritillary butterflies as indicators of habitat change: collating for the first time on GIS comprehensive species data for the region.
- Priority areas for woodland management across participating SE AONBs identified and promoted to relevant regional and national bodies.

Fritillary management areas



Securing Funds

As the management plan production process comes to an end, the focus for securing resources is to target grant aiding bodies potentially offering significant funds towards a raft of projects delivering Plan objectives. Following encouragement by CA and HLF, the production of an outline proposal for a Landscape Partnership scheme was developed in liaison with HLF representatives and a bid for an HLF development grant to build on this outline was submitted in March. During the 6-month process, HLF guidance on the scheme changed, making it hard to identify their priorities. At the end of March it was clear that the scheme would be incredibly competitive with bids considered on a national basis and one scheme per region approved per annum. The outcome is awaited.

At a European scale, the Unit was invited to join a partnership of 5 countries – Belgium, Netherlands, France, Germany and the UK – to develop and submit an INTERREG III bid. The Unit's track record in research demonstrated by The Making of The High Weald and Management Planning process – and its projects such as WMI with socio-economic objectives – led to the approach from the lead partner, Nord Brabant province. Two meetings, one in Brussels and one in the UK led to a £750,000 bid being developed with a theme of re-engaging people with the countryside to achieve economic objectives. The outcome is awaited.

AONB Unit staff resource

The AONB Officer job share post remained vacant over the year. In order to ameliorate this situation, reorganisation of the Unit took place with two new senior posts created: High Weald Business Manager and Director of Policy and Research – replacing the AONB Assistant and Rural Character Advisor. Gerry Sherwin and Dr Roland Harris, both experienced existing staff, were appointed to these posts. New staff were recruited to the posts of Administrator (Job Share) John Hill; Habitat Survey and Mapping Officer – Sally Westaway; Events Officer (part time) – Liz Pritchard; Heathland Conference Admin Assistant (part time) Wendy Makin.



High Weald AONB Unit staff

Financial summary

1st April 2003 to 31st March 2004

The budget for the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee was as follows:

Core activity



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.

Office accommodation and 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.

Expenditure	
Employee costs	159,000
Office costs	46500
ESCC employment overheads	23000
Joint Advisory Committee	10100
Minor works	26100
Management Plan	102100
Total	366800

Income	
Countryside Agency	261900
East Sussex CC	23400
Kent CC	14300
West Sussex CC	10100
Surrey CC	2900
Wealden DC	7500
Rother DC	7500
Mid Sussex DC	6500
Tunbridge Wells BC	6900
Horsham DC	4900
Sevenoaks DC	3800
Ashford BC	1300
Hastings BC	1700
Tandridge BC	2200
Crawley BC	100
Tonbridge and Malling	300
Other	10800
Total	366100
<i>Deficit</i>	700

Project activity

AONB Management Plan

A total of £102,100 was spent on the management plan, with 75% of the funding coming from the Countryside Agency and the remainder from local authorities.

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

Weald Meadows Initiative

A total of £44,124 was spent on the Weald Meadows Initiative between April and March 2003 with support from the Countryside Agency, English Nature and Wealden District Council.

- Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs- Rural Enterprise Scheme
- Heritage Lottery Fund- Your Heritage
- Dennis Curry Charitable Trust
- The Rausing Charitable Trust
- The Countryside Agency
- English Nature – Sussex and Surrey

Weald Heathland Initiative

A total of £319,175 was spent under the Weald Heathland Initiative (February 2003 to February 2004). The following bodies contributed funding towards heathland activity in the High Weald AONB during 2003-2004 with £135,400 provided as a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

- Heritage Lottery Fund
- English Nature
- Countryside Agency
- East Sussex County Council
- West Sussex County Council
- Kent High Weald Project
- Ashdown Forest Conservators
- DEFRA
- RSPB
- Hastings Borough Council
- Heathland landowners and site managers



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 2004

JAC Co-optees

Nature Conservation

Mr K. Hewitt, English Nature

Recreation/Leisure

Mr A Betts, Forestry Commission

Community/Economy

Mr J. Leggett, Sussex Rural
Community Council

Landowners

Mr Rupert Ashby, Country Land
and Business Association

Farming

Mr R Froggatt, National
Farmers Union

Chair – Councillor Mrs P Stockell

Vice-chair – Councillor Mrs S Tidy

OSG Chair – Ms Lisa Creaye-Griffin

East Sussex County Council

Councillor R. Tidy & Mr Simon Hickmott

West Sussex County Council

Councillor Dr A. Chapman

Ms Lisa Creaye-Griffin

Kent County Council

Councillor Councillor Mrs P Stockell

Ms Val Hyland (until late 2003) & Dr John Williams

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 Frank Rallings

Hastings Borough Council

Councillor B Hart

Mr Paul Lewis & Mr Murray Davidson

Mid Sussex District Council

Councillor A MacNaughton (until summer 2003) & Councillor C Hersey

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 R Bullock

Ms Gill Harris

Sevenoaks District Council

Councillor M. Whitehouse (until early 2004) & Councillor Ms G Davison

Mrs Maggie Williams

Ashford Borough Council

Councillor M Gray (until late 2003) & Councillor R Taylor

Ms Rebecca Stott

Tonbridge & Malling District Council

No member representative

Mr Phil Linskey

Tandridge District Council

Councillor M Sydney

Mr Paul Newdick

Contact

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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, 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.

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, a 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 business strategy agreed by the High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee.

Staff (As at 31st March 2004)

Core

AONB Officer – Sally Marsh
AONB Business Manager – Gerry Sherwin
Director of Policy & Research – Roland Harris
Interpretation Officer – Janina Holubecki
GIS and habitat mapping Officer – Sally Westaway (0.4FTE)
Office Manager – Kerry Baldwin

Project

Consultation Officer, Management Plan – Yvonne Riedel
Weald Heathland Officers, Weald Heathland Initiative – Richard Allum and Caroline FitzGerald
Weald Meadows Officer, Weald Meadows Initiative – Dawn Brickwood
GIS and Habitat Mapping Officer, Wealden Ancient Woodlands Project – Sally Westaway (0.6 FTE)
SEAONB Woodlands Officer, SEAONB Woodlands Project – Patrick McKernan (working on behalf of the High Weald, Kent Downs and Surrey Hills AONBs)

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).