



The High Weald AONB Management Plan 2004

a 20-year strategy



Adopted March 2004

The High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB): A nationally valued landscape

The High Weald is a historic countryside of rolling hills draped by small irregular fields, abundant woods and hedges, scattered farmsteads and sunken lanes. It was designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in 1983.



The High Weald AONB Management Plan 2004: a 20-year strategy ADOPTED MARCH 2004

Produced by the High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee, under the *Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000*, on behalf of:

Kent County Council
Surrey County Council
East Sussex County Council
West Sussex County Council

Ashford Borough Council
Crawley Borough Council
Hastings Borough Council
Horsham District Council
Mid Sussex District Council

Rother District Council
Sevenoaks District Council
Tandridge District Council
Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council
Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
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Foreword

The High Weald is an ancient, subtle and much valued landscape. Its essential character was formed by the fourteenth century, has survived major historical events and sweeping social and technological changes, and remains recognizable today. Now the area faces new pressures, many of which lie outside local influence: climate change and globalization of agriculture are obvious examples. But taking action to care for the High Weald is something that all of us – public bodies, land managers, the area's 120,000 residents, and its many visitors – can contribute to: indeed, we have a duty to conserve this nationally important landscape for future generations to enjoy.

The new High Weald AONB Management Plan is an important document. It is the first statutory plan produced under the *Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000* for this unique and special area. As required by the act it sets out local authority policy for the AONB and will be used to assess how public bodies, statutory undertakers and holders of public office fulfil their duty to have regard for the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the High Weald.

We need to take a long view, to aspire to policies that go beyond the short term. The draft High Weald AONB Management Plan 2004 identifies and focuses on the fundamental components of natural beauty that have made the High Weald a distinct and homogenous area for at least the last 700 years, and sets out clear 20-year objectives to fulfilling the purpose of designation. We hope that everyone with an interest in the future of the AONB can contribute to achieving these objectives and securing the survival of a vibrant High Weald.

The High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee has prepared this plan on behalf of the 15 local authorities in which the High Weald lies, but it could not have done so without the help of many people. We would like to thank all those who have contributed and urge everyone with an interest in the area to help us turn this plan into action.



Councillor Liz Kitchen
Chairman 2001-3
High Weald AONB
Joint Advisory Committee



Councillor Paulina Stockell
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High Weald AONB
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A Vision for 2024

- The High Weald is valued by those living, working and visiting the area as a nationally important protected landscape. They support the purpose of AONB designation and the High Weald AONB partnership as advocates for the area.
- Priority areas for funding and support are identified through AONB management plans, Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs) and locally agreed community plans. Targeting of resources at priority areas has achieved favourable habitat conditions for characteristic and threatened BAP species and habitats; and protection of the historic environment.
- The adoption of river restoration policies maximizing opportunities for natural processes to take place has expanded the functional flood plains along rivers and demonstrated reduction in flooding and increases in biodiversity, water quality, and amenity value.
- An increasing number of households has been accommodated without compromising the characteristic historic settlement pattern. Strong planning policies and a sound understanding of the dynamics of sustainable communities have influenced development. Environmental building technologies have improved the construction of buildings and the High Weald now supports 'green' modern designs using local materials.
- Clear guidance has minimized negative impacts of traffic. The network of cycle routes, bridleways and footpaths has been developed to support leisure activities and provide car-free alternatives for well-used routes.
- In woodland, pilot schemes developing local markets for wood to support conservation management, coupled with rising demand for wood fuel and an increasingly skilled workforce, have led to improved confidence in growing high-quality oak and other timbers. Many parishes now support a combined heat and power plant running on local wood, or a small-scale wind turbine.
- Land is managed through diverse activities that are supported and nurtured where they deliver public benefits. Remaining full-time farmers specialize in high-quality products valued by local people. Part-time farmers with a second income manage much of the land and support a contracting industry skilled in conservation management. There is a thriving population of small-holders and co-operatives who graze livestock or grow mostly specialist crops.
- The links between people, their communities and businesses, and the land has strengthened. Many residents grow their own food; are involved in small-scale production; have joined community land management initiatives; are employed in small businesses utilizing products from the local landscape; and buy local products. Most residents and visitors enjoy informal and sensitive open-air use of the AONB and benefit from a rich, protected, well-understood and celebrated cultural heritage.

The role of the AONB vision:

- The 20-year vision for the AONB describes how the High Weald could look in the future.
- It takes a positive view - not a cynical one - but faces up to likely realities: demographic changes that increase demand for housing, lifestyle and technological changes, increase in traffic, climate change, and the decline of traditional farm businesses.
- It envisages environmental, social, and economic developments in the High Weald that support the primary purpose of designation: the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty.
- Environmental sustainability is at the heart of this vision. This means maintaining the capacity of natural systems; minimizing resource consumption; and protecting and improving the quality of the natural and historic environment.

Consultation

Public surveys that informed the drafting of the management plan

- *High Weald Anvil 2002* Management Plan Public Survey: a 4-page pull-out section in the AONB annual free newspaper introducing the management plan and seeking the public's view on the area and key issues. 90,000 copies were distributed between April and July 2002, to residents and to visitor attractions, to which there were 444 respondents.
- Public Survey: this built on the earlier *High Weald Anvil* survey and was undertaken in September 2002 using face-to-face street survey techniques. The survey was targeted specifically at residents and was designed to achieve a truly representative random sample: 722 residents were interviewed allowing statistical conclusions to be drawn from the data with 95% confidence $\pm 9\%$. The survey was undertaken by GeoData Institute, University of Southampton.

Consultation on this plan was divided into four main stages:

i) awareness raising of the management planning process, and early identification of issues that the plan should address (until 31.10.03). Specific stakeholder groups (amenity and conservation groups, local producers, land managers, visitors, parish councils, local authorities, government agencies, and statutory undertakers) were informed of the purpose and timetable of the process, sent questionnaires, invited to focus groups, or engaged in preliminary discussions. Contact with the wider public focused on the High Weald Anvil 2002 Management Plan Public Survey and the face-to-face Public Survey of September 2002.

ii) consultation on the pre-draft plan contents, visions, and chapters (until 6.5.03). Early drafts of the management plan were made widely available through the AONB website – www.highweald.org – and promoted by emailing over 200 e-alerts to individuals with known technical interest and expertise in management of the AONB. On-line surveys and opportunities for comment allowed feedback on policy and issues during drafting. Local authorities and amenity groups were sent draft material and attended workshops, and parish councils attended information meetings.

iii) formal consultation on the published draft plan (30.5.03-5.9.03). 4,300 fliers raising awareness of the draft plan and the formal consultation were sent to individuals on the unit database. 84,000 copies of a management plan special edition of the High Weald Anvil were distributed, as were 15,000 promotional postcards. 960 copies of the printed plan were sent to named contacts within partner organizations, 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 to promote the consultation and to assist those wanting to comment: a series of community arts events was 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.

iv) analysis of feedback from consultation and formal observations of the Countryside Agency and English Nature, modification of the text, and preparation of the final plan, ready for adoption by local authorities and for publication (8.9.03 – 12.11.03). This has involved the consideration of feedback in a structured and transparent manner: the collated feedback and recommendations arising are publicly available through the AONB website.



1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. AONB designation

1.1.1. Purpose of the designation. The *National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949* legislated for the designation of AONBs and National Parks. Their purpose was to be similar – to conserve and enhance natural beauty – although National Parks were also to be areas that afforded opportunity for open-air recreation and were to be close to centres of population. There have been minor changes to the aims of both types of designation since 1949: the primary purpose of AONB designation and subsidiary purposes – in effect, qualifications of the primary purpose – are now those defined in a Countryside Commission statement of 1991 and restated in 2001.¹

- The primary purpose of designation is to conserve and enhance natural beauty.
- In pursuing the primary purpose of designation, account should be taken of the needs of agriculture, forestry, other rural industries and of the economic and social needs of local communities. Particular regard should be paid to promoting sustainable forms of social and economic development that in themselves conserve and enhance the environment.
- Recreation is not an objective of designation, but the demand for recreation should be met so far as this is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty and the needs of agriculture, forestry and other uses.

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty: A policy statement (Countryside Commission, CCP 356, 1991), p. 5.

1.1.2. 'Natural Beauty' defined. The primary purpose of AONB designation remains rooted in *natural beauty*. The term was coined and enshrined in the 1949 act when a Romantic idea of scenic value still prevailed.² Landscape study has advanced since then, most notably through the widening of archaeological and ecological interest from individual sites to landscape-scale systems. For example, the national *Countryside character map* produced by the Countryside Commission and English Nature in 1996 has identified homogenous zones, similar to and often coinciding with AONBs and National Parks, on the basis of a fusion of archaeological, ecological, and scenic qualities. Landscape assessments published by the Countryside Commission articulate the importance of each AONB in England in more detail and also draw heavily on the wildlife and historic environment: the landscape assessment produced for the High Weald AONB in 1994 was no exception.³

The embracing of wildlife and historic environment within *natural beauty* is recognized in legislation by the *Environment Act 1995*. Although this is in relation to National Parks, *Planning Policy Guidance Note 7* (PPG7) was modified in June 2000 following clarification of the status of AONBs by the Minister for Housing and Planning, confirming that the landscape qualities of National Parks and AONBs are equivalent.⁴



"The High Weald AONB is a national designation of equal landscape value to National Parks and we have a duty to future generations to afford it the very best protection"

Duncan Mackay, SE Regional Director, Countryside Agency



"The High Weald AONB designation is about more than just scenery: it is concerned with wildlife and cultural heritage, and the land management, rural industry and communities that support the natural beauty"

Sir Martin Doughty, Chair, English Nature

¹ *Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty: A guide for AONB partnership members* (Countryside Agency, CA 24, 2001), p. 7.

² E Holdaway and G Smart, *Landscapes at Risk? The Future for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty* (2001), pp. 38-42.

³ *The High Weald: Exploring the landscape of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty* (Countryside Commission, 1994).

⁴ *Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty*, written answers, Hansard, 13.06.2000.



"The Countryside Agency, Defra, GOSE, SEEDA and SEERA are committed, by a joint statement of intent,³ to work together in support of AONB management plans"

Alison Parker, Defra Director, GOSE

The Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000:

Section 82 reaffirms the primary purpose of AONBs

Section 84 confirms the powers of local authorities to take appropriate action to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of AONBs

Section 85 places a duty on all public bodies and statutory undertakers to 'have regard' to the 'purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty'

Section 86 establishes a process for creating AONB conservation boards

Section 89 creates a statutory responsibility for local authorities and conservation boards to produce and regularly review AONB management plans

Recent government guidance specifically on AONBs provides a useful non-technical definition: "Natural Beauty" is not just the look of the landscape, but includes landform and geology, plants and animals, landscape features and the rich history of human settlement over the centuries'.¹

1.1.3. Designation enacted. The first of the 41 AONBs of England and Wales was designated in 1956 and the most recent in 1995. Together these AONBs amount to 15.6% of the total land area: in the counties of Kent, Surrey, East Sussex and West Sussex, AONBs account for 41.1% of the total land area. The Designation Order for the High Weald AONB is dated to 4th December 1980, and the date of the Confirmation Order is 23rd October 1983. It is the fourth largest AONB and the second most administratively complex.

1.2. Responsibility for the AONB

1.2.1. Introduction. Unlike National Parks, AONBs do not have authoritative bodies with their own planning or development control functions and other executive powers. Instead, responsibility for the designated purposes is concentrated in the hands of the local authorities – 15 in the case of the High Weald. A duty of care also lies with government departments and agencies, statutory undertakers, and, on grounds of good citizenship at least, with individuals – especially those who own or manage the land.

1.2.2. Government, public bodies and agencies. Governmental responsibility for AONBs takes several forms: designating AONBs; providing a legislative and policy context wherein the purposes can be met; and direct involvement, guidance and funding of AONB initiatives.

The government's responsibility for AONBs is substantial. The *Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000* sets out the procedure for future designation (by the Countryside Agency) and incorporates significant measures designed to address increased pressures on protected landscapes that had rendered the provisions of the 1949 act inadequate. Government policy encompasses the 1991 Countryside Commission policy statement on AONBs (see above, p.7), and reaffirms the special treatment for AONBs in other major policy areas: the significance of AONBs in the context of land use planning is considered in PPG7 and *Regional Planning Guidance for the South East* (SEERA); the rural white paper (Defra, 2000)² sets out the key role of AONBs in the wider rural policy context; the England Rural Development Programme (ERDP) describes how the government is implementing the 'second pillar' of the Common Agricultural Policy – the Rural Development Regulation – in England, and its SE regional objectives include 'better managed landscapes in AONBs and National Parks'⁴ (the ERDP is directed by Defra and supported by bodies that include the Government Office for the South East (GOSE), the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA), the Forestry Commission, the Countryside Agency, English Nature, English Heritage, and the Environment Agency); the *Regional Economic Strategy for South East England 2002-2012* (SEEDA) recognizes the contribution of AONBs to sustainable economic growth; the English Tourism Council strategy for rural tourism stresses the importance of mechanisms for co-ordinating action at a local level, with AONBs given as an example;⁵ and the Forestry Commission is committed to ensuring that its work

¹ *Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty: A guide for AONB partnership members* (Countryside Agency, CA 24, November 2001), p. 6.

² *Our Countryside: The Future: A Fair Deal for Rural England* (rural white paper, Defra, 2000).

³ *Protected Landscapes in the South East Joint Statement of Intent* (Countryside Agency, Defra, GOSE, SEEDA and SEERA, Nov. 2002).

⁴ *England Rural Development Programme 2000-2006: South East Regional Chapter* (1999), regional objective En1.1.

⁵ *Working for the Countryside: A strategy for rural tourism in England 2001-2005* (English Tourism Council, 2001), p. 46.

reflects the distinctive nature of each AONB and helps deliver the priorities identified in AONB management plans.¹

In addition to its designatory role, the Countryside Agency provides the government's direct involvement in the management of AONBs through interpretation of legislation and national policy; guidance on management of AONB partnerships; commissioning research; representation on AONB Joint Advisory Committees and Conservation Boards; and majority funding of AONB staff units.

1.2.3. Local planning authorities. Since the 1949 act, local planning authorities have been central to achieving the purpose of AONB designation, and their responsibility has been reaffirmed in the *CRoW Act 2000*, in which they are empowered to 'take all such action as appears to them expedient for the accomplishment of the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty' of the AONB.²

1.2.4. Other 'relevant authorities'. The *CRoW Act 2000* requires that relevant authorities, in addition to government and local planning authorities, should 'have regard' to the purpose of AONBs: these include statutory undertakers (includes public utilities), community and parish councils, and holders of public office.

1.2.5. The High Weald AONB JAC and Unit. The need for active measures to conserve and enhance AONBs has led to the setting up of AONB-wide partnerships of representatives (Joint Advisory Committees – JACs). A JAC was established for the High Weald AONB in 1996, evolving out of the executive of the High Weald Forum – a wider representative group that was set up in 1988. The High Weald AONB JAC is a partnership of all 15 local authorities, the Countryside Agency, and organizations representing land management, community, business and recreation interests. An AONB Officer was appointed in 1992, and staffing has expanded so that the AONB now has a small dedicated unit.

The main role of the High Weald AONB partnership, embodied in the JAC and unit, is to plan and implement AONB management via the medium of the AONB management plan.⁴ This leads to roles in co-ordinating and demonstrating protection and management of the AONB; promoting the purpose, significance and character of the AONB; advising and guiding stakeholders; seeking funding to assist management activity; undertaking or commissioning research to further understanding; and monitoring the condition of the AONB.

1.2.6. Land managers. Although they are influenced by CAP, government policy and land-use planning, land managers have the greatest influence on the AONB. This influence predates designation by millennia, and has long been linked to a conscious sense of responsibility for the countryside, and the rural society and economy. This duty has been undermined during the 20th century by changing economics, shrinkage of the land-based workforce and intensification of agriculture (partly driven by production-linked policy and subsidy), but is still enacted by many land managers, increasingly supported by their advisers and countryside managers.

Local authorities have followed government legislation, policy and advice and have developed their responsibility in regard to the High Weald AONB to include:

- land use planning that takes account of the purpose of AONB designation. This is seen through land use strategies and development control decisions, underpinned by policies in county structure plans, county minerals and waste plans, and district local plans (and specialist studies such as historic landscape characterization, extensive urban surveys, landscape assessments, and tranquillity studies) that directly refer to the AONB and, indirectly, support the designation through protecting key features of the area and the importance of the character of the countryside.
- pursuing the purposes of AONB designation through other policy, work areas, and partnerships. Examples include: community strategies; biodiversity action plans; advice; landscape and building design; grants; land purchase; countryside management services; Rights of Way maintenance; and provision of affordable housing.
- establishing, and part-funding, a partnership and staff unit to help protect the AONB and focus action, in the form of the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) and the High Weald AONB Unit.
- production of an AONB management plan, a statutory requirement since the *CRoW Act 2000*, which 'formulates their policy for the management of the area of outstanding natural beauty and their functions in relation to it'.³

¹ *A Joint Accord Between the National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the Forestry Commission* (2001).

² The *CRoW Act 2000*, section 84.4.

³ *Ibid.*, section 89.2.

⁴ *Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty: A guide for AONB partnership members* (Countryside Agency, CA 24, 2001), p. 16.

What the management plan does:

- defines the natural beauty, or defining character, of the AONB, and identifies the changes, and pressures for change, that have an impact on this natural beauty
- presents an integrated vision for the AONB
- presents agreed 'policy', in the form of an objective-led approach, to secure this vision
- identifies indicators of success and targets to support objectives
- provides tools, guidance, and supporting information
- presents agreed action plans and implementation strategies
- identifies the means by which the condition of the natural beauty of the AONB can be monitored



"The High Weald AONB Management Plan complements but doesn't duplicate development plans: it provides detailed guidance and is a useful tool for us"

Councillor Paulina Stockell, Kent County Council, Chair High Weald AONB JAC

¹ *High Weald AONB Management Plan 1995* (High Weald Forum, 1995), p. 106.

1.3. Role of the AONB management plan

1.3.1. The need for review. The 1995 High Weald AONB Management Plan suggested that it be reviewed every five years,¹ and there are good grounds, many rooted in the success of the plan itself, to support review:

- many recommendations and actions proposed in 1995 have been delivered
- research by the AONB Unit has provided a better understanding of the High Weald
- the policy and administrative context has changed, with rural sustainability being addressed more holistically through the wider remit of the new Countryside Agency (1999), the rural white paper (2000), the ERDP (2000) and the creation of Defra (2001)
- The *CRoW Act 2000* places a statutory duty on local authorities to produce a new management plan by March 2004, to be reviewed every five years

1.3.2. The role of the plan. The management plan formulates policy for the management of the AONB and fulfils a legal requirement placed on all local authorities under the *CRoW Act 2000*; provides a transparent and accessible means by which all public bodies can ensure that they are exercising their duty to have regard to the purposes of designation; and, through this document and the consultation process, provides a means of focusing and furthering the contributions of all stakeholders in the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty.

This focus of the management plan means that it also has a role as an advocate for what is best for the AONB within the strict terms of its designation. While aware of the wider realities – such as pressure for major development – it cannot balance the purposes of designation against non-AONB concerns such as national defence, or regional economic regeneration. When these concerns are considered by those charged to do so, the management plan has an important role as the main articulation of what matters in terms of the purpose of the AONB.

1.3.3. Role in relation to other plans. This focus on the primary purpose of designation needs emphasis for it is the key to understanding the relationship between the AONB management plan and other plans and strategies that influence management of the AONB.

Local planning authority development plans (structure and local plans), and the national and regional policies that shape them, already provide a considerable level of protection for the character of the AONB. The AONB management plan will inform future development plan policy, and will assist in the implementation of existing policies, especially those that seek to conserve and enhance hitherto undefined 'character'. This symbiotic relationship applies to some other plans (such as community strategies, local transport plans and local Environment Agency plans), whereas with others (such as community strategies and local transport plans), whereas with others (such as local Environment Agency plans, the England Rural Development Plan and biodiversity action plans) it has an advisory role. Also, it will inform and focus Local Agenda 21 plans, parish appraisals, village design statements and parish plans.

1.3.4. The plan's audience. The management plan as a document will be read most by the AONB partnership, other policy makers and funding agencies. As a process, however, it has been targeted at a wide audience, with derivative and interpretative publications, and, ultimately, the objectives and actions themselves serving the broadest community.

1.4. Approach adopted by the AONB management plan

1.4.1. Scope of the plan. The scope of the management plan is dictated by its role, in turn rooted in the precisely defined purpose of designation (see above, p.7). This translates to a focus on the components of natural beauty, and the needs of rural industries, the rural community, and recreation in relation to that natural beauty. To achieve this the management plan includes a 20-year vision, identification of the components of natural beauty, assessment of key issues, strategy (or 'policy'), and planning for, and commitment to, action.

1.4.2. Character approach. The primary purpose of designation and the secondary purposes, or qualifications of the primary purpose, all refer to a *natural beauty* that we have defined above. As with other AONBs, government agencies and local planning authorities, this has been explored through character-based analysis. *The Making of the High Weald* and other studies in support of this management plan have provided time-depth and objective analysis so that the management aims and priorities for the AONB are firmly based on an understanding of the fundamental and defining character of the whole area – that is, those components of *natural beauty* that have made the High Weald a recognizably distinct and homogenous area for at least the last 700 years and that will continue to define it in the future. The safeguarding of the natural beauty within the countryside can only be achieved through understanding and focusing protection on these key structural components.

1.4.3. Features of local and national importance. Interweaving and enriching the combination of the fundamental components of the AONB's natural beauty (which are the focus of this plan) are a myriad of details that form people's everyday experience of the High Weald. Many of these features have a value that is not intrinsically related to their location in the High Weald, while others – such as some agricultural land uses – appear to be quite transitory when set against the long history of the High Weald, yet have a value that often lies in their lifelong familiarity to individuals.

Locally distinctive features include local land uses such as hop gardens or orchards. The 1994 landscape assessment for the High Weald identifies many of these details¹ and is supplemented by local authority landscape character assessments, and parish and village plans and appraisals. Often the locally distinctive has a value at a far greater scale than the AONB: Scheduled Monuments, many listed buildings, and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) are good examples where local features are recognized and protected because of their national and international



"The Making of the High Weald has helped advance our understanding of the fundamental character of the AONB: I would like to see something similar for the rest of West Sussex"

Bob Connell, West Sussex County Council Planning Services

¹ *The High Weald: Exploring the landscape of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty* (Countryside Commission, 1994).



“Clear and concise objectives for managing the High Weald help ensure that much-needed economic regeneration in the region forms part of the AONB management plan”

Valerie Carter, SEEDA



“The High Weald AONB Management Plan has clear objectives that will help us achieve truly sustainable tourism at the local level”

Bob Collier, Director, Tourism South East

importance.

Although beyond the scope of this review, there is a need to develop an appropriate mechanism to allow different communities of interest to identify what additional features they value in their local countryside and to participate effectively in setting priorities for their management. The public survey and other consultation exercises conducted in the drafting of this plan begin to examine public perceptions of the area and raise awareness of valued features. A continuing programme of consultation and public participation will be put in place.

1.4.4. Objective-led management. The plan articulates a concise, internally consistent, and well-reasoned series of management objectives based on the components of character. These reflect and meet the need for a focused, positive, and comparatively simple objective-led approach both within the AONB partnership and amongst other stakeholders. This approach allows the management plan to be used by all stakeholders as an objective and non-political tool for assessing the AONB perspective on wider matters, such as large-scale development, and for major policy changes. Moreover, it allows partners and the wider community to generate original ideas and approaches in the knowledge that they are meeting the objectives of the AONB.

The methods by which objectives can be met are provided by *indicators of success* and their related measurable *targets*. Countryside Agency guidance usefully defines AONB management plan ‘policy’ as this combination of objectives, measurability and method.¹

1.5. Format of this plan

1.5.1. Policy structured around purpose and character. The precise definition of the purposes of AONB designation provides a guide to the structure of the plan. Thus, the larger policy, or strategy, part of the plan is devoted to conserving and enhancing natural beauty. Within this, there are themes concerned with each of the five defining characteristics of the AONB. These sections cover geology, landform, water systems and climate; settlement; routeways; woodland; and field and heath. This serves several purposes: it reiterates the primary purpose of designation; places the key components of natural beauty at the centre of AONB management; emphasizes the AONB role in understanding, rather than purely describing a visual expression of, character; and removes potential confusion that would be caused by following the format of quite different documents, such as development plans and rural strategies.

A second part of the plan is given over to the promotion of public understanding and enjoyment. This phrase was coined by the *CROW Act 2000* and serves as an effective term for, and a reflection of current interpretation of, the recreational purposes of AONB designation.

¹ *Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plans: A guide* (Countryside Agency, CA 23, 2001), pp. 46-7.

1.5.2. Other components in the plan. In accordance with Countryside Agency guidance,¹ the management plan is fronted by an aspirational 20-year vision and includes an outline of the consultation process; a section entitled 'An Outstanding Area' that incorporates a description of the AONB, its special qualities, and the issues and trends that impact on these qualities (below, pp.14-21); an action plan, in the form of themed implementation strategies; and a bibliography.

1.5.3. Supporting material and electronic delivery. This management plan is founded upon a raft of specially produced supporting studies and consultation, and delivers up-to-date tools, data, guidance notes and priority maps to assist implementation. These are too expansive to incorporate within the plan itself without rendering it unreadable and unusable. To facilitate access to such a wealth of material, the format of the management plan has been designed so that its primary usage will be on-line: this will enable easy access to broad underpinning studies (such as *The Making of the High Weald*), detailed research supporting individual objectives (such as those relating to river restoration), shorter topic papers, and comprehensive strategies, guidance and tools. A new purpose-built website (www.highweald.org) provides user-friendly access to, and downloads of, these documents and data sets, and to links to on-line statutory plans and strategies.

This approach allows the management plan itself, in both in its printed and on-line versions, to be a concise document, accessible to a wide range of stakeholders, and easy to use.



"Having a management plan and all the supporting material and guidance available on the internet makes it accessible to a wide range of stakeholders spread across and beyond what is an unusually large and populous AONB"

Councillor Brian Kentfield, Rother District Council

¹ *Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plans: A guide* (Countryside Agency, CA 23, 2001), pp. 45-7.

2. AN OUTSTANDING AREA

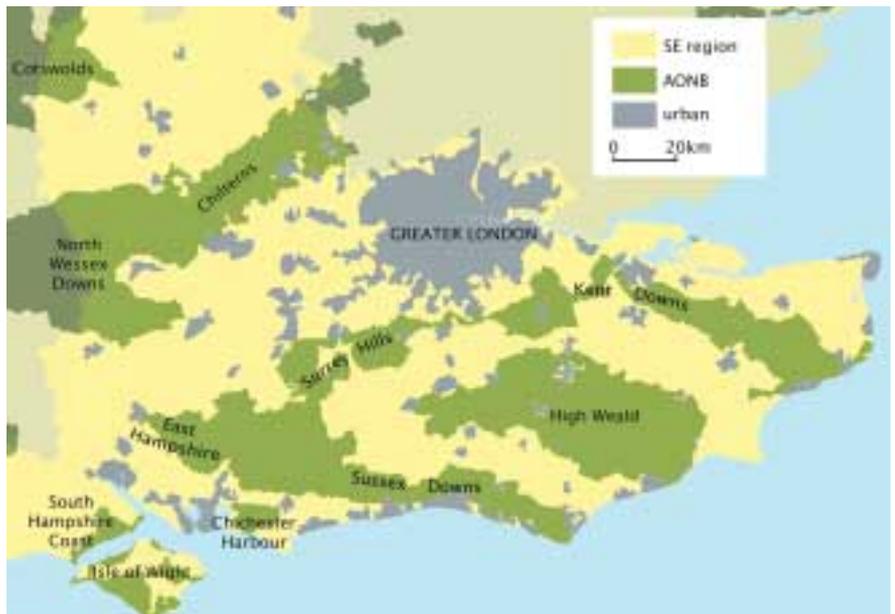
2.1. Introduction

This section of the plan draws on the on-line underpinning studies to provide key facts and figures that profile the social, economic and environmental facets of the AONB.



“The High Weald is beautiful because the landscape is evidence of work. That work has always been concordant with the nature of the place and that combination should be the target of any plan”

Adam Nicolson, resident and journalist



AONBs of the South East Region

2.2. Regional context

The High Weald AONB is one of 12 AONBs in the South East, that together account for 31% of the region. The population surrounding the AONB is high: 873,000 people live in wards wholly or partly within 5km of the AONB; the UK’s second largest airport is within 4km; the Metropolitan Greenbelt extends into the north of the AONB, covering 7.7% of the area; the AONB is crossed by two trunk roads (A23 and A21) linking London and the built-up Sussex coast; and the AONB is adjacent to areas of economic success (e.g. Crawley/Gatwick); priority areas for urban regeneration (especially Hastings), and one of the region’s main proposed growth areas (Ashford). This context highlights the pressures (including those of development) on the AONB as well as its benefits to the surrounding urban areas (such as providing open-air recreation, potable water supply, local produce, and an environment that is attractive to businesses and their workers).

Local authority	% of AONB in local authority	% of local authority in AONB
East Sussex	60.19	50.84
Hastings	0.34	16.13
Rother	29.24	82.24
Wealden	30.61	53.35
West Sussex	13.73	10.05
Crawley	0.07	1.82
Horsham	2.47	6.76
Mid Sussex	11.19	48.91
Kent	25.47	9.74
Ashford	5.70	14.35
Sevenoaks	4.12	16.13
Tonbridge & Malling	0.07	0.46
Tunbridge Wells	15.58	68.38
Surrey	0.69	0.61
Tandridge	0.69	4.08

Administrative areas and the High Weald: breakdown of the 1457 sq km of the AONB by county, district and borough

2.3. Socio-economic profile

The society and economy of the High Weald is one of contrasts. The AONB combines high house prices and a large commuting population, with low productivity, few jobs, and real deprivation.

Key socio-economic facts and figures:

- total population of 121,000 – one of the largest for an AONB
- the AONB population density is 0.8 people per hectare
- there are 103 villages and two towns, of which Battle is the largest with a population of c.6,000
- 38% of the AONB population lives in the countryside outside villages
- 64% of the AONB businesses are in the countryside outside villages
- 20% of the population is aged under 16; 56% aged 16-59; and 24% aged 60 and over
- 45% of the population is economically active, compared to 48% in the rest of the 4 counties around the AONB
- 52% of the population lives within 5km of a railway station
- 63% of the High Weald had a mean house price of £200,000 or more (in 2001)
- there is limited broadband internet connection in the AONB, placing its rural businesses and communities at a disadvantage
- in 66% of the AONB more than 15% of the household incomes are less than £10,500: the area is poorer than the SE region in general
- 46.5% of AONB is designated a Rural Priority Area reflecting real hardship and deprivation measured in national Indices of Deprivation

Tourism is an important industry in the area. Regional analysis suggests that a significant proportion of the AONB has a level of tourism activity that is above average. This is defined as greater than 10% employed in accommodation; visitor numbers greater than 0.5 million; above average density of attractions; and an above average density of accommodation establishments.

Key open-air recreation and tourism facts and figures:

- 2,065km of public footpaths
- 332km of public bridleways
- 56 major visitor attractions
- 3 Tourist Information Centres in the AONB and 16 within 5km
- 61 countryside sites, including Ashdown Forest and Bewl Water
- 427 accommodation providers: 232 B&Bs/guesthouses, 130 self-catering, 47 hotels, 16 camping/caravan sites, and 2 youth hostels
- there are 830ha of woods in Woodland Grant Scheme and 112 Countryside Stewardship Schemes for recreation and access

How adult residents use and think of the High Weald AONB:

- 90% recognize the term 'High Weald' and 92% know that they live in an AONB
- woods, fields, vernacular buildings and 'rural feel' top the residents' list of what they see as distinctive
- impacts of traffic and development are considered the greatest threats to the AONB
- enjoyment is most affected by traffic, rubbish and lack of non-car transport
- 68% of those employed work in the High Weald
- 58% are regular buyers of local products
- over 80% walk in the High Weald, 20% cycle, 14% cycle off road, 11% ride horses and 10% run
- Rights of Way, woodland with open access, and rural lanes are used most for recreation
- over 40% are active bird and nature watchers

Source: *High Weald AONB Management Plan Public Survey, 2002.*

AN OUTSTANDING AREA

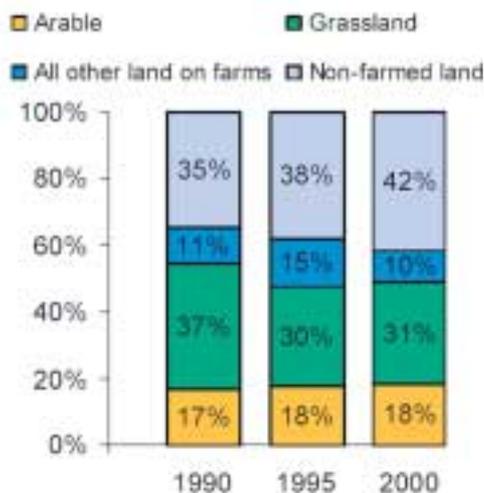
Key pressures on agriculture:

- poor quality soils
- small holding sizes
- low farmgate prices
- a global and strongly competitive market
- increasing regulation
- lack of infrastructure (e.g. abattoirs)
- ageing farming population
- unusual proportion of buildings to land (due to small holding size), increasing value to non-agricultural use
- high land and property values driving farm sales out of agriculture
- uncertainty arising from CAP reform

Agriculture remains the main industry directly related to management of the natural beauty of the AONB, despite the rapidly decreasing extent of farmland and a sharp decline in farmgate prices, income and profitability.

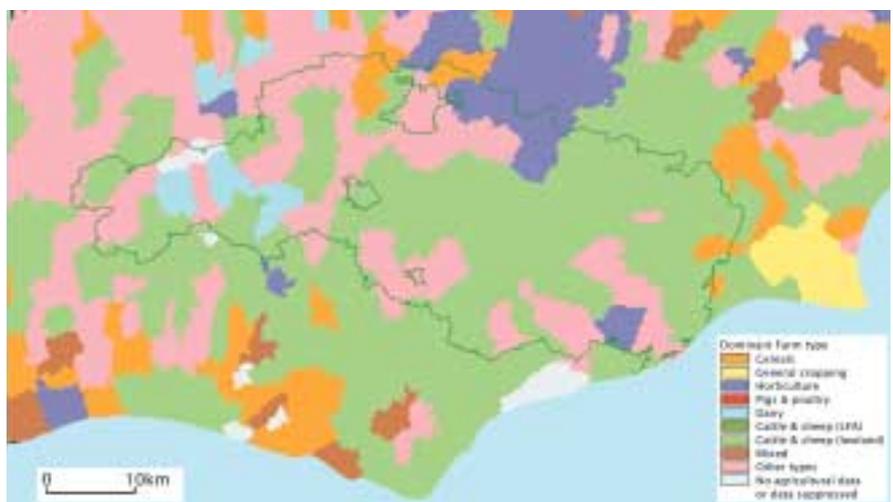
Key agriculture facts and figures:

- there were 2,389 farm holdings in the AONB in 2000
- an estimated 30% of holdings support full-time farming businesses
- 76% of land is owner occupied, higher than the surrounding area
- in 2000 there was an agricultural labour force of 4,310 working in the AONB – a fall of 36% from 1990
- 35% of the farm workforce comprises part-time farmers (28% in the SE region)
- the farmed area declined by 10% between 1990 and 2000 (from 65.2% to 58.5% of the total AONB), and this trend is continuing
- mean farm size declined from 45 to 40ha between 1990 and 2000, faster than in the surrounding area
- retirement is the reason for the sale of 45% of farms over 20ha (50 acres): nationally retirement accounts for 12% of sales
- 60% of land purchasers are 'lifestyle' buyers
- 37% of farms were classified in 2000 as 'other', an increase of 42% from 1990: this marks a sharp decline in commercially active farms
- the estimated gross farmgate output for 2002 was £44.1 million
- CAP receipts account for £7.2 million (16%) of the gross output
- it is estimated that over half the £37.3 million production costs are recycled in the local economy
- the area of holdings wholly or partly under Countryside Stewardship Schemes is 17,747ha



Change in patterns of land use in the High Weald AONB from 1990-2000.

Source: Defra June Agriculture Census



Dominant farm types in the High Weald AONB. Source: (after) *England Rural Development Programme 2000-2006: South East Regional Chapter* (1999)

Forestry, like agriculture, is a rural industry directly related to the management of a significant proportion of the High Weald's natural beauty. In this case, the decline has already happened, for the industry collapsed in the 20th century. The woods remain, however, and with them the need and potential for a revitalized industry.



"The woodlands of the High Weald are a good source of sustainably managed hardwoods: we use them for much of our work"

David Green, High Weald Furniture

Key forestry and woodland industry facts and figures:

- c.30% of the High Weald is woodland
- over 90% of ancient woodlands have survived since c.1880
- hardwood coppice has dominated forestry in the area since the medieval period
- at least 11% of woodland today is in active coppice, representing around a fifth of the area under coppice in 1947
- 60% of this active coppice is in identified Ancient Semi-natural Woodland
- coppice lost since 1947 has not been grubbed up, but has overgrown and become classified as broadleaved: much is recoverable
- in addition to active coppice, 51% of the woodland is broadleaved
- 14% of the woodland comprises coniferous plantation, and this is associated with large woodland blocks that offered better commercial scale of operation when planting took off in the early 1900s
- 9.6% of woodland is owned by the Forestry Commission
- 9,485ha (c.22%) of the woodland is on agricultural holdings
- the former main hardwood pulp user in the south-east (Kemsley Paper Mill, Sittingbourne) closed its broadleaved roundwood intake line in 1991. Hardwood pulp (currently one of the few bulk markets for low-grade broadleaved wood) from the AONB can now only be sent long distances to alternative mills in Wales and County Durham
- 10,213ha of woodland is in the Woodland Grant Scheme (WGS)
- the AONB woodlands are an under-utilized source of renewable energy: the total woodland area of the High Weald could provide nearly 11% of the current 1,120gigawatt/hours domestic and small business energy consumption in the AONB

Key pressures on forestry and woodland industry:

- global market favouring cheap imports of timber and woodland products
- fragmentation of woodlands into small parcels, through sales to private leisure market
- new woodland owners lacking understanding of woodland management and industry
- increasing regulation
- ageing woodland workforce and consequent loss of skills
- poor soils limiting quality of hardwood timber
- small woodland size limiting economies of scale
- low incomes for woodland workers and many small businesses lacking capital to invest
- lack of markets for low-grade broadleaved timber, particularly coppice, which has led to a consequent decline in rotational woodland management

2.4. Environmental profile

The environment of the High Weald is what makes the area outstanding. It comprises physiographic and geological features, water systems, climate, flora, fauna, landcover, buildings, transport infrastructure, boundaries, and archaeological monuments.



“The High Weald is a mosaic landscape – a complex mixture of different and mostly small-scale habitats – and this is where much of its wildlife value lies”

Dr Tony Whitbread, Sussex Wildlife Trust

Key pressures on ecology:

- decline in traditional non-intensive land management, leading to deterioration, fragmentation and loss of habitats
- widespread conifer plantations on ancient woodland and heathland
- collapse of traditional grazing of heathlands and acid grasslands
- urbanization of the AONB, with planting of non-native hedges
- invasive non-native species of flora and fauna spreading in woodlands and wetlands
- climate change, bringing milder wetter winters and warmer drier summers
- diffuse pollution affecting water systems

Key natural environment and landcover facts and figures:

- the AONB is dominated by 3 lithologies: 37% of the area is clay, 24% sandstone and 37% silty sandstone
- there are 50km of sandrock exposures, comprising natural formations and exposures in road cuttings and disused quarries
- outside the gypsum mine at Mountfield, mineral extraction is limited to 5 small-scale brickworks
- at least 16.8% of the AONB is covered by Ancient Woodland of which 64% is Ancient Semi-natural Woodland
- 5% of the UK’s lowland heaths are found in the High Weald, and 67% of this is in one block: Ashdown Forest
- there are 80 unimproved lowland neutral and dry acidic grasslands in the AONB, totalling 434ha
- 31% of the AONB is agricultural grassland (22% in the SE region)
- 18% of the AONB is arable (32% in the SE region)
- 1.4% of the AONB is in horticulture (mainly orchards, soft fruit and hops), concentrated in the north east
- the AONB has a coastline of 9.7km, 6.2km of which has cliffs
- the AONB is covered by 8 major water catchment areas, the largest of which is the Rother (41% of the AONB)
- the AONB has 8,097ha of floodplain, with 1,441 ha of floodplain grassland
- the AONB has small areas of other habitats for which there are, or will be, Habitat Action Plans: saline lagoons (12ha), reedbed (15ha), and wood pasture and parkland
- the High Weald has more than 10,000 ponds concentrated on the clay, with some on the silty sandstone
- there are 5 reservoirs in the AONB, the largest being Bewl Water

Key nature conservation facts and figures:

- there are 52 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) – an area of 5,373ha (3.7% of AONB)
- there are 227 Sites of Nature Conservation (SNCIs) – an area of 10,211 ha (7.0% of the AONB)
- Ashdown Forest and Hastings Cliffs are candidate Special Areas of Conservation (cSAC) and are protected under the European Habitats Directive
- Ashdown Forest is a Special Protection Area (SPA) and is protected under the European Birds Directive
- 29% of Ancient Woodlands are in Woodland Grant Scheme (WGS)
- BAP priority species in the AONB include dormouse, pipistrelle, barn owl, nightjar, great-crested newt, stag beetle, pearl-bordered fritillary and black poplar

Key built and historic environment facts and figures:

- 103 villages and two towns covering 4,826ha (3.3% of the AONB)
- 45,888 houses, 38% of which are in the countryside outside villages
- 100 years ago there were more High Weald houses outside villages than in them: this has reversed, with many villages tripling in size since 1945
- there are 64 conservation areas
- 7.7% of the AONB is adopted Green Belt, and 0.7% is unadopted Green Belt
- there are 57 medieval parish churches
- the ruins of 5 major religious houses survive, including Battle Abbey
- there are 56 High Weald entries on the UK Database of Historic Parks and Gardens
- Winchelsea is a planned town (an English *bastide*) with medieval town walls, gates and houses: it is of international importance
- timber, tile, brick and sandstone are the main traditional local building materials of the AONB
- there are 85 Scheduled Monuments, including 6 iron age hillforts, 23 ironworking sites, 16 moated sites and 4 castles
- 10 grade I and grade II* listed buildings and Scheduled Monuments are on the English Heritage Buildings At Risk Register 2002
- there are 1,906km of roads in the AONB

Key pressures on the built environment:

- increased house building through demographic change and allocation
- increasing use of private cars, resulting in more traffic on rural lanes and in villages, less local employment, and less use of local shops and other services
- urbanization of property, including creation of large residential curtilages from former farmland
- poor quality of much new design
- damage to historic buildings, historic routeways, boundaries, and archaeological monuments through lack of awareness, plough damage, poor maintenance or management and insensitive re-use

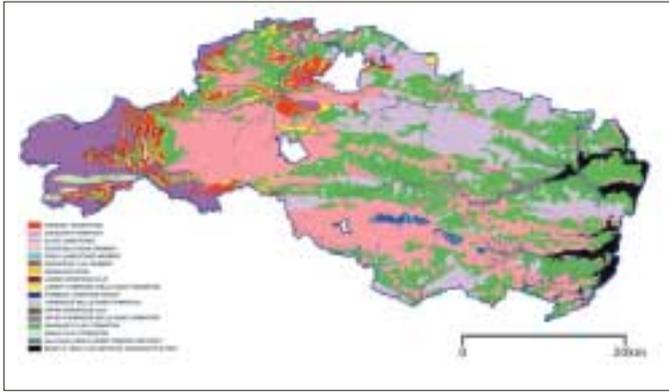
THE CHARACTER OF THE HIGH WEALD

Time-depth and objective analysis in *The Making of the High Weald* has defined the High Weald AONB as characterized by dispersed settlement; ancient routeways; an abundance of small ancient woods, gills and shaws; and small, irregularly shaped and productive fields. These are all draped over a deeply incised and ridged landform of clays and sandstones, and are closely related to socio-economic characteristics that have roots extending deep into history. The essential character of the High Weald was established by the 14th century and has survived major historical events, and social and technological changes. This fundamental and largely immutable character is the essence of the *natural beauty* of the AONB and the following 'policy' part of the plan is structured around the five key components of this character:

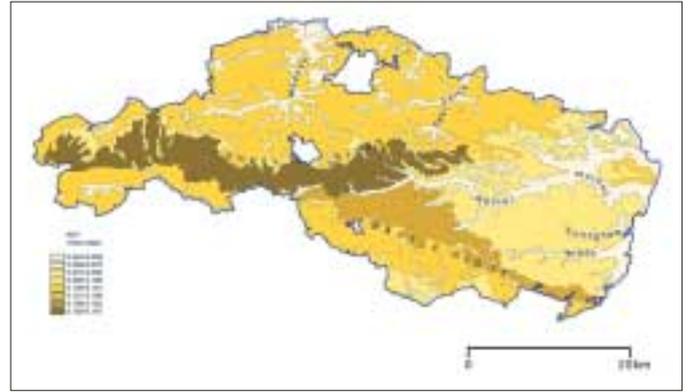
- **Geology, landform, water systems and climate:** deeply incised, ridged and faulted landform of clays and sandstone. The ridges tend east-west, and from them spring numerous gill streams that form the headwaters of rivers. Wide river valleys dominate the eastern part of the AONB. The landform and water systems are subject to, and influence, a local variant of the British sub-oceanic climate.
- **Settlement:** dispersed historic settlements of farmsteads and hamlets, and late medieval villages founded on trade and non-agricultural rural industries.
- **Routeways:** ancient routeways (now roads and Rights of Way) in the form of ridge-top roads and a dense system of radiating droveways. The droveways are often narrow, deeply sunken, and edged with trees, hedges, wildflower-rich verges and boundary banks.
- **Woodland:** the great extent of ancient woods, gills, and shaws in small holdings, the value of which is inextricably linked to long-term management.
- **Field and heath:** small, irregularly shaped and productive fields often bounded by (and forming a mosaic with) hedgerows and small woodlands, and typically used for livestock grazing; small holdings; and a non-dominant agriculture; within which can be found distinctive zones of heaths and inned river valleys.

These fundamental characteristics of the High Weald AONB are enriched by locally distinctive and nationally important details. These include castles and abbeys; hop gardens and orchards; oast houses and parish churches; and Veteran Trees and local populations of key threatened species.

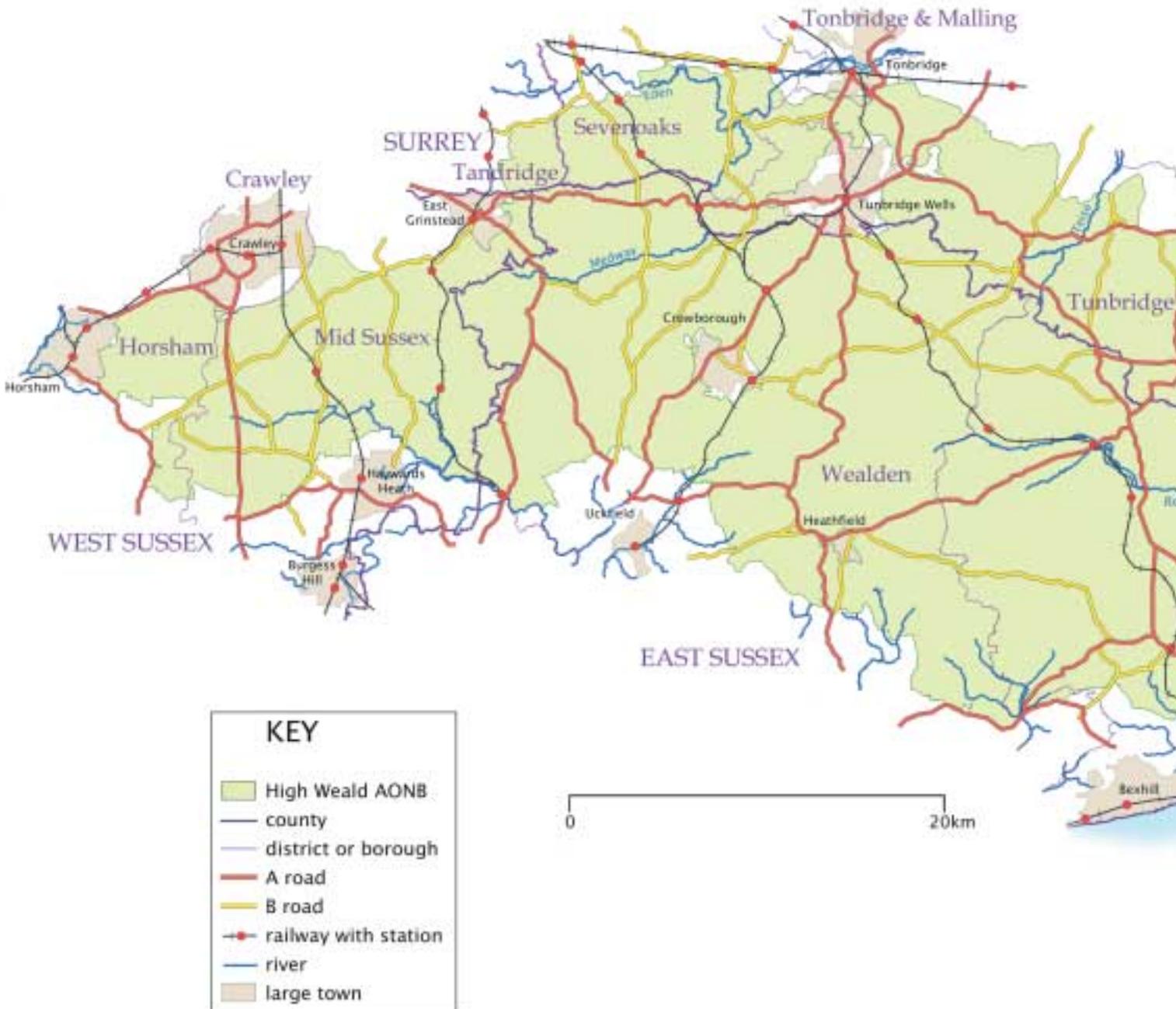
AN OUTSTANDING AREA - MAPPED



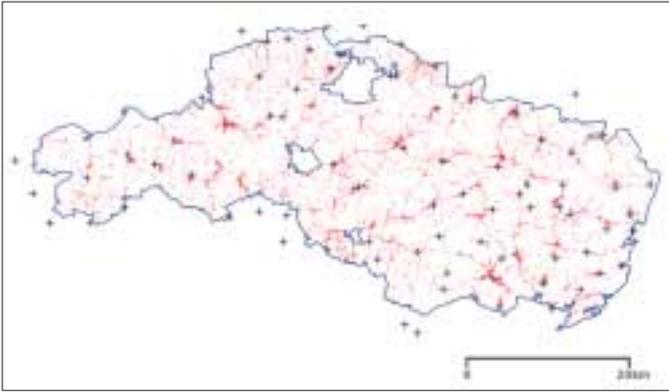
The geology of the High Weald AONB. Based on 1:50,000 digital data, by permission of the British Geological Survey



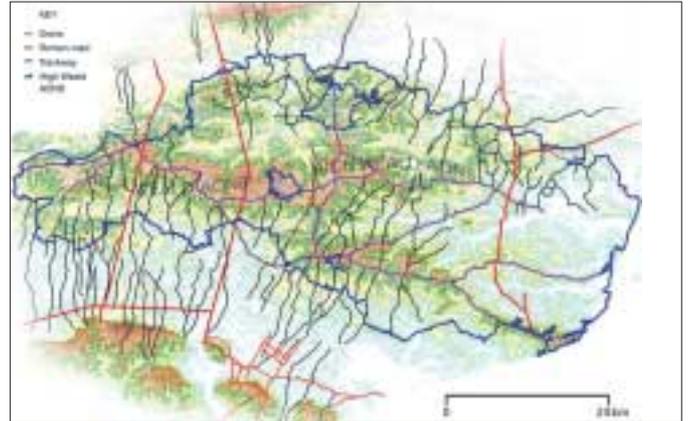
The landform of the High Weald, showing slopes and the names of the main river valleys and ridges:
The Making of the High Weald



AN OUTSTANDING AREA - MAPPED



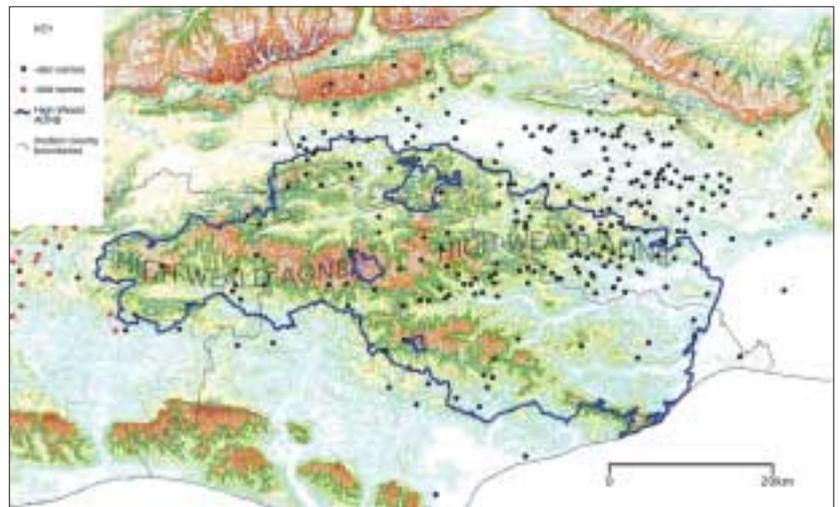
Settlement pattern in the High Weald – modern households and medieval parish churches: *The Making of the High Weald*



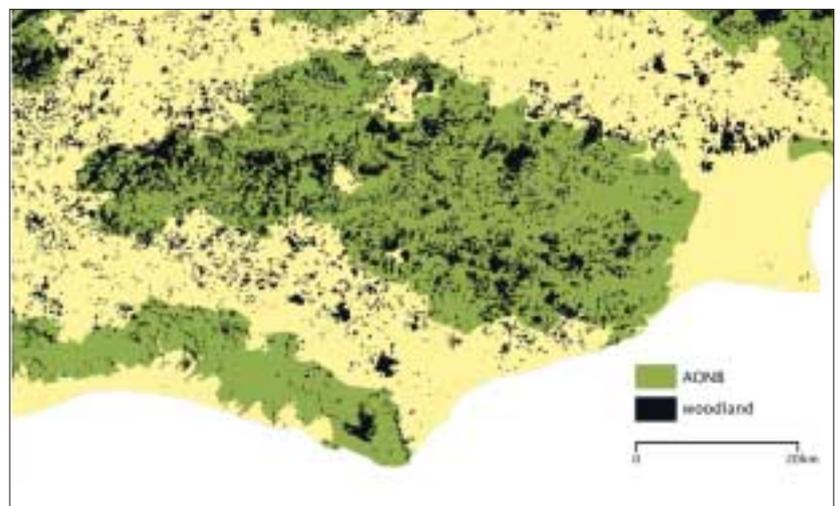
The pattern of ancient routeways in and around the High Weald: *The Making of the High Weald*



Woodland in and around the High Weald: National Inventory of Woodland and Trees (Forestry Commission)



Origins of High Weald settlement – place-name evidence for Anglo-Saxon dens and folds: *The Making of the High Weald*





GEOLOGY, LANDFORM, WATER SYSTEMS AND CLIMATE: CHARACTER DEFINED

The High Weald AONB is characterized by a deeply incised, ridged and faulted landform of clays and sandstone. The ridges tend east-west, and from them spring numerous gill streams that form the headwaters of rivers. Wide river valleys dominate the eastern part of the AONB. The landform and water systems are subject to, and influence, a local variant of the British sub-oceanic climate.



“Geology and landform are key and defining features of the High Weald, and the hydrology is closely related: it is the latter that we need to be managing more sensitively and sustainably”

David Jordan, Regional Director, Southern Region, Environment Agency

GEOLOGY, LANDFORM, WATER SYSTEMS AND CLIMATE

VISION FOR GEOLOGY, LANDFORM, WATER SYSTEMS AND CLIMATE

A landscape in which sustainable land management takes care of the natural resources of geology, soil, landform, and water systems, whilst delivering a wide range of social, economic and environmental benefits. The approach to land management will take account of, indeed will be partly stimulated by, climate change and rising sea levels.

Since the entire AONB is an important water catchment, much of the vision can be realized through the adoption of river restoration policies that seek to maximize opportunities for natural processes to reduce flooding; improve water quality; reduce soil erosion; increase biodiversity and amenity value; and encourage environmentally responsible land management and agriculture.

TOP 5 ISSUES FOR FOR GEOLOGY, LANDFORM, WATER SYSTEMS AND CLIMATE

- Flooding – costly and disruptive frequent flooding of property
- Poor aquatic systems – failing to meet their potential for water quality, biodiversity and amenity
- Climate change (warmer wetter winters and hotter drier summers) and rising sea levels – increasing the propensity to flood and highlighting unsustainable aspects of land and water management
- Poor understanding – of the benefits of adopting river restoration policies that can utilize natural processes to reduce flooding, improve the aquatic systems, increase amenity value, and reduce costs of maintaining the current systems
- Threats to sandstone outcrops – inappropriate use, management, and neglect of key geological features and the ecology that they support

OBJECTIVES FOR GEOLOGY, LANDFORM, WATER SYSTEMS AND CLIMATE

G1 Objective: To restore the natural function of river catchments

Rationale: to protect the built-environment and human life by safe water conveyance across the levels, whilst improving the aquatic ecosystems of the High Weald, mitigating the effects of increasingly frequent and high peak flows, improving the social and economic function of the rivers and streams (e.g. potable water quality and amenity value), and reducing the high costs of maintaining the current system.

Indicators of success

- i) reduction in the rate at which flood waters pass down the middle and upper reaches of the AONB's catchments, and reduction of excessive sedimentation due to run off
- ii) shift in the balance between the quantity of floodwater conveyed directly to the outfalls and the quantity diverted into temporary storage on the floodplains

Targets for 2009

- a) land management advice for gills, and upper and middle reaches for the entire AONB developed and communicated to advisers and land managers
- b) one or more pilot projects established (e.g. through agri-environment support) that demonstrate the potential benefits of the strategy
- c) discussion forum established with the Environment Agency flood defence team and with the Internal Drainage Boards (IDBs) for the levels
- d) research undertaken on any existing mechanistic hydraulic modelling of the Rother and developed to generate a model that can verify the scope for change and anticipate risks and rewards
- e) one or more pilot projects undertaken (e.g. through agri-environment support) to demonstrate the benefits of the strategy and the modelling

G2 Objective: To protect the sandstone outcrops of the AONB

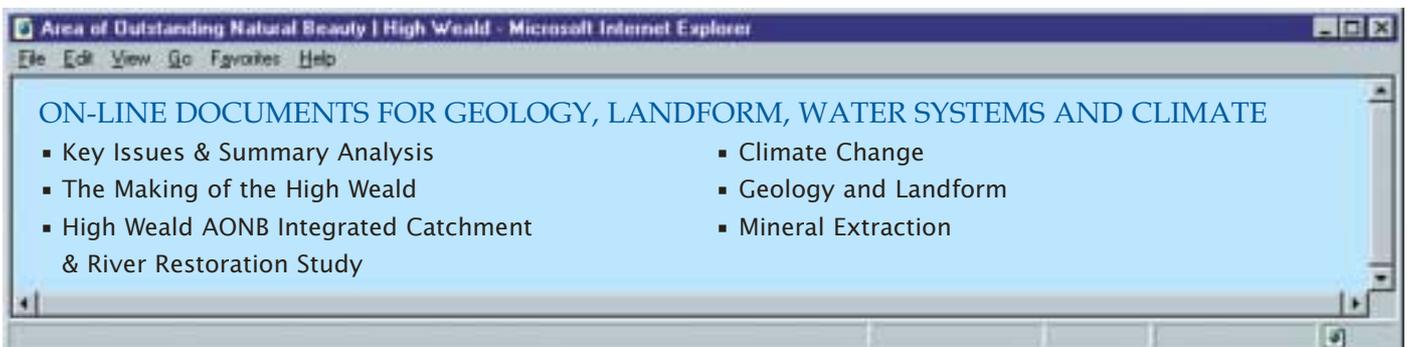
Rationale: to maintain the nationally important geological exposures; to conserve the fern, moss and liverwort communities they support; and to protect their value as some of the most significant sites of prehistoric archaeology in the AONB

Indicators of success

- i) no loss of sandstone outcrops
- ii) favourable condition achieved at important outcrops

Targets for 2009

- a) no change in extent from 2004 baseline
- b) important outcrops identified and management plans produced that accommodate sensitive use for climbing where appropriate





SETTLEMENT: CHARACTER DEFINED

The High Weald AONB is characterized by dispersed historic settlements of farmsteads and hamlets, and late medieval villages founded on trade and non-agricultural rural industries

“Dispersed settlement of farmsteads and hamlets is such an unusual and key feature of the High Weald, that we need to work together to consider how we can protect and enhance this characteristic in the context of broader rural sustainability”

Ashley Brown, Director (Rural Affordable Housing and Related Projects), Wealden District Council

SETTLEMENT

VISION FOR SETTLEMENT

A landscape in which the distinctive and historic pattern of settlement of the High Weald is protected in a way that positively contributes to the natural environment and improves the connections between settlements and the countryside. Appropriately worded land use planning policies within relevant development plans ensure that settlements retain their distinctiveness and individual historic buildings and conservation areas are conserved and enhanced

This vision can be realized through new resources, and the application of planning policies and guidance that seek to control development on the basis of an understanding of rural sustainability; promote the traditional pattern of High Weald villages; maximize environmental design and construction quality; minimize resource consumption and promote alternative forms of energy; support appropriate businesses (especially those based on and supporting productive use of land, and community objectives); and the enhancement of the historic environment.

TOP 5 ISSUES FOR SETTLEMENT

- Need for greater understanding – e.g. of the dispersed settlement pattern of the High Weald, and the connections between settlements and the countryside
- Loss of rural function – becoming dormitories for commuting or places of retirement
- Suburbanization – erosion of AONB character through extension of curtilages, and inappropriate modifications, or treatments, of boundaries and buildings
- Inappropriate new development – e.g. large-sized residences failing to meet needs of local community
- Inappropriate design and building materials – architecture not respecting AONB character, quality and objectives

OBJECTIVES FOR SETTLEMENT

S1 Objective: To reconnect settlements, residents and their supporting economic activity with the surrounding countryside

Rationale: to understand and enhance the synergy of the local economy, society and environment, and the symbiosis with the surrounding countryside, that defines sustainable rural settlement. To provide opportunities for economic activity that supports other land management objectives of the management plan and AONB designation.

Indicators of success

- i) better understanding of the role of settlement in sustainable management of the AONB
- ii) increased connection between settlements and that part of the economy based on the local countryside

Targets for 2009

- a) a study, resulting in good practice principles, to identify the existing sustainability attributes of individual settlements, and networks of settlements, and their connections with the countryside
- b) guidance produced on renewable energy schemes for local communities and businesses
- c) pilot rural community renewable energy schemes in operation
- d) an increase in number and frequency of farmers' markets in High Weald villages and towns
- e) possibility explored with LAs for legislative change for provision for affordable housing for key workers and, especially, land-based workers

S2 Objective: To protect the historic pattern of settlement

Rationale: to protect the distinctive character of towns, villages, hamlets and farmsteads, and to maintain the hinterlands and other relationships (including separation) between such settlements that contribute to local identity.

Indicator of success

- i) enhanced awareness of AONB objectives to help inform emerging plans and policies

Targets for 2009

- a) ability of the AONB partnership to comment on draft development plans (or local development frameworks), and national and regional policy guidance and strategies
- b) identification by LAs of required AONB-wide guidance and information (e.g. for suburbanization), and production thereof

S3 Objective: To enhance the architectural quality of the High Weald

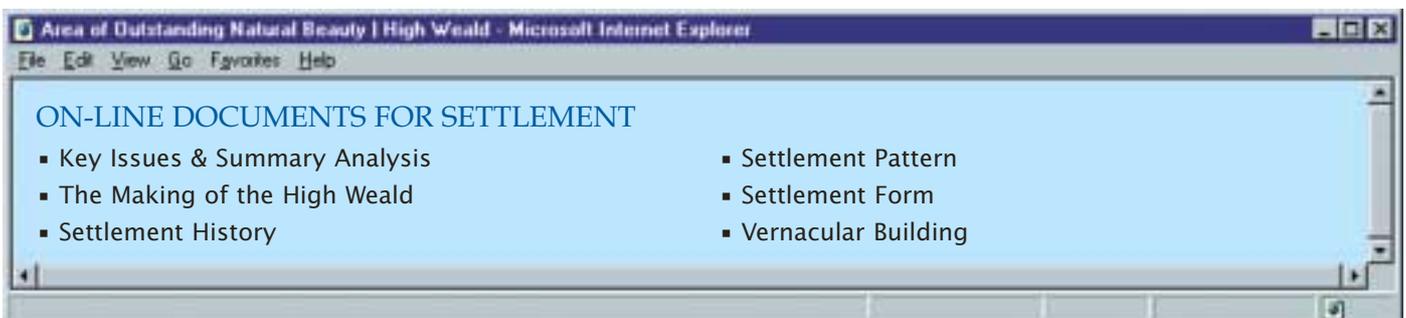
Rationale: to protect and enhance the architectural identity of the High Weald, and to re-establish the use of local materials as a means of protecting the environment and adding to this distinctiveness.

Indicators of success

- i) improvement in condition and setting of historic environment
- ii) better design of new buildings and alterations, and wider use of locally-sourced materials

Targets for 2009

- a) cleared backlog of repairs to listed buildings and scheduled monuments on English Heritage 'at risk register'
- b) conservation area statements (appraisal/management plan) completed for all conservation areas in the AONB
- c) design guidance produced (where needed) that promotes high quality design, local materials and distinctiveness, and environmental design and construction techniques





ROUTEWAYS: CHARACTER DEFINED

The High Weald AONB is characterized by ancient routeways (now roads and Rights of Way) in the form of ridge-top roads and a dense system of radiating droveways. The droveways are often narrow, deeply sunken, and edged with trees, hedges, wildflower-rich verges and boundary banks.



"It is so easy to take the ancient lanes of the High Weald for granted: those of us involved in highway maintenance and planning must try to rise to the challenge of ensuring that we keep their character"

*Graham Furness, Area Highway Manager,
East Sussex County Council*

ROUTEWAYS

VISION FOR ROUTEWAYS

A landscape in which the character of the distinctive lanes and Rights of Way is protected and a balance achieved between the comparative quietness and rurality of the roads of the High Weald and their function as communications central to the economic and social well being of the area. The management will take account of, and indeed is partly stimulated by increasing road traffic, safety concerns, increased leisure activities (riding, cycling, walking and off-road driving), underuse of many Rights of Way, and expanding development.

The vision can be realized through refinement of existing policies and designations that seek to protect archaeology and ecology, and that restrict ribbon development, and through refinement of policies and guidelines that seek to respect the character of lanes and Rights of Way by encouraging use of sympathetic surfacing materials and boundary types; reducing unnecessary use of highway furniture; and by promoting selected walking, cycling and riding routes.

TOP 5 ISSUES FOR ROUTEWAYS

- Traffic – car and lorry numbers increasing on the network of narrow lanes, with implications for safety, non-vehicular use, and tranquillity
- Development – increasing numbers of houses along rural lanes
- Suburbanization – introduction of non-native species (especially leylandii), inappropriate boundaries and gates, and intrusive highway engineering
- Poor understanding – of the resource and the management needed to conserve the roads and non-vehicular routeways, for their ecology, archaeology, and their potential for informal recreation and non-vehicular transport
- Lack of protection – the vast majority of ancient routeways in the High Weald have no protection, leaving them exposed to mis-management

OBJECTIVES FOR ROUTEWAYS

R1 Objective: To maintain the historic pattern and features of routeways

Rationale: to maintain routeway boundaries that form a part of the habitat mosaic of the High Weald; to maintain this key component of what is a rare UK survival of an essentially medieval landscape; to maintain a routeway network that has a symbiotic relationship with settlement location, hinterlands, and identity; and to protect the individual archaeological features of the historic routeways.

Indicators of success

- i) increased protection for and awareness of the best-preserved examples of networks of ancient routeways
- ii) historic street furniture retained
- iii) the undeveloped nature of rural lanes maintained

Targets for 2009

- a) the best examples identified through research project and protected through national heritage designation for areas of landscape importance, and included in Rights of Way Improvement plans so that they become part of the overall access planning for the AONB
- b) agri-environment target aimed at protecting historic routeways and their archaeology
- c) turnpike-related features (e.g. milestones) identified
- d) timber finger posts identified, retained and maintained
- e) guidelines adopted by LAs throughout AONB. These will promote use of characteristic boundaries and the reduction of the impact of intrusive highway engineering and signage. The latter could promote tight (non-swept) junctions; resist kerbs and drains (especially on sunken lanes); minimize road markings; and promote unintrusive traffic calming

R2 Objective: To enhance the ecological function of routeways

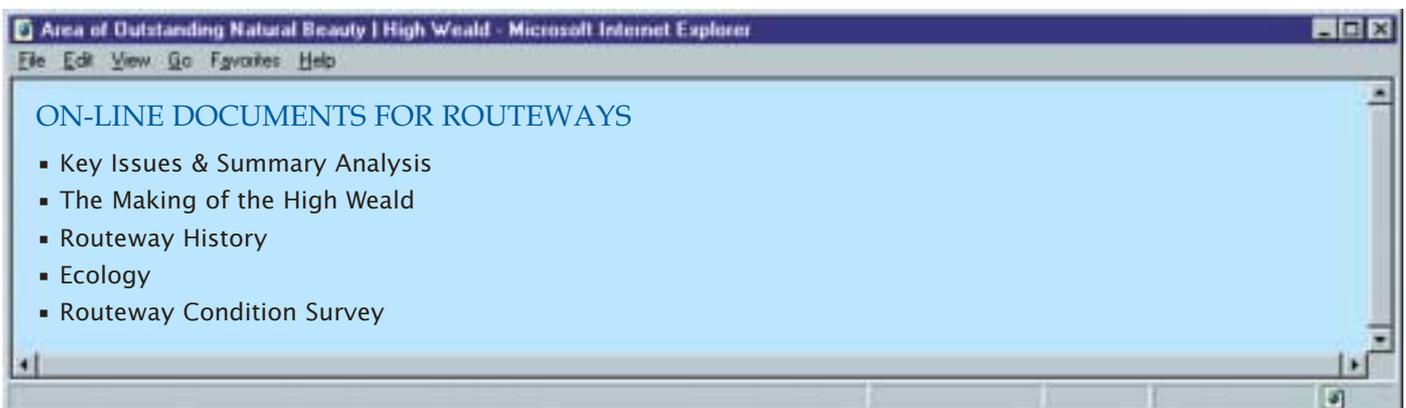
Rationale: to improve the condition and connectivity of habitats along routeways for wildlife.

Indicators of success

- i) favourable ecological condition achieved along routeways
- ii) better protection secured for routeways of ecological value

Targets for 2009

- a) key types of ecological feature of routeways identified and guidelines for good management produced and promoted
- b) subsidy and support mechanisms targeted at ecology of routeways
- c) routeways of ecological importance identified and protected through designations such as SNCI and designated verge





WOODLAND: CHARACTER DEFINED

The High Weald AONB is characterized by the great extent of ancient woods, gills, and shaws in small holdings, the value of which is inextricably linked to long-term management.

WOODLAND

VISION FOR WOODLAND

A landscape in which the nationally important assemblage of ancient woodland in the High Weald is managed to maximize its full wildlife, landscape and historical value. Within this, connectivity between woodland and other habitats is enhanced, archaeology protected, sensitive use for leisure and recreation encouraged, and traditional woodland management active in producing high-quality timber and valued underwood to supply the local markets.

This vision can be realized through strategic focusing of management on key woodland areas (built on better understanding); through new initiatives and policies that seek to support the development of a thriving woodland industry; stimulating new markets for bulk use of coppice; supporting better marketing of local timber and coppice products; increasing understanding and enjoyment of the High Weald's woodland; and providing expert advice to land managers.

TOP 5 ISSUES FOR WOODLAND

- Neglect – e.g. lack of management and poor stock and deer control
- Extent of non-native species. For example, 36% of woods in the AONB are plantations on ancient woodland (PAWS). Other non-native species include invasive rhododendron, cherry laurel, sycamore, and grey squirrels
- Fragmentation – the poor connectivity, increasing isolation, fragmented ownership, and small size of many woodlands is degrading their ecological value and potential productivity
- Collapsed timber market – its drastic decline over the last 50 years has led to a lack of woodland management, decline in local woodland industries, and the loss of skilled woodland workers
- Poor understanding – of ecology and historic environment in the High Weald woodlands, and the nature and extent of the management required to bring them into favourable condition on a landscape scale



“The High Weald has far more woodland than any other AONB and, more importantly, over half of this is classed as Ancient Woodland – areas especially important for landscape and wildlife. Working with partners, the Forestry Commission is seeking to support woodland owners with the most effective combination of grants and advice within the framework of this management plan”

Alan Betts, Regional Director, Forestry Commission, South East England Conservancy

OBJECTIVES FOR WOODLAND

W1 Objective: To maintain existing extent of woodland and particularly ancient woodland

Rationale: to maintain irreplaceable habitats for biodiversity, to maintain a key component of the cultural landscape, and to maintain contribution to carbon storage

Indicator of success

- i) no further loss of ancient woodland

Targets for 2009

- a) no change in ancient woodland from 2004 baseline (including woodlands under 2ha, not currently mapped, as information becomes available)

W2 Objective: To enhance the ecological functioning of woodland at a landscape scale

Rationale: to increase the viability of the woodland habitat for wildlife, by identifying and building on existing areas of high value, extending the area of appropriately managed woodland to link and enhance isolated habitats and species populations, providing greater connectivity between woodlands and other important wildlife areas, and helping to facilitate species' response to climate change

Indicators of success

- i) favourable condition for wildlife achieved in important woodland areas, focusing on appropriate management for key habitats and species

Targets for 2009

- a) important woodlands identified, to include:
- Woodlands supporting population of key BAP species, particularly threatened species showing regional/national decline
 - Large woodland areas providing suitable habitat size for wide range of characteristic species
 - Nationally important BAP habitats (wet woodlands)
 - Woodland areas and associated habitats identified in relevant Habitat Action Plans, including gill woodlands, wood pasture & parkland, and Veteran Trees
- b) subsidy and support mechanisms strategically focused on key woodlands with a shift from a reactive to a proactive approach
- c) decline in key species reversed through landscape-scale species analysis, leading to the short-term focusing of management in critical areas possibly supported by a dedicated land management team
- d) guidelines for good management produced and promoted to woodland owners
- e) relevant Habitat Action Plan commitments fulfilled by partner organizations
- f) landscape-scale management strategies for damaging and/or invasive species agreed
- g) better protection and management of smaller ancient woodlands, including mapping of all woodlands under 2ha
- h) woodland listed on the Ancient Woodland Inventory to have supporting ecological information available from the relevant Local Record Centre
- i) key areas identified for increasing habitat size and connectivity through increased understanding of edge effects, the value of core areas, analysis of species trends, and identification of small, isolated woodlands
- j) increased connectivity between woodland and other important habitat areas, to promote a wildlife-rich habitat mosaic
- k) increased understanding and promotion of the wildlife value of inter-habitat transition zones (ecotones)
- ii) increase in connectivity

W2 continued over

W2 continued

- iii) appropriate restoration of Plantations on Ancient Woodland (PAWS)
- iv) improved understanding of the ecological value of wooded heaths
- l) planned programme implemented for key PAWS sites where restoration will make the greatest contribution to habitat and species connectivity
- m) partnership project established to produce management guidelines for wooded heaths

W3 Objective: To protect the archaeology of AONB woodlands

Rationale: to protect the historic environment of the AONB represented by the unusual concentration of archaeological sites and monuments within ancient and secondary woodlands

Indicators of success

- i) increased protection for key archaeological sites and monuments
- ii) improved management and understanding of historic environment

Targets for 2009

- a) increased number of sites and monuments found within woodlands (e.g. ironworking sites) protected by a national heritage designation
- b) woodlands with good archaeological resource identified and guidelines for appropriate management produced and promoted
- c) archaeological surveys undertaken prior to publicly-funded management

W4 Objective: To increase the output of sustainably produced high-quality timber and underwood for local markets

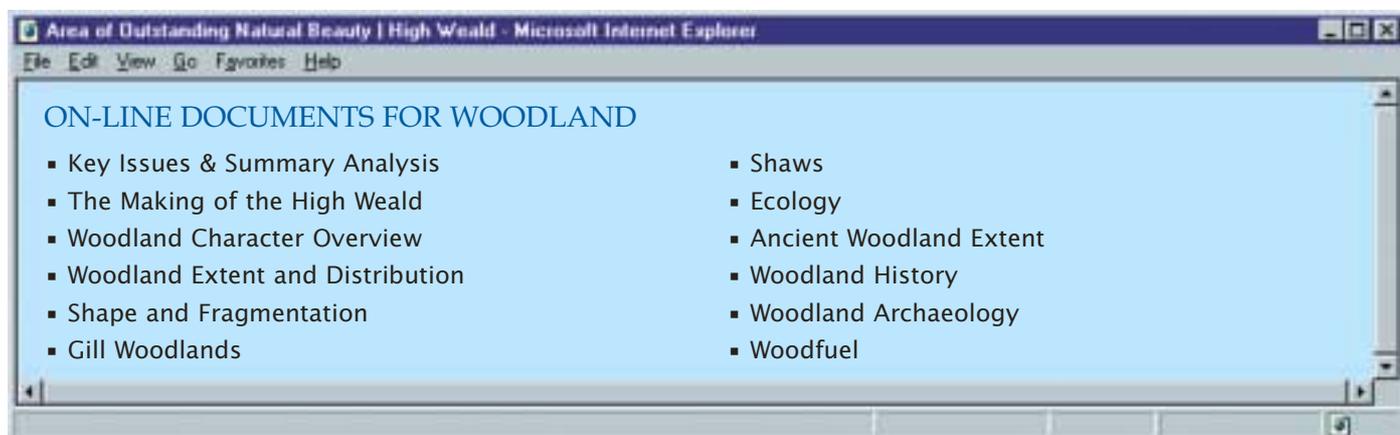
Rationale: to achieve the most effective management that will deliver the other objectives for woodland, to contribute to sustainable domestic timber production, to support a working countryside, to contribute to UK and international targets for renewable energy, and to reduce the dependency of the UK on non-sustainably managed woodlands and greenhouse-gas producing international transport

Indicator of success

- i) a thriving woodland industry supporting sustainable woodland management within the AONB

Targets for 2009

- a) improved marketing of existing wood products and new markets established for locally-sourced timber and underwood
- b) support mechanisms tailored to industry need generated through greater understanding of the woodland industry
- c) increase in timber and underwood sales
- d) increase in number of skilled coppice workers
- e) 20% increase in United Kingdom Woodland Assurance Scheme (UKWAS) certified woodlands from 2004 baseline
- f) landscape-scale strategies for grey squirrel control agreed and implemented





FIELD AND HEATH

VISION FOR FIELD AND HEATH

A landscape in which the fundamental character is maintained by skilled land managers and workers, and livestock and crops that are bred and grown for agricultural production and environmental targets, and which allows responsible access and enjoyment by the public.

This vision can be realized through tailoring rural development and agri-environment schemes to meet High Weald objectives, through refining existing policies that seek to protect the countryside from development, and through new initiatives and policies that seek to maintain and expand traditional land-management skills, stimulate markets for local products, support a local infrastructure for productive farming, and provide expert advice to land managers.

TOP 5 ISSUES FOR FIELD AND HEATH

- Declining extent of agriculture – land falling out of productive use into amenity and residential use, with consequent suburbanization and neglect
- Collapse of profitability of farming due to fall in farmgate prices (driven by the global market) and uncompetitive nature of High Weald agriculture (small holdings with poor soils) – resulting in lack of straightforward farm businesses, exits from agriculture, lack of successors to existing farms, increased reliance on non-land based diversification and incomes (taking the farmers out of farming), and the rise of part-time farming
- Lack of infrastructure for agriculture and land management – e.g. absence of abattoirs supporting a predominantly grazed landscape
- Declining skills – an ageing and shrinking workforce with the traditional skills necessary to maintain the features of the open land of the AONB
- Environmental degradation – neglected fields scrubbing up, increasing run-off and agrochemical inputs, loss of key habitats (e.g. meadows and heaths), and damage to historic features (e.g. field boundaries and field pattern, and archaeological sites and monuments)

FIELD AND HEATH: CHARACTER DEFINED

The High Weald AONB is characterized by small, irregularly shaped and productive fields often bounded by (and forming a mosaic with) hedgerows and small woodlands, and typically used for livestock grazing; small holdings; and a non-dominant agriculture; within which can be found distinctive zones of heaths and in-land river valleys.



“Farming has always struggled in the High Weald – and now is as bad a time as any – but well-managed and productive land remains the key to the future of the AONB”

Bob Tidy, farmer and East Sussex County Council councillor

OBJECTIVES FOR FIELD AND HEATH

FH1 Objective: To secure agriculturally productive use for the fields of the High Weald AONB, especially for local markets, as part of sustainable land management

Rationale: to contribute to sustainable domestic food and non-food agricultural production, to support a working countryside, and to reduce the dependency of the UK on non-sustainably managed agricultural land and the need for long-distance transport that produces air pollutants causing harm to health and the environment

Indicators of success

- i) an increase in added value to agricultural products
- ii) increase in production that directly benefits the environment
- iii) infrastructure established to support main agricultural sectors, especially livestock
- iv) increased demand for locally-produced agricultural products

Targets for 2009

- a) increase in support for adding value
- b) expansion of farm diversification schemes directly linked to added value
- c) increase in cooperative enterprises such as farm machinery rings
- d) improvement in advice, facilitation and liaison linked to LAs and government agencies
- e) increase in value of products from wildflower grasslands or heathlands
- f) rural development funds targeted at support for critical infrastructure
- g) increase in regular outlets for local agricultural products

FH2 Objective: To maintain the pattern of small irregularly shaped fields bounded by hedgerows and woodlands

Rationale: to maintain fields and field boundaries that form a part of the habitat mosaic of the High Weald; and to maintain this key component of what is a rare UK survival of an essentially medieval landscape.

Indicator of success

- i) payments and accreditation tied to maintaining the historic field pattern

Targets for 2009

- a) increase in area of AONB covered by agri-environment payments for field boundaries, old meadows and pastures, old orchards, arable margins and relevant new schemes under Countryside Stewardship Schemes (CSS)
- b) this objective adopted as a regional target for CSS

FH3 Objective: To enhance the environmental function of field and heath as part of the complex mosaic of High Weald habitats

Rationale: to improve the condition and connectivity of fields and heaths and their associated and interrelated habitats (such as hedges, woodlands, ditches, ponds and water systems) for wildlife

Indicators of success

- i) unimproved grasslands retained in favourable condition for wildlife
- ii) heathland retained in favourable condition for wildlife
- iii) improved management of margins and transition zones
- iv) reduction in agrochemical inputs
- v) traditional land management skills retained
- vi) relevant Habitat Action Plan (HAP) targets met
- vii) expert advice on specialist habitats and features of the AONB made available to all land managers

Targets for 2009

- a) 100% retention of unimproved grassland identified by the Weald Meadows Initiative
- b) 50ha to buffer and connect existing priority grassland sites using Weald Native Origin Seed
- c) a local network established for conservation grazing
- d) 100% retention of key heathland sites identified by the Weald Heathland Initiative
- e) 1,500ha to buffer and connect existing scattered heaths
- f) increase in area under arable margins, buffer strips, and wildlife strips agri-environment payments
- g) area farmed organically increased by 20%
- h) target for supporting traditional skills adopted by ERDP vocational training
- i) AONB accreditation scheme for contractors established
- j) commitment from relevant organizations to achieving HAP targets, including SSSI and SNCI commitments
- k) AONB co-ordination and training of existing advisory services

FH4 Objective: To protect the historic features of field and heath

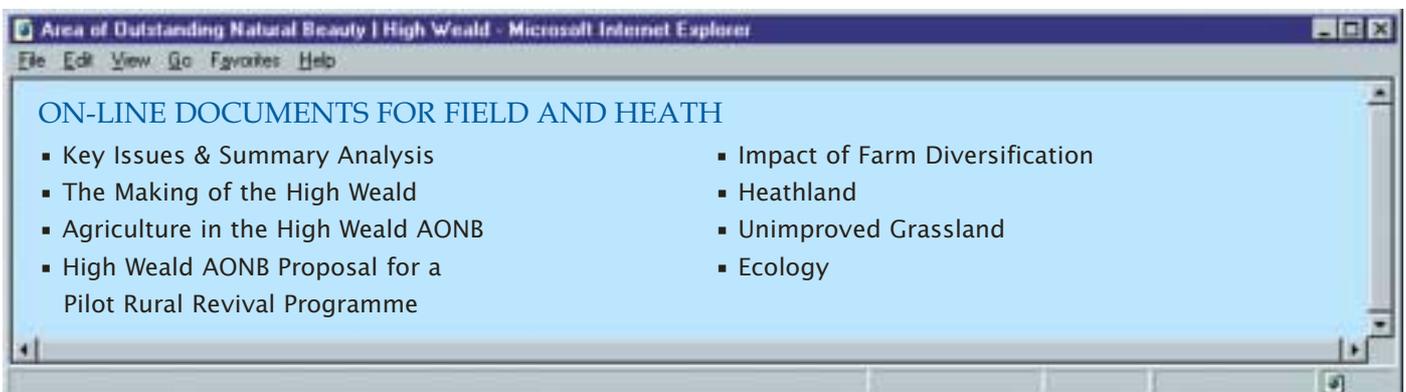
Rationale: to protect the historic aspects of non-wooded land other than the pattern of fields: i.e. the individual archaeological features

Indicators of success

- i) Ashdown Forest maintained in favourable condition for wildlife and archaeology
- ii) increased protection for smaller individual archaeological features

Targets for 2009

- a) a single management plan produced for the pale and all the land within
- b) additional scheduling achieved for the major medieval sea walls, ironworkings, moated sites etc.
- c) archaeological features identified through Historic Landscape Characterization (Sussex)
- d) target aimed at protecting sites outside parks, and old meadows and pastures, adopted by CSS





PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING AND ENJOYMENT TODAY

The High Weald population recognizes and values many of the components of natural beauty, especially the small woods, fields and the vernacular buildings. They identify the impact of traffic, development and the loss of traditional management skills as the major threats to the area. Most use the AONB for open-air recreation, predominantly for walking along its footpaths and rural lanes, and in woodland. Traffic, rubbish and lack of non-car transport are significant in marring enjoyment of the AONB.

PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING AND ENJOYMENT

VISION FOR PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING AND ENJOYMENT

An AONB in which public understanding and the pursuit of enjoyment are increased in a manner that leads to more sustainable lifestyles and actions that protect and enhance the natural beauty of the High Weald.

This vision can be realized through promotion of leisure activities and education that increases understanding and enjoyment of the character of the High Weald and that reconnects people with the land; stimulation of cultural activities that celebrate the character of the area and its icons – major historic events, artistic or literary creations, and famous people; support for conveniently and regularly available local products; curtilage design guidance for residences; initiatives that channel visitors towards locations with the capacity and infrastructure to support ‘green’ tourism activities; and support of non-car transport that reduces traffic increases on lanes and maintains the comparative tranquillity and remoteness of the area.

TOP 5 ISSUES FOR PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING AND ENJOYMENT

- Limited, fragmented and inconsistent information on, and interpretation of, the AONB
- Low awareness amongst residents and visitors of the action they can take to care for the area
- Quality – the area’s Rights of Way (RoW) and visitor services infrastructure needs to be developed to meet needs and demands for higher standards
- Lack of integration – amongst visitor information and service providers
- Traffic impacts



“Managing this landscape is complex and knowing how we can all do our bit is important”

Margaret Brown, resident

OBJECTIVES FOR INCREASING PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING AND ENJOYMENT

UE1 Objective: To increase opportunities for education and celebration of the character of the AONB

Rationale: to help develop a commitment amongst residents, visitors and businesses to the conservation and enhancement of the AONB

Indicators of success

- i) increased participation of residents in community activities and events that develop understanding of the rural environment
- ii) increased amount of high quality (particularly character-based) AONB interpretation material
- iii) AONB information incorporated into local studies activity in educational establishments
- iv) new and stronger links established between land managers and the area's residents and visitors

Targets for 2009

- a) new character-focused AONB events established
- b) joint working between tourism and countryside and arts sectors to develop and promote a programme of AONB events and activities
- c) information and interpretation guidelines for the AONB developed and promoted
- d) organizations and service providers actively engaged in providing information on and interpretation of the AONB within AONB guidelines
- e) AONB profile raised at all major countryside sites, attractions and visitor information centres
- f) consultation with education providers on the scope for tailoring local studies work to include AONB information
- g) AONB character-based educational material developed to meet educational establishment needs
- h) increase in the number of farm familiarization events: open days, guided walks and school events

UE2 Objective: To increase the contribution of individuals to the conservation and enhancement of the AONB

Rationale: the actions of the 121,000 population of the High Weald, and the 873,000 living within wards wholly or partly within 5km of the AONB, have a significant impact on the AONB

Indicators of success

- i) increased demand for local products derived from sustainable management of the High Weald countryside
- ii) increased residents' understanding of the positive role individuals can play in conservation of the High Weald
- iii) increased residents' practical involvement in the care of the AONB

Targets for 2009

- a) programme established to increase understanding and enjoyment of the links between consumers and the local landscape
- b) *Caring for the High Weald* promoted to residents, visitors and businesses
- c) development and promotion of a training and events programme that offers opportunities for all to develop skills in countryside crafts and management
- d) increase participation of residents in local and national wildlife surveys and monitoring

UE2 continued over

UE2 continued

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> iv) improvements in the maintenance of the rural character of AONB properties v) increased number of LA21 activities that make links to the AONB context as well as the global and local context vi) improved control of invasive species, e.g. <i>Rhododendron ponticum</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> e) production and promotion of AONB guidelines on maintaining rural character f) district and local projects that promote and enable residents and businesses to undertake such activities as: using less water; reducing, reusing, recycling; and reducing speed to protect people, horses and wildlife g) increase in residents' understanding of the damage to AONB character caused by invasive plant, animal and fish species |
|--|--|

UE3 Objective: To increase community involvement in conservation and enhancement of the AONB

Rationale: the diverse communities with an interest in the AONB have a significant role in generating new initiatives, and protecting and enhancing local features and distinctiveness

Indicators of success

- i) communities actively identifying what they value in their local countryside and participating in setting priorities for its sustainable management
- ii) increased number of community led initiatives to change drivers' attitudes and actions
- iii) increased number of community initiatives aimed at supporting locally distinctive features
- iv) comprehensive coverage of AONB by community support mechanisms such as countryside management services (CMS)

Targets for 2009

- a) scope for existing mechanisms, such as parish appraisals, to facilitate this reviewed, and new mechanisms piloted where and if appropriate
- b) a High Weald and local awareness campaign highlighting the impact of traffic on the area's character and residents' enjoyment
- c) a pilot community investment fund set up to support conservation of locally distinctive features
- d) existing and new initiatives developed to assist the public to increase and express their knowledge and understanding of local distinctiveness
- e) extend CMS to cover the gaps in East Sussex, Kent and Surrey

UE4 Objective: Integrated management of the resources for informal open-air recreation to facilitate 'green' use by residents and visitors

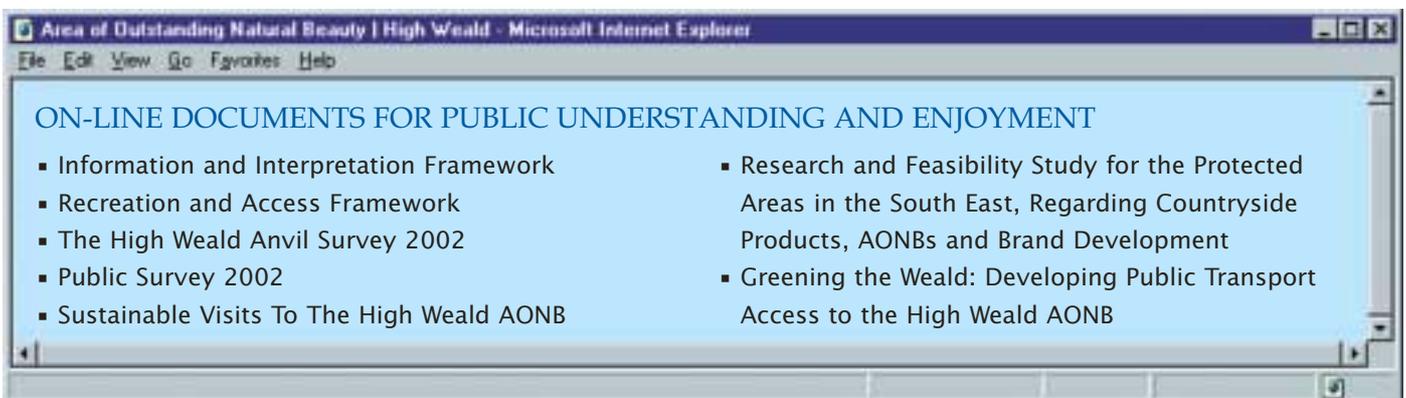
Rationale: to meet demand for recreation and ensure that this is consistent with the primary purpose of conserving and enhancing natural beauty, by providing and promoting the infrastructure – with particular attention to quality, ease of access, location and appropriate facilities – to maximize opportunities for positive enjoyment, appreciation, and understanding of the character of the AONB

Indicators of success

- i) improved maintenance standards of the Rights of Way (RoW) network in areas close to towns, villages, visitor attractions and within AONB rural tourism hubs
- ii) increased range of high quality promoted access opportunities that meet the needs of all users
- iii) development of key strategic links in the Rights of Way network for all walkers, cyclists and riders
- iv) improved links between promoted informal access opportunities and public transport provision
- v) action to reduce traffic impact on AONB lanes with a high level of leisure use
- vi) integrated approach to the development and promotion of 'green' tourism
- vii) AONB visitor services raising awareness of the AONB and assisting with its conservation and enhancement

Targets for 2009

- a) 100% of network in these zones meeting basic RoW standards
- b) 10% of network in these zones meeting enhanced AONB standards
- c) AONB priority networks included in the Public Rights of Way Improvement plans
- d) research project to develop understanding of the needs of existing and potential users
- e) identification, development and promotion of a range of AONB high-quality walking routes
- f) all key promoted routes meeting AONB promoted route standard
- g) projects to improve and promote access for users with impaired mobility
- h) 5 new sites/areas promoting family cycling opportunities
- i) High Weald long-distance bridle route developed and maintained in a usable condition
- j) study to identify areas with the need and potential for development of strategic linkages
- k) expansion of the SE toll ride network
- l) LAs aware of opportunities for local linkages
- m) government supported land management schemes to focus access on jointly agreed priority areas
- n) public transport options available for all promoted routes and green tourism areas
- o) a management approach agreed by local users and LAs for key lanes identified by the AONB Recreation and Tourism Programme
- p) successful application of management approach to 5 rural lanes
- q) 5 areas of opportunity for 'green' tourism identified, developed and promoted
- r) visitor management plans produced for sensitive sites and areas
- s) service providers taking steps to meet AONB quality standards
- t) service providers producing and implementing 'green' travel plans



IMPLEMENTATION



Harvesting local wildflower meadow seed at Broad Oak

It is vital that the objectives of the management plan are embraced and acted upon by all those organizations and individuals that have a role to play in the management of the High Weald landscape and the well-being of its communities.

Future plans, strategies and actions of key partners should reflect the vision and objectives of this statutory AONB management plan. For local authorities, it 'formulates their policy for the management of the area of outstanding natural beauty and their functions in relation to it'.¹ For government, public bodies, agencies and other 'relevant authorities', the AONB management plan is the key to their legal requirement to 'have regard' to the 'purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty' of the AONB: it is the only articulation of vision and objectives focusing on the High Weald as a whole.

HOW IS THIS PLAN TRANSLATED INTO ACTION?

2009 Targets. Targets have been set under each objective and indicate the key outcomes or outputs to be achieved by 2009 (the plan review date). These targets can only be met through organizations accommodating the AONB management objectives within their own business plans and translating this thinking into action, and by individuals, whether they own land or not, taking positive action to care for the area.

The targets are not intended to be comprehensive. As yet unforeseen pressures and opportunities will require creative solutions and new partnerships in the future. Many of the non-AONB specific activities undertaken by partner bodies will make a positive contribution to AONB objectives, but gaps will remain. In order to meet some objectives there is an urgent need for new action and the forging of new partnerships.



Charcoal burning from coppiced woodland at Turners Hill

The Action Plan. This plan is supported by an action plan for the priority programmes that are required immediately to meet these gaps. The action plan has been formulated through discussions with relevant bodies and reflects their commitment to joint action. It is a rolling programme and will be reviewed on an annual basis by the High Weald AONB JAC.

More detailed implementation strategies will be developed for specific important issues, features and habitats. These will expand on the approach behind certain broad objectives or indicators of success (such as FH3 IoS (i) retention of unimproved grassland).



Local cherries for sale at Goudhurst

Production of policy and guidance. The AONB Management Plan does not, in itself, propose policy to address contentious issues such as telecommunications masts or wind farms. Instead it sets out a framework within which the impact of these and similar issues can be assessed against the interests of the AONB. As and when such issues threaten the intrinsic natural beauty of the High Weald or the achievement of AONB objectives then the High Weald JAC will seek to produce appropriate guidance rooted in the management plan.

¹ The *CRoW Act 2000*, section 84.4.

WHO WILL DELIVER THE PLAN?

Everyone with an interest in the High Weald AONB has a role to play in its future management:

The High Weald AONB partnership. The JAC will have a key responsibility for promoting and encouraging co-ordinated action in support of the plan; for increasing awareness of and commitment to the management objectives; for seeking new funds and resources to assist implementation of key action programmes; and for monitoring both the condition of the AONB itself and the achievement of the plan objectives. A three-year business plan (reviewed annually) will be prepared by the JAC setting out the key programmes where the partnership and its dedicated staff unit can make a significant impact.

Government departments and regional bodies. Support for AONB management plans as statement of public policy relating to the management of these nationally protected areas has been agreed by the signatories to the 'Protected Landscapes in the South East: Joint Statement of Intent' (2002), namely the Countryside Agency, Defra, GOSE, SEEDA and SEERA. The statement includes commitment to shared action in support of AONB management plans.

Local authorities. In addition to the delivery of planning policy supporting AONB designation, local authorities can assist through continuing to support and fund the AONB partnership; developing community facilitation services such as countryside management projects across the AONB; the delivery of educational materials rooted in AONB character themes; a proactive approach to the procurement of local products; and support for pilot initiatives such as wood fuel.

Land owners and managers. Land owners and managers have a crucial role to play in the long-term conservation and management of the AONB and will be vital partners in action targeted particularly at key features or important habitat mosaics. Their response to CAP reform and changes in rural development policy will have a major impact on the AONB.

Parish Councils, amenity organizations and community groups. These will be important partners driving projects on the ground, particularly those related to increasing public understanding and enjoyment, but also community initiatives to identify and protect features of local distinctiveness.

Individuals, visitors and businesses. Through individual actions residents, visitors and businesses can contribute significantly to the care of the High Weald AONB and the achievement of management objectives.

Caring for the High Weald (see back pocket) – is a charter for residents, visitors and businesses to inform and encourage everyone to take action. This charter will form an important component of activities carried out under Part 2: Public Understanding and Enjoyment.

MONITORING THE CONDITION OF THE AONB

The High Weald AONB partnership has a duty to monitor the condition of the AONB.¹ This plays an important role in identifying key issues and in assessing the appropriateness of management plan objectives.

Establishing and sustaining a monitoring mechanism, through the use of simple and meaningful headline indicators, will also provide a means of assessing and communicating change over time and thus inform the five-yearly reviews of the plan. The headline indicators for the High Weald AONB are each related directly to the components of fundamental character and to public understanding and enjoyment, and thus to the purposes of designation. Inevitably, indicators can only be part of the analysis of issues, changes and trends that is necessary for management plan review: they are no substitute for thorough research.

EVALUATION OF THE MANAGEMENT PLAN

The High Weald AONB Management Plan 2004 is more than just a statement of character, and it is essential that the objectives and actions are evaluated. This will take place on an annual basis, reported in the High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee Annual Report (available online). The monitoring will critically assess action being undertaken by partners in support of the management plan objectives, and, importantly, how this action and these objectives are helping deliver the visions in the plan. The monitoring will be undertaken through partners completing a simple electronic annual return, and the assessment thereof.

¹ *Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plans: A guide* (Countryside Agency, CA 23, 2001), p. 64.

MONITORING CONDITION: HEADLINE INDICATORS FOR THE HIGH WEALD AONB

Geology, landform, water systems and climate:

- area of restored functional floodplain (Environment Agency and HW AONB JAC data)

Settlement:

- number of new dwellings and business premises within and without development/settlement boundaries as defined in local plans (data provided by LPAs)
- proportion of resident economically active population that is employed in rural industry or works locally (decennial population census)

Routeways:

- quality of ancient routeway networks (HW AONB JAC sample-based data)

Woodland:

- area of Ancient Semi-natural Woodlands (data maintained and supplied by the Forestry Commission)
- area of important woodlands in appropriate management (SE AONBs Woodland Programme has identified the key woodlands and produced base-line data, with long-term monitoring vested in the HW AONB JAC/FC)

Field and heath:

- area of land in registered agricultural use (Defra June census)
- mean holding size (Defra June census)
- proportion of agricultural land in grassland (Defra June census)
- area of heathland (Weald Heathland Initiative)

Public understanding and enjoyment:

- proportion of residents that engage in informal open-air recreation (5-yearly Public Survey)
- proportion of residents aware of the High Weald AONB designation (5-yearly Public Survey)

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BAP	Biodiversity Action Plan
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
CSS	Countryside Stewardship Scheme
Defra	Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs
ERDP	England Rural Development Programme
GOSE	Government Office for the South East
JAC	Joint Advisory Committee
LA	Local authority
LA21	Local Agenda 21
LPA	Local planning authority
PPG	Planning Policy Guidance
RoW	Rights of Way
SEEDA	South East England Development Agency
SEERA	South East England Regional Assembly

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