

Council Offices
Argyle Road
Sevenoaks
Kent
TN13 1HG



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I hereby summon you to attend the meeting of the Sevenoaks District Council to be held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Argyle Road, Sevenoaks commencing at 7.00 pm on 23 April 2024 to transact the under-mentioned business.

Chief Executive

AGENDA

There are no fire drills planned. If the fire alarm is activated, which is a continuous siren with a flashing red light, please leave the building immediately, following the fire exit signs.

Apologies for absence

1. To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 20 February 2024 (Pages 1 - 36)
2. To receive any declarations of interest not included in the register of interest from Members in respect of items of business included on the agenda for this meeting.
3. Chairman's Announcements.
4. To receive any questions from members of the public under paragraph 17 of Part 2 (The Council and District Council Members) of the Constitution.
5. To receive any petitions submitted by members of the public under paragraph 18 of Part 2 (The Council and District Council Members) of the Constitution.
6. Matters considered by the Cabinet and/or Scrutiny Committee:
 - a) High Weald AONB Management Plan (Pages 37 - 138)
 - b) Sevenoaks District Community Safety Partnership 2024-25 Strategy & Action Plan (Pages 139 - 178)
7. Matters considered by other standing committees:

8. To consider the following reports from the Chief Executive or other Chief Officers on matters requiring the attention of Council:
 - a) Draft Calendar of Meetings 2024/25 (Pages 179 - 182)
9. To consider any questions by Members under paragraph 19.3 of Part 2 (The Council and District Council Members) of the Constitution, notice of which have been duly given.
10. To consider any motions by Members under paragraph 20 of Part 2 (The Council and District Council Members) of the Constitution, notice of which have been duly given. (Pages 183 - 186)
11. To receive the report of the Leader of the Council on the work of the Cabinet since the last Council meeting. (Pages 187 - 190)
12. Annual report on Special Urgency decisions. (Pages 191 - 192)
13. To receive reports from the Chairmen of the Audit and Scrutiny Committees on the work of the Committees since the last Council meeting.
 - a) Report of the Chairman of Audit Committee (Pages 193 - 196)
 - b) Report of the Chairman of Scrutiny Committee (Pages 197 - 202)

EXEMPT ITEMS

At the time of preparing this agenda there were no exempt items. During any such items which may arise the meeting is likely NOT to be open to the public.

To assist in the speedy and efficient despatch of business, Members wishing to obtain factual information on items included on the Agenda are asked to enquire of the appropriate Contact Officer named on a report prior to the day of the meeting.

Council

Minutes of the meeting held on 20 February 2024 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Layland (Chairman)

Cllr. Ball (Vice Chairman)

Cllrs. Abraham, Barnes, Bayley, Clack, Clayton, Penny Cole, Perry Cole, P. Darrington, Dyball, Edwards-Winser, Esler, Hudson, Kitchener, Maskell, McArthur, Purves, Reay, Streatfeild, Thornton, Waterton, Williams, Alger, Camp, Granville, Haslam, Horwood, Lindop, Manamperi, Manston, Robinson, Shea, Silander, Varley, White, Skinner, Baker, Barker, Ferrari, Gustard, Leaman, Malone, James Morgan and Scott

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. Barnett, Bulford, G. Darrington, Grint, Harrison, Hogarth, Roy, Williamson and Cathy Morgan

40. To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 14 November 2023

Resolved: That the Minutes of the Council meeting held on 14 November 2023, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

41. To receive any declarations of interest not included in the register of interest from Members in respect of items of business included on the agenda for this meeting.

Councillors Dyball and Maskell declared for reasons of transparency that they were the Council's representatives on the Citizen's Advice.

42. Chairman's Announcements.

The Chairman started his announcements by stating that it gave him great joy in being able to announce that the Council, and its UK Shared Prosperity Fund Project Officer Aidan Kiely, had been named Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Champion of the Year at the Institute of Economic Development Annual Awards. Further celebratory news was that Sevenoaks District Council was a finalist in the 'Working Together' category for the 'Better Together' community mobilisation project in the iESE Public Sector Transformation Awards 2024. The winner would be announced on 6 March 2024, but what an honour it was to make it to the list of finalists. It was a fantastic submission by the team, he gave thanks to Margaret, Kelly and Yulia.

The Chairman drew attention to his upcoming Charity Dinner Dance, which would be held on Saturday 27 April 2024 at Hever Castle Golf Club at 7pm. Monies raised from this event will go to the Sevenoaks Area Dementia Friends. He reminded Members to get their tickets as soon as possible.

In ending his announcements, he reminded Members that 'Run, walk or push against dementia' was happening again on 19 May 2024. There was a choice of doing 3K, 5K and 10K, which made the event ideal for all ages and fitness levels.

43. To receive any questions from members of the public under paragraph 17 of Part 2 (The Council and District Council Members) of the Constitution.

Three questions had been received from Members of the public, Sue Caskey, Anthony Judge and Kevin O'Brien-Wheeler, in accordance with paragraph 17 of Part 2 (The Council and District Council Members) of the Constitution. The Chairman took each of the questions in turn and the Portfolio Holder responded to all of the question en bloc.

Question 1: Sue Caskey

"I recognise the hard choices that you are having to make in the current financial climate. However, the Council's grant support for the Citizens Advice general advice service is critical in equipping, training, supporting and covering the expenses of a volunteer plus maintaining our two office locations. For volunteers, the office is where we meet, access technology and work stations, and receive support from supervisors and colleagues that is essential for training and guidance. This is a vital part of the volunteering experience, without which our capacity and delivery would be severely damaged. My question is whether Council Members understand the impact on its most vulnerable residents and Citizens Advice volunteers that will result from the substantial reduction proposed to the level of grant?"

Response: Portfolio Holder, People and Places

"Thank you for your question.

Although a difficult decision, the change in funding to Citizens Advice has been made with the utmost care and consideration. You are quite right in stating that some difficult choices have had to be made in order for the Council to achieve a balanced budget. Budget setting and savings discussions have been ongoing since last year, with cross-party member views and input being sought through the Council's advisory committees, Cabinet and full Council.

You ask if Members appreciate the impact of the funding reduction and I would respond, that yes, we do. Members and officers have sought to prioritise internal savings, which has seen the Council and notably our staff bear this impact and burden directly, as staffing posts have sadly been cut, services reduced, whilst customer demand only increases.

Then, and only then, have we considered external partners and funding. Citizens Advice, like many other voluntary sector organisations, provides a valued service and even in these difficult times, the grant, will remain the largest grant the Council provides to any voluntary sector organisation.

Both myself and Cllr Maskell are Member representatives for Citizens Advice in North and West Kent and Edenbridge and Westerham. We understand first-hand the services and support offered. However, we are also acutely aware that the finances of Citizens Advice are now at the most stable that they have been for many years. Indeed, we, amongst other funding bodies including Central Government and other local authorities, have been very pleased to contribute to their financial stability over many years and would wish this to continue.

It is evident from your original contact with the Council ahead of tonight's meeting that office space is important to volunteers in terms of training and guidance, but also places a high-cost burden to Citizens Advice as they lease a number of offices across the District, including Bligh's Meadow in Sevenoaks. As portfolio holder, I am happy to support and instruct Council officers to enter into conversations with Citizens Advice in terms of utilising and leasing space at our Argyle Road offices, if appropriate, as this may alleviate some of the expensive office and overhead costs, whilst promoting joint working and helping to provide wheelchair access and parking for vulnerable customers."

Question 2: Anthony Judge

"Do Members appreciate the depth of advice and assistance that is provided by Citizens Advice volunteers? Volunteers are required to train to a high level relating to each area of advice. For example, volunteers have extensive training on the full range of benefits and other support that may be available to clients. In a case I was heavily involved with last year we helped a Sevenoaks resident through numerous interactions over a 6-month period through two stages of appeal on a PIP claim. This resulted in a backdated payment of over £6,000 and an ongoing award of nearly £5,000 p.a. We provide essential advice and practical help not otherwise available to clients – not just sign posting - often representing those with a range of educational, medical, social or age-related challenges."

Response: Portfolio Holder, People & Places

"Thank you for your question.

I do appreciate the work undertaken by Citizens Advice volunteers and the wider voluntary sector, notably, as on a daily basis, I see how as a Council we support residents and businesses with a range of problems, some which at first may seem complicated, even intimidating.

The impact of inflation and energy prices has exposed just how precarious many people's housing situation and household finances are, with Council officers providing statutory support around homelessness, resettlement

and refugees, domestic abuse, benefits support, disability adaptations in the home and healthy lifestyles, whilst continuing to deliver those Council services that are most important to residents such as feeling safe and clean streets, alongside maintaining our leisure centres, protecting the environment and the need to provide more housing.

I know only too well that Council staff, including our Housing, HERO, Community Safety and Benefits teams, have, like Citizens Advice worked tirelessly and courageously through what can only be viewed as a relentless 3 years since the pandemic and more recently the cost of living.

As a Council we are doing what we can to help meet as much of this demand as possible. That might be through innovating and adapting our customer journey, building on successful joint partnerships and securing external funding. However, difficult choices have still had to be made and as I referred to in my previous response, it is Council staff and services that have been most impacted by the recent budget savings.

Through the budget process, we have also had to be mindful to significant savings and service reductions being made by Kent County Council in terms of withdrawing some children's and youth services, community transport, support to care leavers and other support services, which will have far reaching impacts on the District Council and our resources.

Therefore, we have fought hard to minimise, wherever possible, any impact to our grant commitments to the District Sports and Arts Councils, family and youth activities, the wider voluntary sector through our Community Grant scheme and of course, Citizens Advice. Our Service Level Agreement with Citizens Advice will provide an annual grant of £81,540 from 1 April this year and will remain the largest grant the Council provides to any voluntary sector organisation.

If I may, I thought it would be helpful if I put the grant reduction to Citizens Advice into some broader context against the Council budget setting for 2024-25 being presented to Members and notably how the £1.4m annual impact on our 10-year budget has been addressed. Nearly £350k of the savings required comes from deleting existing Council staff posts and restructures, with the remainder being made up from removing, reducing or changing Council services, activities and events.

Therefore, I would sincerely hope that these savings are neither marginalised or dismissed by any Member of this Council, as it should not be forgotten that they have come at a significant cost, impacting every service and staff member within the Council. In comparison, the grant reductions contribute a total of £63k to the overall £1.4m savings required, with Citizens Advice in North and West Kent and Edenbridge and Westerham seeing their collective grant reduced by a total of £35k, equating to nearly 2.5% of the total savings required to achieve a balanced budget."

Question 3: Kevin O' Brien-Wheeler

"The presence Citizen's Advice maintains in both Swanley and Sevenoaks is critical for service delivery. For residents and those with greatest needs our local offices provide a place for appointments, reviewing and scanning their documents, and help with online applications. For volunteers, it is where we access technology, work stations and the support that trains, supports, mentors and guides us. This is a critical part of the volunteering experience and service delivery, without which our capacity and delivery would be severely impaired. Do Members appreciate the impact of the proposed grant cut will have on a service which has been calculated to delivery more than £9 in hard benefit secured for residents for every £1 of support invested?"

Response: Portfolio Holder, People & Places

"Thank you for your question.

I have already covered some of the points you raised in your initial contact with the Council ahead of tonight's meeting regarding office space and opportunities to discuss alternative and possibly more cost-effective solutions with officers, so I will not repeat my earlier response. A key element of a Council's work, like the hard benefits provided by Citizens Advice, is the social value we provide to our colleagues and the people we support.

Our services work in many ways to promote good health and wellbeing among the people we support, which can be seen through our investment of over £20 million into a new leisure centre in Swanley and by providing £1.83 million to ensure our leisure facilities in Edenbridge, Swanley and Lullingstone remain open to the public and with an improved leisure offer. The social value of such investments was reported late last year to the People and Places Advisory Committee by our leisure operator, Everyone Active, and demonstrated that in a three-month period, the Council's leisure sites generated social value of £914,270, equating to 11,360 participants and a social value of £80 per person.

However, such investment has come at a cost. If we cast our minds back to last year, cross-party members were resounding in their support for the Council's leisure facilities to re-open when the leisure company, Sencio, sadly became another casualty of the pandemic, inflation and rising utility costs. Whilst this Council approved an allocation of £1.83m (and might I add, under the current Administration, reopened the facilities within 5 weeks of closure), it must not be forgotten, that this was money not budgeted for and the difficult choices we have had to make in our 2024/25 budget, including staffing cuts, service reductions and other savings, are as a direct consequence of ensuring much-valued leisure services continue to be provided.

Lastly, I mustn't forget our HERO service, which continues to provide customers with advice and support on housing, benefits, training, employment, energy efficiency, budgeting and much more. Since April last year, the service has supported over 1,600 customers across the Sevenoaks District and continues to be innovative in delivering a

service against a total core budget of only £64k. The service operates across community venues, including children's centres, community halls and food banks, providing support directly to communities. In the next few months, I understand from the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder, it will be launching a new partnership project with Kent County Council and DWP seeking to identify and prevent homelessness at the earliest stages, helping to stabilise future budget pressures on the Council, notably the cost of homelessness and emergency accommodation.

Many of the Council's services and support, similar to Citizens Advice, add much value to our District. However, it would be irresponsible to ignore that we are facing unprecedented demand for services and the money available to pay for them is under increasing pressure. In common with many councils across the country, we are not immune to national, unprecedented financial and service pressures.

Representing just over 2% of the £1.4m savings being presented tonight, I would sincerely hope that our commitment to provide an annual grant of £81,540 per annum for the duration of our 3-year Service Level Agreement with Citizens Advice in North and West Kent and Edenbridge and Westerham from 1 April demonstrates the value we place on this relationship.

As a financially responsible authority, we have worked proactively to balance our budget, with much of the identified savings only being achieved through savings directly impacting our Council staff and services. I truly hope all Members in attendance tonight and our voluntary sector partners, including Citizens Advice, fully grasp and comprehend this, as it is evident in the savings put forward by our own Council staff and members, that sacrifices have been made to protect the voluntary sector at the detriment and significant cost to our own staff and services."

CHANGE IN ORDER OF AGENDA ITEMS

The Chairman, with the Council's agreement, brought forward consideration of Minute 44.

44. To consider any questions by Members under paragraph 19.3 of Part 2 (The Council and District Council Members) of the Constitution, notice of which have been duly given.

One question had been received from Members in accordance with paragraph 19.3 of Part 2 (The Council and District Council Members) of the Constitution.

Question 1: Cllr Purves

"Before we commit ourselves to borrowing £3.635 million we need to know: Have any cafes / drive throughs committed to take a lease or just shown an interest?"

Direct Services equipment. 4 trucks and a great mass of wheely bins, bottle banks and other associated material stored here. Where is this to go if Dunbrik depot is full and no room at Hollybush lock up depot?

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Is the contingency percentage (as specified in the Gold pages) sufficient, bearing in mind the increased costs due to unforeseen circumstances at Farmstead Drive and White Oak Leisure centre?

Is this the time to take out more loans bearing in mind the current financial situation with many local councils with over investment? What assurances can be given that we are not going down the same path?"

Response: Leader of the Council

"There is a report in front of Members, where I believe some of these matters have been addressed but, as you've raised them specifically at this point in the proceedings. Your first question was regarding the borrowing and whether any café or drive-through had already committed to the lease or just shown an interest. The Council has received firm interest from drive-through operators, who had given an indication as to the lease terms they might be seeking. While generic provision is being made for such an operation for design and feasibility purposes, such an operation will need to be offered to the market on a competitive basis prior to entering into any particular lease arrangement. So basically, yes we've had interest shown. No we have yet to actually sign up with anybody in particular as we're too far away but we know that there is interest.

Your second question, the current site is not being efficiently used and officers are in discussion as to how best to optimise Direct Services' operation on this site and the use of alternative sites. This work is on-going. At the moment this is not a priority because we've yet to approve it but should this scheme be approved this evening then it will go onto the list of priorities to sort, but yet to have a final solution.

Thirdly, the contingency percentage. This level of contingency is quite high given the size, type and scale of the project, but considered sensible and cautious given the early stages of design development we are at. The Council has sought advice on the level of contingency to be applied and the contingency is considered to be appropriate for this particular project. Significant due diligence work including detailed geotechnical site investigation have already been undertaken and these have helped to prepare the contingency levels that we're working on. It is therefore prudent to have high contingencies at early stages of development and as design emerges and become fixed then that contingency can be reduced as the scheme is de-risked through design. So it is deemed that the level we have at the moment is high and considered to be right and appropriate at this stage.

You ask about whether it is right to be taking out more loans, capital and revenue budgets are treated separately by local authorities. This development will be deploying capital, and the financial and development appraisals suggest that the scheme is viable, and that the Council could deploy various exit strategies should it need to. There's a certain amount of flexibility in there. It is also important to bear in mind that the District needs to support its businesses and provide job opportunities and there is a need for such developments.

Finance & Investment Advisory Committee have recognised the increase in size of the capital programme and the risks that brings. This highlights the importance of the depth of due diligence that our officers carry out for each scheme to mitigate and be aware of risks. Other councils have issued S114 notices for a number of reasons. Where they have related to property it should be noted that the scale has been considerably higher than this councils and the due diligence has not been carried out to the same degree.”

No supplementary question was asked. In accordance with the constitution no follow up discussion was allowed.

45. To receive any petitions submitted by members of the public under paragraph 18 of Part 2 (The Council and District Council Members) of the Constitution.

No petitions had been received.

46. Matters considered by the Cabinet and/or Scrutiny Committee:

- a) 12 Otford Road, Sevenoaks Business Park Development Project

Cllr Thornton moved and Cllr Maskell seconded the recommendation from Cabinet, which sought the approval of £3,635,004 in the Capital Programme for the Otford Road development scheme. It also noted that the scheme would only progress subject to financial viability and planning consent.

Cllr Thornton spoke to the motion stating that this was a regeneration opportunity for a Council owed site for a mixed scheme which would provide economic development which was a key policy objective. The scheme was affordable and viable, although further viability testing would be needed as detailed design works were undertaken. The funding would be from internal and external borrowing and met from future rents to meet loan terms. Close monitoring of the finances would continue to be undertaken, noting that financing was at least 12 months away, and the market was indicating that interest rates would be lower. Early occupier interest had been made and was a positive sign. Concerns previously raised had been taken into consideration and necessary design solutions would be applied during the detailed design stages. Subject to the necessary approval officers would commence the appointment of a project team for detailed designs for a planning application for submission in September 2024, determination by December 2024, work starting in spring 2025 and being completed by 2026.

The Finance & Investment Advisory Committee considered and discussed and endorsed the scheme which was considered further at Cabinet. It was a unique opportunity for the Council to promote business and job opportunities within the district in an underused challenging site.

Members debated the motion. Members were advised that the report had been heavily discussed at the Finance & Investment Advisory Committee with active questioning and debate from Members. The Committee thought it was a good use of

the site, with some issues raised that had since been addressed and further checks and balances would continue for due diligence on the project. Other Members raised points concerning economical conditions and contingency allowances, as well as the impact on local housing, air quality and the Sevenoaks Town Neighbourhood Plan.

In her right of reply, Cllr Thornton advised that under the 2019 Local Plan, the site had been marked as a previously developed site, and was underused. The report requested for funds to be secured, and during the detailed design works, formal consultation would be undertaken.

The motion was put to the vote and it was

Resolved: That the provision of £3,635,004 in the capital programme for the Otford Road development scheme and notes that the scheme will only progress subject to financial viability and planning consent being received, be approved.

b) Treasury Management Strategy 2024/25

Cllr Maskell moved and Cllr Thornton seconded the recommendation from Cabinet to approve the Treasury Management Strategy 2024/25.

Cllr Maskell spoke to the motion stating that the report had been considered in detail at the Finance & Investment Advisory Committee in January, and prior training had been provided by Link, the treasury advisors to assist discussions. The increased borrowing requirement was detailed in paragraph 48 and a clarification of the exposure to unrated organisations within treasury portfolio detailed in paragraph 47. The report continued to emphasise the importance of training on Treasury Management to ensure due diligence was maintained to ensure sound management of the financial resources within the level of appetite for risk that Members were comfortable with.

Members debated the motion, stating concern had been expressed regarding where the investments were being made and the cumulative risk on debt and the level of debt the Council would face by the end of 2027.

Cllr Maskell exercised his right of reply.

The motion was put to the vote.

Resolved: That the Treasury Management Strategy 2024/25, be approved.

c) Property Investment Strategy Update

Cllr Maskell moved, and Cllr Thornton seconded the recommendation from Cabinet that the Property Investment Strategy criteria be agreed.

Cllr. Maskell spoke to the motion advising that the document looked at the future direction of the strategy. It helped to support self sufficiency as central government funding had reduced over the years. The report had also been considered the Finance & Investment Advisory Committee who had been advised of the limitations now in place. The report advised on the acquisitions previously made.

Members debated the motion. Some Members expressed concern that interest rates had gone up and where some sites were not making money. It was suggested that the focus should not be on property investments. In debate it was raised that the strategy was generating over £1m a year to deliver essential services to customers. Good investments had been made but it was government who had removed the ability to purchase just for yield, but it was important to keep an eye on what investments the council did still have to make sure they were still delivering.

Cllr Maskell gave his right of reply.

The motion was put to the vote and it was

Resolved: That the property investment strategy criteria, be agreed.

At 8.16pm the Chairman adjourned the meeting for the comfort of Members and Officers

At 8.28pm the meeting resumed.

d) Budget and Council Tax Setting 2024/25

Councillor Thornton moved and Cllr Maskell seconded the recommendation from Cabinet. The report sought approval of the proposed budget and required level of Council Tax for 2024/25, and proposed a net expenditure of £19.445m with the District Council Tax increasing by 2.97% resulting in Band D Council Tax being £243.72. It also sought the one-off funding of £165,000 to be placed into the budget stabilisation reserve.

Cllr Thornton spoke to the motion stating that “when setting the current years budget one year ago and when new councillors joined us in May, we were all made very aware that future years budgets would be considerably more challenging and we're not alone. Councils across the country find themselves in turbulent financial positions. Since 2021, some local authorities have declared themselves effectively bankrupt, and recent research by the Local Government Association revealed that almost one in five council leaders and chief executives think that it is very or fairly likely that they will need to issue a section 114 notices in the next two years. Due to funding shortfalls, thankfully, and largely due to the fiscally responsible approach that this Council has historically and proudly taken, we are a long way from being one of those.

However, with high inflation, escalating utility costs and demand for some of our most important services being at record levels, the difficulty in proposing a balanced

10 year budget as we do tonight should not be underestimated here. At Sevenoaks, we have a huge amount to be proud of. This is a high performing productive council with some of the highest rates of resident satisfaction in the county. We are one of only two local authorities in the country to hold investor in people's platinum, whilst budgets have been squeezed again beyond all recognition over the past decade, we are 24% more productive than pre pandemic. That's 78,000 extra units of work every year with the same or less staff resource. We process more planning applications than any Council. Our housing waiting list has the lowest number of households applying for a home in Kent, and through our Hero service, we give extra support to around 250 residents every year. With debt income, energy efficiency, housing and benefits advice.

We've delivered a brand new leisure centre for Swanley and we're building new affordable housing. In doing all of this and so much more, we have the lowest employee and running costs per head of population in Kent and through our capital programme, this Council is continuing to invest in the future of our district, providing homes, jobs and the infrastructure that we need. Well, there have been some difficult decisions to make.

The sound financial management of Council taxpayers money is a long standing priority and one that continues in the budget before you tonight, a budget that continues to protect those services that are most important to our residents and businesses within the sensible and sustainable financial. Limits that we must work within a budget that is focused on delivering value for money to every single household in the district with a lower than inflation rise in Council tax, making necessary savings and embracing new ways of working to balance our books. When I became leader back in May, our annual budget gap forecast stood at £1.7 million. After some early interventions, we reduced this gap to £1.3m by September. By December it was £650,000 and today that budget gap is £0.

Our financial pressures have been openly shared throughout our budget setting process and these have included staff pay awards agreed at a national level and critical to retaining our very best staff homelessness pressures and the costs associated with the provision of temporary accommodation. The significant increase in domestic waste and recycling levels post pandemic, with many more people working from home as a normal part of their working week, use of home delivery services with all the outer packaging that comes with it and working at breakneck speed to keep the leisure centres open following the sudden demise of Sencio last spring. Addressing these pressures and removing the budget gap has been achieved. Portfolio Holders initially reviewing their services and making proposals for change, which have been included as SCIA's. Despite the increased demand for our services and the pressure being placed on our staff, we asked officers if they could review every single line of their budgets to make savings with minimum impacts on services. A reduction in staff has been unavoidable, but thankfully limited in number and predominantly within back office services and where we have been able, officers have been redeployed and vacant posts have simply gone unfilled. Stopping some loss making discretionary services is also part of this, where alternative commercial providers can meet the needs of our residents and businesses just as effectively.

Providing recycling bags for life and asking residents to acquire black refuse sacks with an eye on improving recycling rates and our Environment. A review of fees and charges, including a nationally agreed increase for those that use the planning service and at the last minute, a limited amount of additional funding from government for just one year.

Members have at every turn been given the opportunity to engage productively and proactively in this budget setting and full training was provided. Members were regularly invited to submit their budget, saving ideas, and to engage in the Advisory Committee process to ensure saving options could be considered in detail and in full before being included in the budget presented tonight. I am grateful to those Members. Although few in number, and entirely from this side of the House that chose to engage in the process and support our endeavours to balance our budget and minimise the impact on our residents. A balanced budget is exactly that, carefully balanced. To maximise efficiencies, savings and increased revenue, it has to be looked at as a whole rather than as a sum of its individual parts. Rather like a house of cards, removing one single card from the deck could cause the collapse of the whole lot.

A proposal to change any one single line of the budget would only result in another area of savings being required elsewhere. And that brings me directly to our grants to the Citizens Advice. The proposed saving was brought to everyone's attention in early January and discussed at Cabinet meeting on the 18th of January, which incidentally was attended by 9 guest councillors that night, including six from our opposition colleagues. But not one single question was raised by these members about this particular proposed saving that night, despite there being ample time left during question times from members for them to do so. In fact, no question was raised directly on this subject until February. Setting that aside, we have heard loud and clear the concerns raised by colleagues and members of the public on the proposed reduction to funding for Citizens Advice. This is not a decision we take lightly, and it is no reflection of the high regard that we hold for those that volunteer and provide support to our residents. But we cannot let our own statutory services suffer when difficult decisions are needed. Asking our partners to work within our available budgets is not only prudent, but proportionate, fair and necessary. I have read in the local newspaper that it may be proposed tonight that a single year grant we have received from the government could be used to fund Citizens Advice. Government has said to us that this funding is to be used to address the pressures facing councils and improve performance and that is what we will do. We will use that funding to protect our statutory services and prevent a repeat of the level of savings we were faced with this year. That is the prudent and sensible approach as households across our districts will be doing every day. It is often better to manage our money sensibly, to plan to our future rather than be led by our hearts desire.

The funding we will continue to provide to our local citizen service is comparable to other Councils and is guaranteed for the next 3 years. I remain open minded to reviewing that in the future should our budget position improve in future years. You have a 10 year balanced budget in front of you, it's an award-winning 10 year budget and it remains unique across this country. Other councils across the country can only

aspire to this. I'm hoping that I can rely on you this evening to support this. Thank you."

An amendment by Cllr Leaman was moved and duly seconded by Cllr Gustard that recommendation (a) include, "provided that the General Advice Grant to Citizens Advice is restored to £98,000 per annum for the years 2024-25, 2025-26 and 2026-27, using £105,000 of the additional £165,000 funding from Government announced in February to offset this amount, with the remainder to be used as proposed."

Councillor Leaman spoke to his amendment, acknowledging the commitment of Councillors and Officers who had worked hard on the budget. However, he did not think that it was a budget that he could support as over time there were a number of future issues which could affect the position. He expressed his thanks to the Citizens Advice for their work within the District and expressed concern that their grant could be cut. Noting that the local government finance settlement, of which £165,000 was unplanned and unexpected and in Michael Gove's speech it was said that the additional funding is for services which communities relied upon. He presented figures to the meeting, detailing the amount in reserves and questioned why an additional grant was also going into reserves when it could be used for the residents. Members debated the amendment and in discussion concerns were raised that the cuts would have an impact and around 900 residents could miss out on advice and services provided as a result of the cut. It was further raised that being in the middle of a cost-of-living crisis, demand had increased by 14% and many of the users required specialist skills and the £165,000 would be able to support local services.

It was raised that the amendment would support the most deprived in the district. Concerns were raised that as the Citizen's Advice was the first contact point for people in difficult circumstances to propose a cut was ill-advised, when considering the skilled advice that was provided. Some Members felt as if the proposed cut had not been well debated through the committee process and that by reducing the grant, Officers at the Council would have more demand on their time.

In response to some of the points raised in debate, other Members also recognised the invaluable service provided by the Citizen's Advice and that they too regularly referred residents to them for advice and so it was not an easy decision to make. However, it was noted that the Portfolio Holder in response to the public questions earlier in the meeting had shared other ways that the Council was helping them and the reasoning. The HERO service which the Council provides was highlighted, and credit should be given, for the number of people who had been helped through the Council's own services.

It was raised during debate that the additional funding through the Local Government Finance Settlement would help ensure the Council's statutory services were maintained, and so it was unfortunate that the grant funding to Citizen's Advice was not a statutory activity. It was further raised that the reduction in funding, was only a reduction and that there was still funding being provided to support the service. It received more funding than any other charity from the Council. The decisions taken were to ensure that a balanced budget was met, and it was not an easy decision,

noting the number of residents who were helped. It was brought to Members' attention that there was a wealth of other free support available to residents in the district including KCC, Age UK, Imago, West Kent Housing Tenancy support. The HERO service supported residents in a number of areas and everyone had a part to play in helping residents. It was unfortunate that given the cost-of-living crisis which was affecting businesses as well, that cuts had to be made.

It was moved that the amendment be put.

In Cllr Leaman's right of reply, he put forward that core funding was critical to organisations such as the Citizen's Advice and therefore felt the right decision was to vote for the amendment.

The amendment was put to the vote and it was taken by all those present in the Council Chamber.

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The amendment was lost.

Cllr Leaman moved an amendment, which was duly seconded to add to recommendation (a), “with the addition that the Expenses of the Chairman and Deputy Chairman be reduced by 50% in 2024-25 and £8,000 used to provide black waste bags free of charge to those who need them, distributed via food banks, charities and other voluntary organisations.”

Cllr Leaman spoke to his amendment expressing that the amendment was a result of the decision in the budget to end free black sacks for residents and many would be affected by this, as another expense in the cost-of-living crisis. As this money was not being used, it would benefit those in need whilst cutting the cost of distribution by making them available via food banks, and other voluntary organisations. The amendment was put to the vote, and it was taken by all those present In the Council Chamber.

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The amendment was lost.

Debate continued on the original motion.

It was indicated that as part of the budget process, suggestions which had been proposed were not fully considered for full cost analysis and that the early payment of a penalty charge for fly tipping was not increasing. If those were increased, they could off-set savings from other services. Concerns were raised about the number of Family Fun days being cut and staff vacancy rates. In addition, that the £165,000 from the Local Government Financial Settlement was being proposed to go into reserves.

It was stated that it was never easy to put a budget together, especially when savings were required, and every budget line had been scrutinised to reduced expenditure. It was important to be realistic and provide services for residents, whilst noting the amount of work that had gone into the budget and the enviable position the Council was in.

Cllr Thornton gave her right of reply, thanking Councillors for their comments, noting the vast amount of work which had gone into the budget at every single level. She stressed that achieving a balanced budget in the current economic climate was not simple and by making the difficult decisions now and closing the gap, it would leave the Council on a firm footing for whatever may come. Coping with a pandemic and being able to open the leisure centres because of their strong financial position the Council was in.

She further stated that the award-winning, forward-thinking strategies that were in place such as the property investment strategy provided independence from government funding. She further noted that with cuts being made in other services, it was likely that the Council would have to have resilience to support those affected. The £165,000 would be to go in the Council's reserves as there was still a financial shortfall for the year 2023/24 to deliver the essential services. Noting comments raised regarding staff vacancies, she advised that most of the vacancies and agency staff were used for the waste collection services and the team was under a lot of pressure with the volume of waste and recycling that was collected. In closing she reminded Members that thanks to this process the Council was in a stronger financial position than many others who could only aspire to be in and commended the budget for approval.

The motion was put to the vote and it was taken by all those present in the Council Chamber.

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It was therefore resolved that

- a) The summary of Council Expenditure and Council Tax for 2024/25 set out in the supplementary agenda, be approved;
- b) the 10-year budget 2024/25 to 2033/34 which is the guiding framework for the detailed approval of future years' budgets set out in Appendix C(i) to the report, including the budget changes set out in Appendix E to the report, and that where possible any variations during and between years be met from the Budget Stabilisation Reserve, be approved;
- c) the Capital Programme 2024/27 and funding method set out in Appendix K(i) and Capital Strategy 2024/25 set out in Appendix K(iii), be approved;
- d) the changes to reserves and provisions set out in Appendix L, be approved;

Agenda Item 1

Council - 20 February 2024

- e) the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2023/24, be rolled forward to 2024/25, with effect from 1 April 2024 (Appendix N), be approved;
- f) the agreement made at Council on 21 February 2023 to shorten the Council Tax premium on long term empty dwellings from the current 2 years (empty) to 1 year from 1 April 2024, be confirmed;
- g) the agreement made at Council on 21 February 2023 to implement the 100% Council Tax premium on all second homes from 1 April 2025, be confirmed;
- h) that it be noted that at the Cabinet meeting on 18 January 2024 the Council calculated as its council tax base for the year 2024/25:
 - (i) for the whole Council area as 52,394.75 being Item T in the formula in Section 31B of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, as amended, (the "Act"); and
 - (ii) for dwellings in those parts of its area to which a parish precept relates as in the attached Appendix P;
- j) that the council tax requirement for the Council's own purpose for 2024/25 (excluding Town and Parish precepts) be calculated as £243.72;
- k) that the following amounts be calculated for the year 2024/25 in accordance with Sections 31 to 36 of the Act:
 - (i) £59,441,384 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(2) of the Act taking into account all precepts issued to it by Town and Parish Councils.
 - (ii) £41,113,000 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(3) of the Act.
 - (iii) £18,328,384 being the amount by which the aggregate at (c)(i) above exceeds the aggregate at (c)(ii) above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 31A(4) of the Act, as its council tax requirement for the year (Item R in the formula in Section 31B of the Act).
 - (iv) £349.81 being the amount at (c)(iii) above (Item R), all divided by (a)(i) above (Item T), calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 31B of the Act, as the basic amount of its council tax for the year (including Town and Parish precepts).
 - (v) £5,558,736 being the aggregate amount of all special items (Town and Parish precepts) referred to in Section

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(vi) £243.72 34 (1) of the Act (as per the attached Appendix P).
 being the amount at (c)(iv) above, less the result
 given by dividing the amount at (c)(v) above by
 the amount at (a)(i) above (Item T), calculated by
 the Council, in accordance with Section 34 (2) of
 the Act, as the basic amount of its council tax for
 the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to
 which no Town or Parish precept relates.

- l) that it be noted that for the year 2024/25 the Kent County Council, the Kent Police & Crime Commissioner and the Kent & Medway Fire and Rescue Authority have issued precepts to the Council in accordance with Section 40 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, for each category of dwellings in the Council's area as indicated in the table below:-

| Valuation Bands | Precepting Authority | | | |
|-----------------|----------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|---|
| | Sevenoaks District Council | Kent County Council | Kent Police & C.C. | Kent & Medway Fire and Rescue Authority |
| | £ | £ | £ | £ |
| A | 162.48 | 1,073.88 | 170.77 | 59.94 |
| B | 189.56 | 1,252.86 | 199.23 | 69.93 |
| C | 216.64 | 1,431.84 | 227.69 | 79.92 |
| D | 243.72 | 1,610.82 | 256.15 | 89.91 |
| E | 297.88 | 1,968.78 | 313.07 | 109.89 |
| F | 352.04 | 2,326.74 | 369.99 | 129.87 |
| G | 406.20 | 2,684.70 | 426.92 | 149.85 |
| H | 487.44 | 3,221.64 | 512.30 | 179.82 |

- m) that the Council, in accordance with Sections 30 and 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, hereby sets the aggregate amounts shown in Appendix R as the amounts of council tax for the year 2024/25 for each part of its area and for each of the categories of dwellings;
- n) that the Council's basic amount of council tax for 2024/25, shown in (c)(vi) above, is not excessive in accordance with principles approved under Section 52ZB of the Local Government Finance Act 1992; and
- o) the additional one-off funding of £165,000 in 2024/25 be placed into the Budget Stabilisation Reserve to reduce the savings required to offset the

expected 2023/24 overspend when setting the 2025/26 budget, be approved.

At 9.50pm the Chairman adjourned the meeting for the comfort of Members and officers.

At 10pm the meeting resumed.

47. Matters considered by other standing committees:

a) **Local Government Boundary Commission For England Electoral Review**

It was moved by Cllr. Esler and seconded by Cllr. Penny Cole that the recommendation from Governance Committee that the timetable of the electoral review and the formation of a working group to advise Council, be noted.

Cllr Esler spoke to the motion.

Resolved: That

- a) the timetable for the electoral review being undertaken by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England, be noted; and
- b) a working group, set up by the Governance Committee had been formed to advise Council on the electoral review as it progresses, be noted.

b) **Review of the Scheme for Members' Allowances**

It was moved by Cllr. Esler and seconded by Cllr. Penny Cole that the recommendation from Governance Committee to adopt the Members' Allowance scheme as amended, be approved.

Cllr Esler spoke to the motion. Members discussed the scheme, and thanks was given to the Working Group for their work.

Resolved: That

- a) the recommendations of the Joint Independent Remuneration Panel be agreed subject to the following changes:
 - i) The Deputy Leader continue to be remunerated at £14,023 but this allowance be frozen until such a time as the JIRP determines the sum to fall within 10% of the Kent Councils Deputy Leader Allowances mean;

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- ii) Opposition Group Leaders continue to be remunerated at £298 per group Member;
- iii) Subsistence allowances be maintained at the £9.86/£12.21 for lunch/evening meal, subject to the Member being on Council business out of the District; and
- b) The next review of the allowances by the JIRP, be requested to be undertaken in advance of the next election cycle.

c) Scrutiny Committee Procedure Rules

It was moved by Cllr. Esler and seconded by Cllr. Penny Cole that the recommendation from the Scrutiny Committee to adopt the revised appendix C and part 5 of the constitution, be agreed.

Cllr Esler spoke to the motion advising that the revisions were to clarify and update the sections of the constitution so they were less ambiguous when it came to call-in.

It was moved by Cllr. Streatfeild and duly seconded by Cllr. Leaman that the revised appendix C, paragraph 18.4 be deleted and insert with the following wording:

“Members can call-in a decision for one or more of the following reasons:

- (a) The decision is not in line with the Council’s Policy Framework,
- (b) The decision is not in accordance with the Council’s Budget,
- (c) The decision was not taken in accordance with the principles of decision- making set out below, and/or
- (d) The decision was not taken in accordance with the Constitution of the Council.

The relevant principles of decision-making referred to in (c) are:

- (a) Action proportionate to the desired outcome.
- (b) Due consultation and the taking of professional advice from Officers.
- (c) Respect for human rights in all its forms.
- (d) A presumption in favour of openness.
- (e) Clarity of aims and desired outcomes.
- (f) Explanation of the options considered and giving reasons for decisions.”

Cllr Streatfeild spoke to his amendment advising that this was the wording from Kent County Council’s constitution, and in his opinion the Scrutiny system worked well. Debate continued on the amendment, with some Members suggesting that the amendment would change the system for the better and allow non-key decisions to be called-in.

Cllr. Esler in her right of reply to the amendment, reminded Members that the Scrutiny Committee was an important mechanism to ensure the discharge of

functions by the Council. Call-in was not a mechanism that should be used to delay the implementation of decisions, and further stating that the principles of what was being amended had already been proposed in the revised appendix.

The motion was put to the vote and it was lost.

At 10.20 p.m. it was moved by the Chairman that, in accordance with rule 16.1 of Part 2 of the Constitution, Members extend the meeting beyond 10.30 p.m. for as long as was necessary to enable the Council to complete the business on the agenda. The motion was put to the vote and it was

Resolved: That the meeting extend beyond 10.30pm

It was moved by Cllr Leaman and duly seconded by Cllr. Robinson that paragraph 18.6 be deleted and the following be inserted "When considering a decision that has been called-in, the Scrutiny Committee may:

- (a) make no comments,
- (b) express comments but not require reconsideration of the decision,
- (c) require implementation of the decision to be postponed pending reconsideration of the matter by the decision-maker in light of the Committee's comments, or
- (d) require implementation of the decision to be postponed pending review or scrutiny of the matter by the full Council."

Cllr Leaman spoke to his amendment, detailing that it could improve the scrutiny process and be more constructive. Members debated the amendment, noting that government guidance considered scrutiny a healthy part of good governance and its importance of acting as a critical friend. Members discussed other local authorities and their scrutiny functions. It was also raised by some Members that scrutiny was a healthy tool.

Cllr. Esler made her right of reply to the motion reminding Members that reports that went to the Executive for decision had already been through the Advisory Committee process, allowing Members to consider and give their views. In responding to points raised in the debate, amendments a, b and d were already included within the proposal, and any views from a call-in Scrutiny meeting would be detailed in the minutes and provided to Cabinet.

The amendment was put to the vote and it was lost.

Debate continued on the original motion. It was raised that although comparing to KCC's scrutiny procedure could be helpful, it was noted that KCC's Cabinet Committees only advised individual Cabinet Members rather than the Cabinet as a whole and then it could be subject to call-in. Sevenoaks already had a two stage process to advise Cabinet, where KCC was more of a single stage process. The revisions helped to clarify the process and the decisions that could be subject to call-

Council - 20 February 2024

in. Other Members were concerned that the process did not fully allow engagement from opposition Members within the Advisory Committees.

Cllr Esler, gave her right of reply stating that the process was not to minimise opposition involvement but clarify the process to enable the Council to function.

As there was no further debate the Chairman moved to take the vote. In accordance with the Council's Constitution, Part 2 paragraph 24.4, five Members of the Council stood and demanded a recorded vote.

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Resolved: That Appendix C (Scrutiny Committee Procedure Rules) and Part 5 (Scrutiny Function) of the Constitution, be adopted.

d) Protocol on Webcasting and Electronic Voting

It was moved by Cllr Esler, and seconded by Cllr. Penny Cole that the recommendation from Governance Committee to adopt, as amended the draft protocols on webcasting and electronic voting.

Cllr Esler spoke to the motion, stating she was grateful for the amendment that had been agreed at the Governance Committee. The electronic voting system was actively being tested and would soon be in place.

Resolved: That the draft protocol on Webcasting & Electronic voting (as amended), be adopted.

e) Motions on Notice at Full Council

It was moved by Cllr Esler, and seconded by Cllr. Penny Cole that the recommendation from Governance Committee to authorise the Monitoring Officer to insert a new paragraph 20.6 into the constitution be approved.

Cllr Esler spoke to the motion, stating that it was important to keep Council meetings constructive and other local authorities also limited the number of motions.

Members discussed the motion with some expressing concern that opposition groups would be restricted to making proposals to full council only 3 times a year. During debate it was raised that the Advisory Committee process allowed for topics to be added to their work plans, this was debated and some Members' felt they did not have the opportunity to add things to the work plan and by reducing motions would not serve the democratic process. Members further debated the need for good decisions to be taken. Previous motions which had been discussed and voted through was raised and the positive impact they had had.

In response to the debate, Cllr. Esler gave her right of reply.

The motion was put the vote and it was

Resolved: That, the Monitoring Officer be authorised to insert a new paragraph 20.6 into the Constitution, substantially in the terms of the report.

48. To consider the following reports from the Chief Executive or other Chief Officers on matters requiring the attention of Council:

a) Pay Policy Statement

It was moved by Cllr. Thornton and duly seconded by Cllr. Perry Cole that the recommendation to adopt the Pay Policy Statement be agreed.

Resolved: That the Pay Policy Statement, be adopted by the Council and be published on the Council's website.

b) Supplementary Estimates

It was moved by Cllr Maskell and duly seconded that the recommendation for the approval of supplementary estimates for the cost of planning appeals be agreed.

Cllr. Maskell spoke to the motion.

Resolved: That the cost of planning appeals in excess of the budget in 2023/24 be met from the supplementary estimate of £120,000, be agreed.

c) Changes to Committee Appointments

It was moved by Cllr Thornton and seconded by Cllr Perry Cole that the changes to Committee appointments be agreed.

Resolved: That

- a) Cllrs Skinner and Manston be removed from the Development Management Committee and Cllrs. Granville and Barker be appointed to the Committee; and

- b) Cllr Manston be removed from Scrutiny Committee and the Standards Committee and Cllr Lindop be appointed to the Scrutiny Committee and Cllr Barker be appointed to Standards Committee.

49. To consider any motions by Members under paragraph 20 of Part 2 (The Council and District Council Members) of the Constitution, notice of which have been duly given.

Cllr. Manston proposed the following motion, which was seconded by Cllr. Lindop.

“This Council pledges to:

Lead by example and remove single-use plastic items from its premises and operations, wherever it has the power to do so;

encourage plastic-free initiatives in Sevenoaks, promoting the campaign and supporting events that aim to raise awareness of single-use plastics and reduce the use of them; and

support Cllr Manston in convening and chairing a cross-party Plastic Free Community Steering Group and establishing appropriate terms of reference, KPIs and reporting.”

Cllr Manston spoke to the motion, highlighting to the meeting that this would be a cross-part initiative using a third party framework to allow focus on shared objectives. As the next big plastic count was on 11 March, she advised it would be an excellent opportunity to launch this type of initiative. If all the objectives were met, the plastic free logo could be used in all of the Council’s communications. She further advised that this had not gone through the committee process, as it was being

suggested to be a Councillor led initiative within the responsibility of Councillors, without a budget and to save Officer resources. A lot of the work had already been undertaken by Councillors throughout the District and therefore a lot of expertise was already there. Working with the Cleaner & Greener Advisory Committee, and where appropriate, to have advice from Officers to provide sound performance indicators. Cllr Manston further detailed that the steering group would have Members from different parties, and would look to have two meetings a year. There would be projects assessing carbon footprints, the big plastic count and supporting the Sevenoaks climate action network climate fair. It was a new approach to create a steering group, not through the normal committee process which would in turn, ease pressure on Officers and financial implications.

The discussion moved into debate, and it was noted the care and thought that had been put into the motion. However it was felt that Cleaner & Greener Advisory Committee needed to be more fully involved, with Officer guidance. It was moved by Cllr. Clack and duly seconded that the motion be amended to delete “wherever it has the power to do so, and insert “wherever it is viable to do so. The review and recommendation will be reported at the next available Cleaner & Greener Advisory Committee and all members will be invited to give their views to the review.”

On paragraph two to put a full stop after “them” and take out the word “and,” and delete paragraph three.

Members debated the amendment. It was noted that Sevenoaks Town Council had a plastic pledge to which 20 businesses were already signed up, including a pub in New Ash Green, and the Council had also signed up at its conception. The Town Council had been promoting the pledge for a number of years. It was raised in debate that the Council were already taking action to reduce its use of single use plastic. In its role as community leader, it promoted the reduction of single-use plastic. It had made resources available to communities to encourage the reduction in use of single use plastics and during that process had also spoken to Town and Parish Councils, who were better placed to lead this work within their local communities, on supporting local initiatives, rather than taking a top down approach and Sevenoaks Town Council was an example of that.

It was thought that the suggestion of a cross-party steering group would not necessarily be as effective, as there was already the system to do so through the Advisory Committee which also had the Climate Change strategy and action plan.

In debate it was raised that by encouraging businesses and residents to sign up to the pledge it could reduce the amount of recycling going into the system.

In his right of reply, Cllr Clack advised that he thought this was the best way forward by putting it on a future meeting of the Advisory Committee, and from comments raised in debate, it should be relatively easy to make progress on and therefore he was against forming a further cross-party group.

In Cllr Manson's right of reply to the amendment, she thanked the Portfolio Holder for raising the work that was already being undertaken and therefore viewed that it would not be difficult to get the plastic free status. The justification was due to limited financial resources, and officer time. She was pleased that it would go on the agenda, but expressed concern that the next Advisory Committee was not for another three months', and this would delay the process to take action.

The amendment was put to the vote and it was agreed.

Debate continued on the substantive motion.

The substantive motion was put to the vote and it was

Resolved: That this Council pledges to:

Lead by example and remove single-use plastic items from its premises and operations wherever it was viable to do so. The review and recommendation will be reported at the next available Cleaner & Greener Advisory Committee and all members will be invited to give their views to the review;

encourage plastic-free initiatives in Sevenoaks, promoting the campaign and supporting events that aim to raise awareness of single-use plastics and reduce the use of them.

50. To receive the report of the Leader of the Council on the work of the Cabinet since the last Council meeting.

The Leader of the Council reported on the work that she and the Cabinet had undertaken since Council 14 November 2024. She brought to Members attention that it was the 50th anniversary of the Council soon and there would be some communications work on this.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT WEDNESDAY 21 FEBRUARY AT 00:00

CHAIRMAN

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Item 6a – Adoption of High Weald AONB Management Plan 2024-2029

The attached report was considered by the Cabinet on 18 April 2024. The relevant Minute extract was not available prior to the printing of these papers and will follow when available.

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ADOPTION OF HIGH WEALD AONB MANAGEMENT PLAN 2024-2029

Council – 23 April 2024

Report of: Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Officer – Planning & Regulatory Services

Status: For Decision

Also considered by:

- Cabinet – 18 April 2024
- Development & Conservation Advisory Committee – 26 March 2024

Key Decision: No

Executive Summary: Sevenoaks District Council is legally required to prepare and publish a management plan for the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. In the High Weald this requirement is delivered through the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee. A draft management plan has been prepared, after public consultation and with input from the Council, setting out key character components of the High Weald's natural beauty. It is an important guidance document for functions affecting the AONB and its setting.

This report supports the Key Aim of: ensuring that Sevenoaks District remains a great place to live, work and visit.

Portfolio Holder: Cllr. Reay

Contact Officer: Vivienne Riddle, Ext. 7357

Recommendation to Development and Conservation Advisory Committee:

That, subject to its approval by the High Weald JAC on 27 March 2024, it be recommended to Cabinet to recommend to Council to adopt the High Weald AONB Management Plan.

Recommendation to Cabinet:

To recommend to Council adopt the High Weald AONB Management Plan.

Reason for recommendation: To fulfil the statutory duty arising from the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 to prepare a management plan for the High Weald AONB.

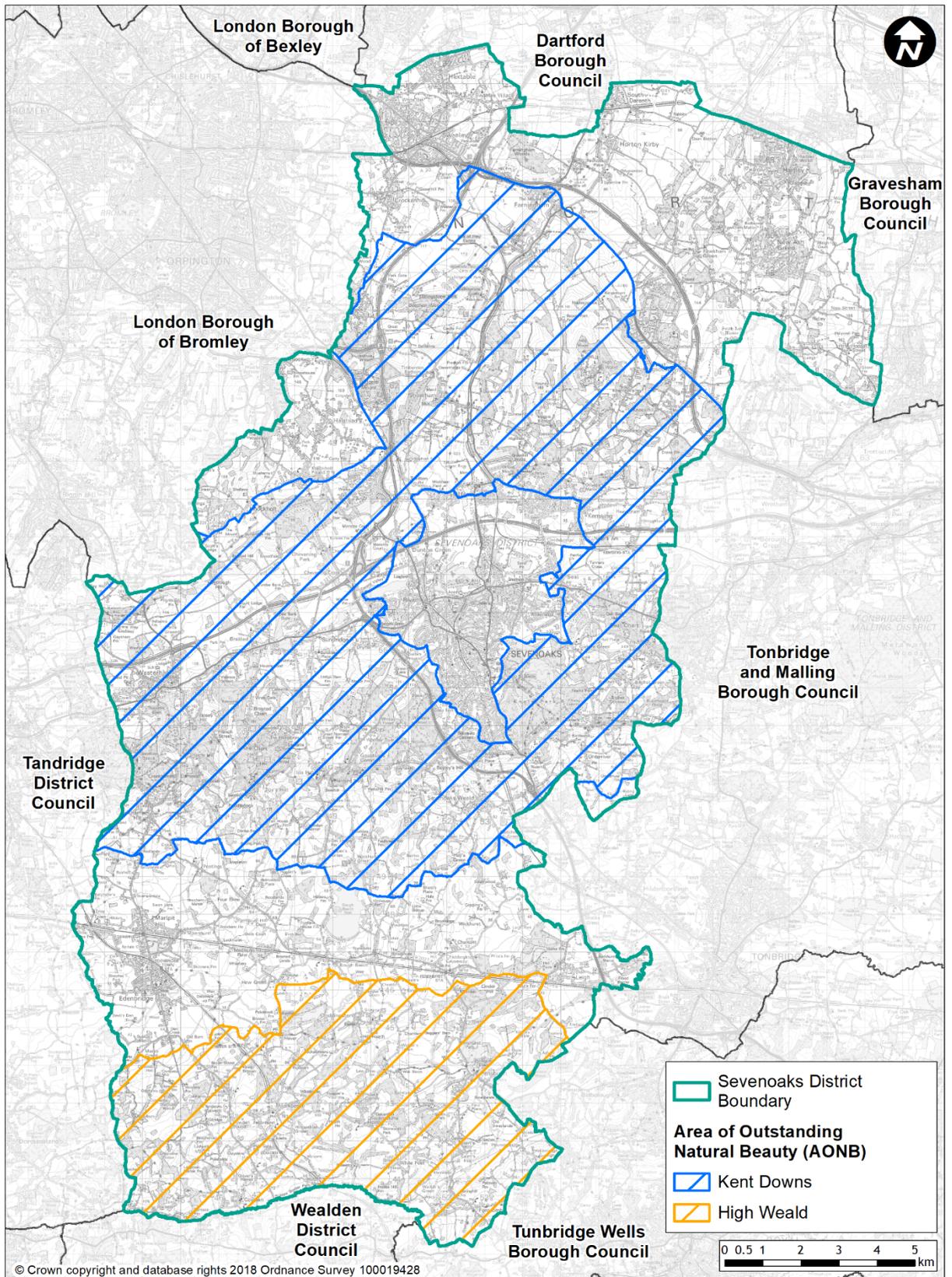
Introduction and Background

- 1 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) are national designations established by Natural England. The main purpose of an AONB designation is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the landscape. The legal status and importance of AONBs is on a par with National Parks although they do not have the same administrative arrangements.
- 2 On 22 November 2023 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty were renamed as National Landscapes, to highlight their national importance and to elevate them alongside National Parks. Despite the renaming, they remain known as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty within the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 and within the National Planning Policy Framework and Planning Practice Guidance. Accordingly, the High Weald AONB Management Plan refers to it as such and for the sake consistency and clarity they have also been referred to as AONBs throughout this report.
- 3 Under the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000, Section 89(2), local authorities with land in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) are legally obliged to prepare and publish an AONB management plan which 'formulates their policy for the management of the area of outstanding natural beauty and for the carrying out of their functions in relation to it', and to review this plan every five years. Where an AONB crosses administrative boundaries local authorities are required to act jointly to produce the plan (Section 89(11)(b)).
- 4 Sevenoaks District has two AONBs as shown in Map 1, the Kent Downs AONB across the centre and north of the District and the High Weald AONB across the southern part of the District. A management plan is required for each; however, this report relates to the management plan for the High Weald only, as the Kent Downs AONB management plan covers the period 2021-2026 and the review process has yet to commence. The management plan is required to be adopted by Full Council.
- 5 Sevenoaks District Council (SDC) has a statutory responsibility with regards to the management of the AONBs. This duty has recently been strengthened through the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023, which has inserted an amendment into section 85 of the CRoW Act 2000. The amended duty came into force on 26 December 2023 and is as follows:

'In exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in an area of outstanding natural beauty in England, a relevant authority ... must seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty.'

The CRoW Act also reaffirms the original purposes of designation and confirms the powers of local authorities to take appropriate action to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of AONBs.

Map 1. Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty in Sevenoaks District



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- 6 The National Planning Policy Framework places great weight on conserving landscape and scenic beauty in AONBs, giving them the highest status of protection in relation to these issues (paragraph 182, NPPF 2023). It also states that planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment, which this document will assist us in.
- 7 The guidance provided in the AONB management plan is supported by the Council's Core Strategy (2011) under Policy SP1 and in paragraph 2.33 of the Allocations and Development Management Plan. It is also supported in Policy NE1 of the emerging Local Plan (Plan 2040), as well as being referenced within other policies e.g. our proposed policy on design quality. More widely, the use of the management plans can assist the Council in delivering the greener aims contained within the SDC Community Plan.

The High Weald AONB Management Plan

- 8 The High Weald AONB was designated in 1983. It is the fourth largest, covering areas of Surrey, Kent, East Sussex and West Sussex. Sevenoaks District Council is a member of the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee (JAC), a partnership of the 4 county and 11 district authorities that cover the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and who each, according to their relative interest, jointly fund the JAC. Cllr Williams currently represents SDC on the JAC and Vivienne Riddle attends the Officer Steering Group meetings.
- 9 The High Weald AONB Management Plan can be used to guide environmental land management and assess the impact of development or other changes on the AONB. It has the potential to improve the quality of life for residents of Sevenoaks District living and working in and around the AONB through the conservation and enhancement of their landscape and supporting the social and economic wellbeing of communities.
- 10 The management plan contains various sections, including a Statement of Significance and 8 components of character which together combine to create its distinct and recognisable landscape, comprising physical components and perceptual and aesthetic qualities and cultural associations. Each component is described in detail, including key characteristics, the top 5 issues and objectives and actions recommended to guide the activities of partners and stakeholders. This helps local authorities, and also developers, to identify what contributes to the natural beauty of the landscape, how development can be in keeping with the existing identified characteristics and what issues need to be addressed by any new development within it.
- 11 The character components of the High Weald have been identified as:
 - Natural Systems (Geology, soils, water and climate)
 - Settlement
 - Routeways

- Woodland
- Fieldscape and Heath
- Dark Skies
- Perceptual and Aesthetic qualities
- Land-based economy and related rural living

12 It also includes the following cross cutting themes, including programmes, principles for action and investment strategy:

- Restoring soil health and regenerative land management
- Nature recovery and biodiversity
- The climate crisis; achieving net zero
- People and access
- Planning and development in the High Weald AONB

Summary of Review Process

13 In 2004 a statutory plan for the High Weald was produced as a rolling 20-year strategy to be reviewed every 5 years. The approach taken was designed to be robust and future-proofed, resulting in an objective led plan rooted in an understanding of landscape pattern, and structured around AONB purpose and character. To allow for cost-effective review, the published plan was kept concise with supporting evidence, data and guidance available online. This approach allowed for 'light touch' reviews in 2009, 2014 and 2019.

14 A new management plan is now required to be published in 2024. This is the first edition of a new 20-year strategy, covering the period 2024-2029, and includes a 5-year implementation plan. The review has taken account of the current and future major challenges/issues of biodiversity crisis, climate change, fairer access to nature, and development pressure. The plan also needs to be cognisant of the National Guidance for AONB Management Plans, currently in preparation, which is anticipated to require plans to address these issues. Therefore, while the character components and management policy objectives (the most important aspects of the HWMP) remain broadly appropriate, the range of character components has broadened, and other aspects of the plan have needed a more substantive re-consideration, including the inclusion of cross cutting themes: programmes, principles for action and investment strategy 2024-2029, to reflect the afore-mentioned challenges/issues.

15 The High Weald Joint Advisory Committee launched the current review in 2022 to cover the period 2024-2029. The draft management plan has gone through an extensive process of consultation with the Officer Steering Group

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in 2022 and 2023, evolving as a result of reviewing the feedback received during that process. Public consultation on the management plan and its supporting documents ran from 05 September 2023 to 05 November 2023, over a 6 week period, to which we responded. Our response touched on and made suggestions and recommendations regarding a number of aspects, including highlighting the backdrop of a Government target for housing of 300,000 per year, a high local housing need and a highly constrained context.

- 16 The draft management plan is also supported by a Consultation Statement, a Strategic Environmental Assessment, a Habitat Regulations Assessment and an Equality Impact Assessment.
- 17 The next step is for the management plan to be considered by the JAC, who, if they approve it, recommend individual local authorities to adopt it. In this instance, the Joint Advisory Committee of the AONB will be considering the draft management plan on 27 March 2024, the day after DCAC, as such the recommendation to adopt the management plan, is subject to its approval at the High Weald's JAC. The timing of this report is to support the High Weald with their aim of submitting the management plan to the Secretary of State by the end of May.

Other options Considered and/or rejected

The Council could consider not adopting the AONB Management Plan however the CRoW Act 2000 requires local authorities with land in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) to prepare and publish an AONB Management Plan.

Key Implications

Financial

Any cost will be met out of the existing budget.

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement

The Council has a statutory duty to prepare and review a management plan for any areas within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. By not adopting the plan the council is in breach of the CRoW Act 2000.

Equality Assessment

The High Weald AONB Management Plan has been subject to an EQIA which concludes that the management plan complies with the equalities legislation.

Climate Change Implications and Environmental Impact

The management plan will assist in identifying potential opportunities to reduce carbon emissions within the AONB. SDC will continue to work with the AONB Units

to identify, develop and support projects which enhance the landscape, reduce carbon emissions and adapt to the inevitable changes in climate.

Conclusions

The Council is legally required to have an AONB management plan in place and to keep this under review. Together with the relevant local authorities, the Council has worked with the AONB Unit to review the plan. The review has been carried out within the relevant guidance and statutory requirements and reflects the Council's aims and objectives and it is considered appropriate for the Council to adopt it.

Appendices

Appendix A – High Weald AONB Management Plan 2024-2029

https://www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/downloads/file/3935/high_weald_aonb_management_plan_2024_final_version_for_jac

Background Papers -

https://www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/info/20069129/current_local_plan/256/national_planning

Consultation Statement

[Strategic Environmental Assessment \(SEA\)](#)

[Habitat Regulations Assessment \(HRA\)](#)

[Equalities Impact Assessment \(EqIA\)](#)

Richard Morris

Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Officer – Planning and Regulatory Services

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High Weald
National
Landscape

The High Weald National Landscape an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty



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AONB Management Plan

A 20-year strategy for the conservation and enhancement of the High Weald's natural beauty

THIS EDITION: 2024-2029

A statutory plan adopted by 15 local authority partners setting out their policies for the management of the area and providing an agreed public policy vision for the High Weald 2024-2044

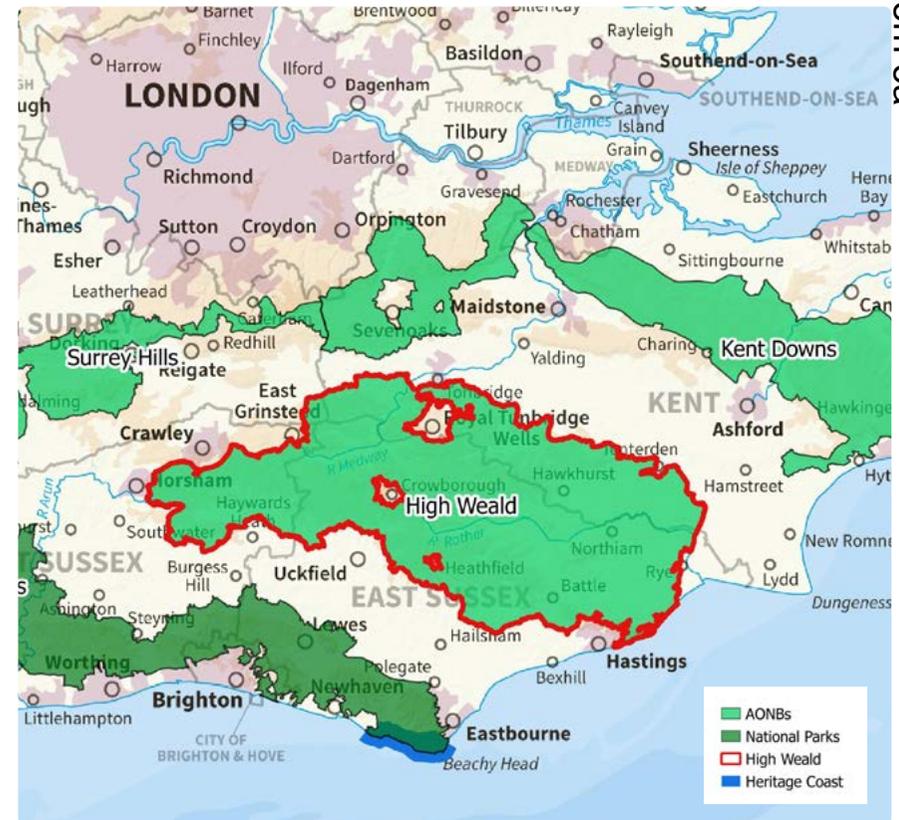
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The High Weald

AONB Management Plan 2024-2029

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

- East Sussex County Council
- Kent County Council
- Surrey County Council
- West Sussex County Council
- Ashford Borough Council
- Crawley Borough Council
- Hastings Borough Council
- Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council
- Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
- Horsham District Council
- Mid Sussex District Council
- Rother District Council
- Sevenoaks District Council
- Tandridge District Council
- Wealden District Council



From November 22nd 2023, all AONBs are to be known as National Landscapes. The High Weald National Landscape remains designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and is referred to as such in policy, legislation and guidance. For this reason, this document is still titled and referred to as the High Weald AONB Management Plan. Its statutory purpose remains unchanged.

This edition published 2024

- Fourth edition published 2019
- Third edition published 2014
- Second edition published 2009
- First edition published 2004

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Foreword

The High Weald is a remarkably beautiful and precious landscape. It has for centuries inspired artists and writers and been a joyous place for its residents and visitors. Its protection should be of importance to all, and threats to its character should be of concern to all.

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Future generations will view us very poorly if we fail to hand it on to them in good shape. Designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in 1983, the High Weald now enjoys the greater accolade of 'National Landscape' respecting its great significance beyond its own borders.

The High Weald is part of a family of landscapes which are so special, they have been recognised in law as being of national importance.

In today's rapidly changing world, our landscapes are facing unprecedented challenges. Climate change, habitat loss, and growing pressures from human development threaten the very essence of what makes our National Landscapes so special. As such, it is imperative that we take proactive measures to safeguard our natural heritage for future generations to enjoy.

In line with current policy priorities in landscape and natural beauty, this Management Plan sets out a clear vision for the future of the National Landscape. At its core, this vision aims to strike a balance between conserving the area's natural beauty and wildlife, while also supporting thriving communities and facilitating responsible and sustainable access for visitors and residents alike.

This Management Plan acknowledges the importance of partnership working in achieving our conservation goals. By collaborating, we can leverage our collective expertise and resources to implement effective strategies for protecting and enhancing the National Landscape.

We urgently need to recognise that natural beauty is not to be taken for granted and is an essential and life enhancing foundation for a healthy and sustainable future. Indeed, it is reckless to take it for granted; natural beauty and the landscapes that cradle it deserve to be cherished, protected and celebrated.

I am grateful to all those who have contributed to this excellent management plan. Your dedication and passion for the High Weald are truly commendable and I look forward to seeing the Plan's positive impact for years to come. While I encourage you to read the Plan, I equally encourage you to take every opportunity to get out and enjoy the special beauty of the High Weald.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Hygate'.

Philip Hygate FRSA Chair of the National Landscapes Association



The High Weald is an outstandingly beautiful landscape cherished by people and celebrated for its scenery, tranquillity and wildlife. Its ridges and valleys are clothed with an intricate mosaic of small fields interspersed with farmsteads and surrounded by hedges and abundant woods, all arranged around a network of historic routeways. One of the best surviving medieval landscapes in north-west Europe, the High Weald has remained a unique and recognisable area for at least the last 700 years. Covering 1461 sq. km and close to London, this extensive area offers millions of people the opportunity to experience the beauty of nature within working countryside. It was designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in 1983, and is now known as the High Weald National Landscape.

‘A landscape not yet bulldozed for speed’

As I walked Out One Midsummer Morning, Laurie Lee, 1969

High Weald National Landscape Partnership

The High Weald Partnership is constituted as a Joint Advisory Committee involving the 15 local authorities that cover the National Landscape (AONB) and representatives of local communities and other stakeholders. Its role is to champion the National Landscape, prepare a joint management plan and coordinate delivery of the Plan's objectives. The Partnership was set up in 1989 as an advisory body. It does not own or manage land in the National Landscape.

Our commitment

- We will work together to recover nature and achieve a landscape-led net zero future for the High Weald through facilitating regenerative land management, encouraging pollution reduction and coordinating ambitious net-zero related planning policies.
- We will work together to protect the distinctive cultural character of the High Weald landscape and its human capital, supporting rural skills and a local economy for food and sustainable materials.
- We will work together to ensure fair access to the landscape as a natural health service, promote ecological literacy in schools and facilitate connections to nature in communities so everyone can enjoy the High Weald's natural beauty.
- We will use the Plan to inform plan-making and assess policies, proposals, and planning applications to fulfil our duty under Section 85 of the CRoW, Act 2000 to ensure they further the purpose of conserving and enhancing natural beauty.
- We will use the Plan to guide support for environmental land management and rural development to ensure they conserve and enhance the AONB.
- We will pursue best practice in governance of the Partnership in relation to equity, diversity and inclusion, seeking to engage and empower local communities in decision-making and giving a voice to young people and future generations.

Message from the Chairman

The High Weald Partnership has a vision to foster the restoration and reinvigoration of this beautiful cultural landscape for future generations to enjoy and for nature to thrive whilst supporting our journey towards net zero.

As part of our vision, sustainable activities, farming and community-scale land management will secure long-term economic and social benefits, creating more rural jobs and supporting vibrant community life. An unpolluted and biodiverse landscape will ensure food security, clean air and water, and healthy soil for our children and grandchildren.

Settlements designed around safe and accessible low carbon travel will provide opportunities for everyone to enjoy the health and happiness that the High Weald's natural beauty offers, with well planned housing, tailored to local needs and designed as a high quality response to the character of the area.

This Plan sets out a route map to achieve our vision. A successful outcome relies on all our actions, large and small, and our collaboration as a community.

I would like to thank all those that contributed to this Plan, particularly the staff and colleagues who have worked so diligently to produce it, and I commend it to our partners. We, in the High Weald Partnership will continue to lead and champion the protection of natural beauty so that the legacy bequeathed to us from past generations is passed on restored and renewed for the future.



Councillor Pete Bradbury

Chairman, High Weald Joint Advisory Committee



High Weald Partnership 20-year vision

The High Weald Partnership seeks to ensure that actions taken today leave the High Weald National Landscape as a beautiful and functioning biodiverse landscape for future generations, whether they work, live, or spend their leisure time here.

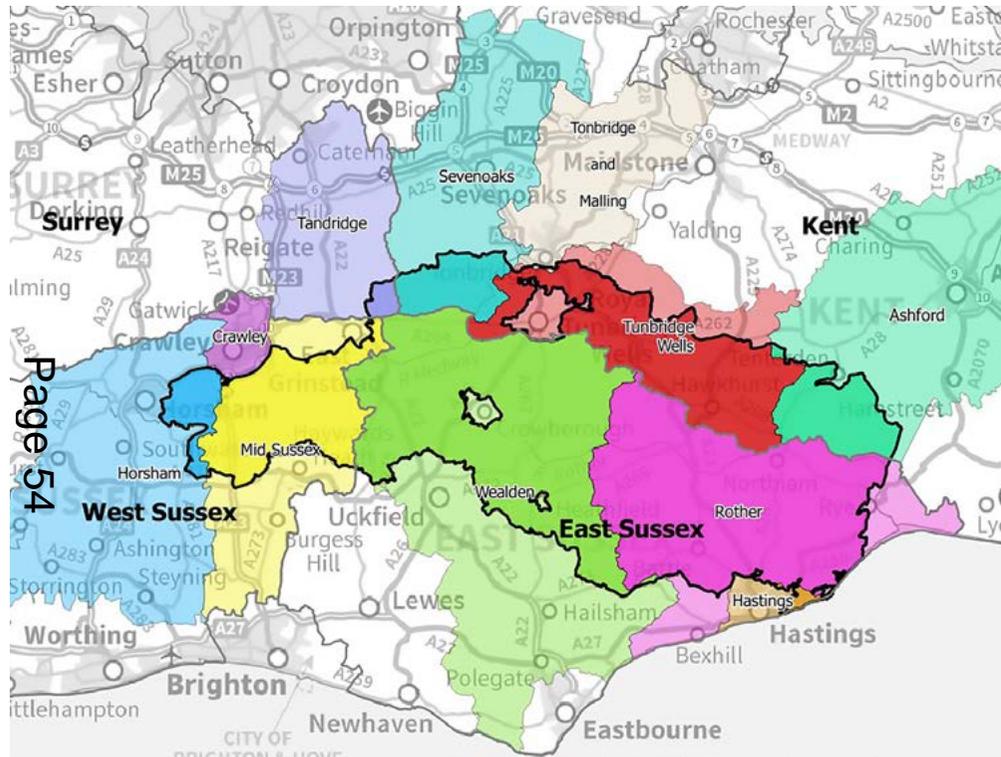
This will require transformational change at a cultural level, with a strengthened appreciation of National Landscape status amongst policymakers supported by increased investment and resources, and wider engagement and understanding. The High Weald Partnership seeks to respond proactively, ambitiously and urgently to 'drivers of change', including working towards the national goal of reaching net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, reversing the biodiversity crisis, and reducing development pressure so that the High Weald:

- Retains its distinctive historic character and beauty as a small-scale anciently enclosed working landscape, with a mosaic of landscape features and habitats including woodland, shaws, native hedgerows, gill streams, traditional meadows, lowland heath and built heritage, and has halted the incremental erosion of natural beauty.
 - Has restored its rich biodiversity and abundance of characteristic species, and reinstated healthy water, air and soil systems improving habitat connectivity, condition and ecological resilience.
 - Is maintained as a thriving working landscape with mixed farming and livestock producing nutrient-dense food through sustainable land management practices, such as regenerative agriculture supplemented by leaving land to nature and agro-forestry, with activities and appropriate infrastructure supported and nurtured where they deliver public benefits.
 - Celebrates its woodland history and has revitalised its woodland economy producing highly valued timber products sustained by sensitive small-scale woodland management.
 - Sustains a diverse range of people and more young people working in farming, forestry and rural land management, supported by appropriate workspace, skills training and business investment.
 - Retains its innate sense of rurality, tranquillity and perception of remoteness, allowing people to experience the sounds of nature and changing seasons.
 - Has protected its historic landscape features and heritage assets, allowing people to experience the sense of history everywhere and the visibility of the medieval landscape.
 - Has maintained and enhanced the quality of its dark skies and the ability to see the stars.
 - Exhibits appropriate high quality and landscape-led new housing, including affordable housing, and workspace to support thriving rural communities, and which does not compromise the High Weald's character, aided by a consistent approach to planning across the National Landscape.
 - Facilitates active participation by people, their communities and businesses, in conserving the area and managing change.
 - Has adopted a net-zero future, relying on nature-based solutions to aid climate cooling and adapt to flooding and extreme weather events, with landscape-led green and renewable technologies, and non-fossil fuel transport underpinning a strong rural economy and thriving communities.
 - Provides a warm welcome and high-quality experience for residents and visitors, and is a more accessible landscape, with modal shifts in transport and more opportunities for walking and cycling, allowing people to engage with nature and enjoy the 'natural health service' benefits offered by the landscape.
 - Provides inspiration and enjoyment for people, businesses and communities, and is valued and understood by them and championed by the High Weald Partnership.
- To help achieve this, the Management Plan sets out a 20-year strategy for the High Weald National Landscape, supported by a five-year implementation strategy 2024-2029 with recommended actions to guide the activities of the partnership partners, stakeholders and communities, along with investment priorities under a number of cross-cutting themes.

Members of the High Weald National Landscape Partnership: Ashford Borough Council, Country Land and Business Association, Crawley Borough Council, East Sussex County Council, Forestry Commission, Hastings Borough Council, Horsham District Council, Kent County Council, Mid Sussex District Council, the National Farmers Union, Natural England, Rother District Council, Sevenoaks District Council, Surrey County Council, Tandridge District Council, Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, Wealden District Council, West Sussex County Council.

About the High Weald

High Weald AONB counties, districts and boroughs



Fifteen local authorities have adopted the Plan as their policy for the AONB.

AONB boundaries were drawn so as to include land of outstanding scientific value to ensure:

‘The preservation of large tracts of country too large for strict preservation as National Nature Reserves, but yet of great value either physiographically or geologically or as containing complex communities of plant and animal life’.

The Report of the National Parks Committee 1947

| Local Authority | | % of the HW AONB within each local authority | % of each local authority that is within the HW AONB |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|--|--|
| County Councils | East Sussex | 60.19 | 50.99 |
| | Kent | 25.41 | 10.21 |
| | West Sussex | 13.68 | 9.87 |
| | Surrey | 0.7 | 0.61 |
| Districts & Boroughs | Wealden | 30.53 | 53.36 |
| | Rother | 29.29 | 82.6 |
| | Tunbridge Wells | 15.61 | 68.88 |
| | Mid Sussex | 11.19 | 48.96 |
| | Ashford | 5.69 | 14.34 |
| | Sevenoaks | 4.05 | 16.0 |
| | Horsham | 2.46 | 6.77 |
| | Tandridge | 0.7 | 4.11 |
| | Hastings | 0.37 | 17.63 |
| | Tonbridge & Malling | 0.07 | 0.39 |
| | Crawley | 0.03 | 1.05 |



High Weald National Landscape

High Weald in facts and figures

2,570 km of public footpaths, bridleways and byways

Ashdown Forest the largest public open space in South East England

Over 13,000 man-made ponds

>700,000 people within 5km

68 Village Conservation Areas

100 parishes

57 Medieval Parish Churches

124,000 residents

174,000 hectares in environmental land management schemes

Dissected by 4,613 of small streams

1,562 farm holdings average size 36ha, half the national average size

3,500 historic farmsteads

>12,500km of ancient hedgerows

40% of fields managed with low chemical inputs

639 recorded historic iron working sites

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671 inland sandstone outcrops

272 sq km of ancient woodland highest coverage in any protected landscape

15% designated as wildlife sites

Covering 4 Counties Across 11 Districts

4th largest AONB

>1,800 sites of internationally important gill woodland

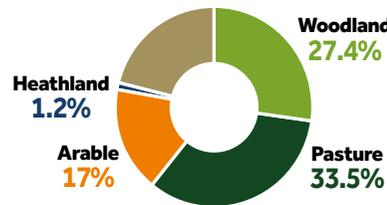
5 reservoirs

29 Historic parks & gardens open to the public



9.5 Million tonnes of carbon sequestered in trees
18.6 Million tonnes of carbon stored in soils

Land use



71 Parishes with intrinsically rural Dark Skies

41km of heritage railways

5,296 listed buildings

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About our Plan

What is a National Landscape or AONB?

'National Landscape' is the informal term adopted in 2023 to describe an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). 'Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty' (AONB) is the legal term for the designation. An AONB is an area of countryside designated by the government to protect its landscape character and the wildlife, natural systems and cultural associations on which it depends in order that people, now and in the future, can enjoy its natural beauty. AONBs (National Landscapes) are protected by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CRoW Act), which sets out the legal purpose of AONB designation as being to "conserve and enhance natural beauty".¹

There are 34 National Landscapes in England, a further four wholly in Wales and eight in Northern Ireland. The 46 National Landscapes in England, Wales and Northern Ireland cover approximately 18% of the land surface.

Together with National Parks, National Landscapes represent our finest landscapes; unique and irreplaceable national assets, each with such distinctive character, biodiversity and natural beauty that they are recognised internationally as part of the global family of protected areas to be managed in the interest of everyone. The distinctive character and outstanding natural beauty of National Landscapes make them some of the most special and loved places in the UK.

National Landscapes are living, working landscapes that contribute some £16bn every year to the national economy. Land in National Landscapes is mostly owned and managed privately with limited ownership by third sector or public bodies. The commitment of all these communities is critical to the designation's success.

1 & 2. [Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk)

What is the purpose of the Plan?

AONB Management Plans are policy documents for the whole of the protected landscape. They are evidence based, locally owned and democratically accountable strategies for looking after these beautiful places in the interests of both people and natural systems. They are formulated to coordinate ambition, policy, investment and action to achieve the legal purpose of 'conserving and enhancing natural beauty' for the benefit of current and future generations, and to set out how people's enjoyment of the area's special qualities can be fostered. The Management Plan is the principal vehicle for ensuring that the statutory purposes of the protected landscape are met.

Who prepares the Plan and what is its status?

AONB Management Plans are statutory documents. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 requires local authorities with land in an AONB (National Landscape) to prepare and publish an up-to-date plan which

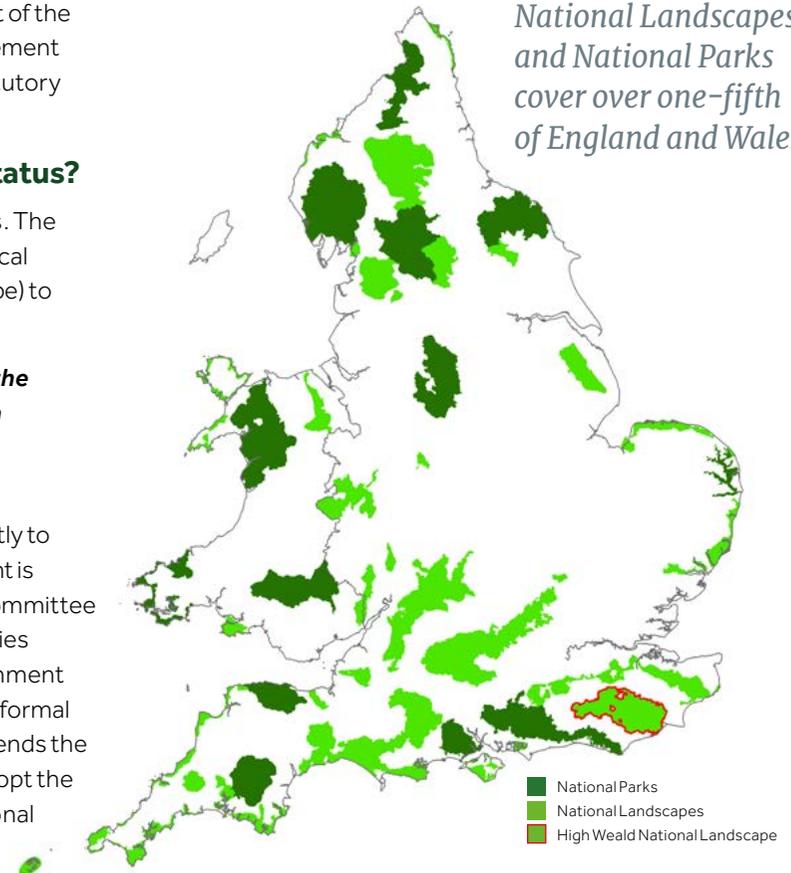
'formulates their policy for the management of the area and for the carrying out of their functions in relation to it'.²

Where National Landscapes cross administrative boundaries, local authorities are required to act jointly to prepare the plan. In the High Weald, this requirement is delivered through the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee (JAC), a partnership which includes 15 local authorities covering the area together with community, environment and land-based sector representatives. Following a formal consultation process, the High Weald JAC recommends the Plan to individual local authorities who then each adopt the Plan as their policy for the management of the National Landscape. The Plan is reviewed every five years.

Who is the Plan for and how should it be used?

The Management Plan is relevant to everyone. It guides local authority plan-making and decision-taking, and also has a wider role, setting a 20-year strategy for everyone who lives or works in the High Weald, or visits it, to work towards. The Management Plan defines the Natural Beauty of the High Weald AONB, and sets out the management policy for its conservation and enhancement.

National Landscapes and National Parks cover over one-fifth of England and Wales



The Plan is divided into two parts. The first part describes the core components of natural beauty to be conserved and enhanced, providing long term objectives supported by five-year ambitions and proposed actions to guide the activities of the partnership, partners, and stakeholders during the Plan period. The second part addresses the main drivers of change (or cross-cutting themes) affecting the High Weald in the Plan period, providing principles to underpin activities and a strategy for investment 2024-2029. The ambitions and actions in Part 1, and principles and investment strategy in Part 2, constitute the five-year implementation strategy of this Plan.

Government, statutory undertakers and other public bodies (such as NHS England, Forestry Commission and Natural England) or person holding public office can use the Management Plan to help ensure they are fulfilling their Section 85 duty to 'seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty' of the High Weald AONB³. Additionally, the public can use the Management Plan to highlight to relevant bodies the natural beauty and needs of the AONB, and the actions that should be taken to protect it.

AONB 'setting'

The Management Plan may also be applied to the area's 'setting'. The term 'setting' is used to refer to areas outside the National Landscape where development and other activities may affect land within a National Landscape. Its extent will vary depending upon the issues considered, however, due to the high synergy in character between the National Landscape boundary and the wider High Weald National Character Area (NCA)⁴, land within the NCA should be considered as falling within the setting of the National Landscape. Section 85 of the CRoW Act 2000 requires

public bodies to consider whether any activities outside the AONB may affect land in an AONB. Not all activities will be detrimental; conservation practices and economic activities outside the National Landscape can support the National Landscape's conservation purpose.

How was the Plan prepared?

Management Plan preparation follows a formal process requiring preparation of a Strategic Environmental Assessment and other appropriate assessments to comply with UK law. Public comment and engagement were sought throughout the Plan preparation, and a formal consultation process undertaken in October 2023.

The following documents have been prepared in support of this Plan:

AONB Management Plan Review (2023)

Strategic Environmental Assessment. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee

AONB Management Plan Review (2023)

Habitats Regulations Assessment. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee

AONB Management Plan Review (2023)

Equality Impact Assessment Screening Report. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee

Savanta (2022)

Visitors to the High Weald AONB. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee

The above documents can be found at www.highweald.org

The AONB Management Plan and local authority functions

The Management Plan is relevant to any local authority function that may have an influence upon the natural beauty of the AONB, including:

- Planning and development, including neighbourhood planning
- Scheduled ancient monuments, listed buildings and conservation areas
- Building regulations and energy efficiency
- Waste, environment protection, pesticides and pollution
- Libraries and museums
- Animal health and welfare, biodiversity, flooding and marine areas
- Rights of way and coastal access
- Food and food safety
- Public health, mental health, social care and young people
- Highways, traffic management, public transport and parking
- Education

A full list can be found at Statutory duties placed on local government – data.gov.uk

³ Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (legislation.gov.uk)

⁴ NCA Profile:122 High Weald – NE508 (naturallengland.org.uk)



The High Weald's landscape

The High Weald occupies the ridged and faulted sandstone core of an area known from Saxon times as the Weald. It is an area of ancient countryside and one of the best surviving medieval landscapes in Northern Europe. The mosaic of small mixed farms and woodlands is considered to represent a quintessentially English landscape.

At first glance the High Weald appears to be a densely wooded landscape, but closer examination reveals a detailed agricultural tapestry of fields, small woodlands and farmsteads. Everything in the High Weald landscape is human scale. Wildflower meadows, alive with bees and grasshoppers, are now a rare delight, but the medieval pattern of small fields with sinuous edges surrounded by thick wooded hedges remain. Extensive views punctuated by church spires can be glimpsed along the ridge-top roads. Around almost every corner, a harmonious group of traditional farm buildings comes into view with their distinctive steep, clay tile and hipped roofs.

The High Weald is crossed by one of the most famous routeways in English history, the one that took King Harold's army from victory at Stamford Bridge to defeat at Hastings in 1066. Today, its rich detail is still best explored through the myriad of interconnecting paths and tracks. Here you can walk in the footsteps of our medieval and Anglo-Saxon ancestors, who used this dense network of routeways to move between the wooded Weald and settlements on its fringes where farming was easier. These tracks remain a visible legacy of the value communities placed on the resources of the forest.

Woodland still covers nearly a third of the area in an intricate network of farm woods, wooded shaws, pits and gills, and larger wooded estates. Medieval forests and deer parks were extensive, with significant remnants surviving in Ashdown Forest, Worth Forest, Waterdown (Broadwater) Forest, St Leonard's Forest and Dallington Forests. Most of the woodland is ancient, managed in the past as coppice and swept with magnificent carpets of bluebells and wood anemones in the spring. Of the mature oaks for which the Weald was once famous, few remain. The drier sandy soils favour pine and birch within a patchwork of lowland heath.

More ancient woodland survives in the High Weald than anywhere else in the country owing to the small size of Wealden holdings, the importance of crafts to supplement the income from agriculture on poor soils and the high economic value of timber for ships and buildings, and to fuel the iron, glass and cloth industries. Woods were enclosed and managed as coppice with standards, producing hardwood and construction timber. Large, widely spaced trees in hedgerows and parklands produced the crooked trunks required for shipbuilding. In the 17th and 18th centuries, when hop growing expanded so did the extent of chestnut coppice for hop poles.

Indications of the area's busy industrial past are everywhere, from the large houses built by wealthy ironmasters and clothmakers, to the charcoal hearths, pits and ponds of the iron industry scattered through ancient woodlands.

The small scale and historical patterning of the landscape, with intermingling woodland, wetland and open habitats, and many interconnected linear features supporting semi-natural vegetation makes for a rich and accessible landscape for wildlife. Sandstone exposed as outcrops or along the wooded gills is a nationally rare habitat and supports a rich community of ferns, bryophytes and lichens. The High Weald meets the sea at Hastings cliffs, an area of undeveloped coastline consisting of actively eroding soft cliffs of sands and clays. The numerous gill streams of the High Weald give rise to the headwaters and upper reaches of rivers, with those to the east

important in the past as trade routes for timber, iron and wool out to the coastal ports on Romney Marsh.

The High Weald is well-known nationally for its wealth of historic houses and gardens including Sheffield Park and Ashburnham Place, both of whose landscaped gardens were designed by Lancelot 'Capability' Brown; the ruined 13th-century Bayham Abbey, with grounds landscaped by Repton; the follies at Brightling created by 18th-century eccentric 'Mad Jack' Fuller; Bodiam Castle, moated and dating from the 14th century, Standen, the Arts & Crafts house designed by Philip Webb; the Jacobean house Batemans, home to Rudyard Kipling; Great Dixter, restored by Lutyens with an internationally-renowned garden created by Christopher Lloyd; and Great Maytham, home to Frances Hodgson Burnett, whose walled garden provided the inspiration for

97% of people find the High Weald's scenery, tranquillity and proximity to nature appealing

High Weald Public Survey, 2018

her classic children's book *The Secret Garden*.

Such accents stand out against the backdrop of a rich tapestry of vernacular architecture composed of materials distinct to the High Weald and which contribute to the unique sense of place, cultural identity and local distinctiveness of both the area as a whole, and its individual settlements.

Wilder elements reminiscent of the former forest survive amid this beautiful small-scale landscape, shaped by man, inspiring many notable people. These include the architect Norman Shaw, painter William Holman Hunt, and William Robinson, who pioneered the creation of the English natural garden, as well as writers Rudyard Kipling and A.A. Milne, who set his much-loved stories about Winnie the Pooh in Ashdown Forest.

The High Weald forms the central core of a geological landform of sedimentary rocks, the Wealden anticline, which underpins the south east. The unique geology of the Weald is shared with only three places in Europe – the northern part of the Isle of Wight, and parts of the Boulonnais and Pays de Bray in France. The Purbeck Beds, which lie along the Battle ridge, form the oldest sediments, having been laid down in shallow lagoons at the end of the Jurassic period (142 million years ago). Iron-rich clays and sandstones followed as the landscape changed to one of flood plains and rivers. The area gradually sank below the sea and around 75 million years ago the great uplift began, followed by compression which folded and faulted the strata. Subsequent weathering has cut through the strata, exposing the layers as sandstone ridges and clay valleys. The amazing variability of soils produced has shaped the Weald's economic and therefore social history.

With rising temperatures at the beginning of the post-glacial period, and the continuing land link to Europe, arboreal species were able to expand with birch, hazel and pine being followed by oak, elm, alder, ash and lime. There is some evidence for small-scale, sporadic and temporary clearance by Mesolithic hunter-gatherers. From c6000 BC, when Britain became separated from Europe, people had already begun to change the landscape; this is evidenced by the scatter of flints used for hunting and the use of fire to make clearings to entice prey. Periodic woodland clearance continued with Bronze Age barrows and Iron Age hill forts indicating active communities in Ashdown Forest, but it was the medieval practice of transhumance – the seasonal movement of people and animals between the settlements on the borders of the Weald and its interior – coupled with exploitation of the valuable resources of the forest, that transformed the Weald into the settled landscape we see today.

*Edited and adapted from *The Kent and Sussex Weald*, Peter Brandon, 2003*

Natural Beauty and the legislative purpose of AONBs (National Landscapes)

The legal purpose of AONB designation is to **conserve and enhance natural beauty**⁵ (CRoW 2000). Section 85 of the CRoW Act sets out the general duties of public bodies ('relevant authorities'):

“In exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in an area of outstanding natural beauty in England, a relevant authority other than a devolved Welsh authority must seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty.”⁶

In the first half of the 20th century, cultural landscapes such as the High Weald were considered to be 'natural' countryside reflecting centuries of human interaction with nature which pre-dated industrial farming. Their distinctive patterns of land cover (landscape character) included unique settlement patterns, building forms and material palettes, and they were enriched by features of scientific (wildlife and geology) and geographic interest and cultural associations originating from centuries of non-mechanised land management.

The 1949 Act summed up this combination of character and interest as 'natural beauty'. Access to natural beauty was seen as a right for everyone now and in the future, with the pleasurable aesthetic experience and sense of wellbeing gained from immersion in nature considered a societal good and a necessary precursor of health and happiness for all.⁷

'Natural beauty' has been the basis for the designation of both AONBs and National Parks since the 1949 Act. Natural beauty is a holistic concept, and whilst the term has never been exhaustively defined in legislation, over the years, qualification and amendment to the legislation has made it clear that natural beauty includes considerations such as wildlife, geological features and cultural heritage but is not restricted by them.

Government guidance relating to 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.*⁸**

This includes scenic quality, tranquillity and cultural heritage (including the built environment), that makes the area unique.

The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 clarified that land used for agriculture, woodlands, parkland or with physiographical features is not prevented from being treated as an area of 'natural beauty'.

For the purposes of this Plan, the High Weald's natural beauty is defined by the Statement of Significance overleaf and expanded in the character component sections of this plan.



5. Updated from 'preserve and enhance natural beauty' in the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949.

6. Amended by the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023

7. (Dower 1945).

8. Guide for AONB partnership members 2001 CA24, available to view at [National Landscapes - Historical Papers \(national-landscapes.org.uk\)](https://national-landscapes.org.uk).

“What aspects of the High Weald do you value most?”

Public Survey 2022



Scenic beautiful walks

Rolling hills

Its natural light

Tranquillity

Unspoiled views

The greenery

Wooded countryside

The peacefulness

Diverse flora and fauna

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High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty – Statement of Significance

The High Weald is one of the best-preserved medieval landscapes in north-west Europe. Despite its large size (1,461 sq.km) and proximity to London, its landscape has remained relatively unchanged since the 14th century, surviving major historical events and accommodating significant social and technological changes.

The natural beauty of the High Weald AONB is derived from the essentially rural and small-scale landscape character, rich in wildlife and cultural features. It has been created by historic and locally distinctive agricultural and forestry practices, with the story of its past visible throughout. The extensive survival of woodland and traditional mixed farming supports an exceptionally well-connected green and blue infrastructure, with a high proportion of natural surfaces. Food production and semi-natural habitat are interwoven in a structurally diverse, permeable and complex mosaic supporting a rich diversity of wildlife. A dense network of historic routeways and public rights of way provides access for people to get close to nature and experience its natural beauty. The pattern and landscape setting of dispersed historic settlements enriches its natural beauty, with small, irregular fields and pasture, hedgerows and ancient woodlands interspersed with the rich clay-tiled roofscapes of historic buildings. Greenness, a sense of tranquillity and dark skies contribute to the perceptual and scenic qualities people enjoy.

The Plan articulates natural beauty through eight core character components which are rooted in the historic characterisation of the High Weald landscape as a whole, and represent the cultural imprint of generations on the natural inheritance of the area. These components encompass finer-grained key characteristics which include habitats, features of interest and cultural associations, and all combine to create a distinct and recognisable landscape whose natural beauty exceeds the sum of its parts.

Each core component of natural beauty is of equal and stand-alone importance in its own right, (i.e., they cannot be ranked) and any policy or action may be considered harmful to the AONB if it results in the loss of, or material harm to, any of these components of character. *All* of the AONB is important; any areas perceived as ‘degraded’ should be seen as opportunities for enhancement of natural beauty contributing positively to the purpose of designation and objectives of the Management Plan.



Core Character Components of the High Weald’s natural beauty comprise

1

Natural systems (geology, soils, water and climate) – a deeply incised, ridged and faulted landform of clays and sandstone with highly variable, relatively undisturbed soils and numerous headwaters (gill streams) functioning under an oceanic climate.

2

Settlement – dispersed historic settlement including high densities of isolated farmsteads, hamlets and late-medieval villages founded on trade and non-agricultural rural industries.

3

Routeways – a dense network of historic routeways (now roads, tracks and paths).

4

Woodland – an abundance of ancient woodland mostly in small holdings, highly interconnected with hedges and shaws.

5

Fieldscapes and heath – small, irregular and productive fields, bound by hedgerows and woods, and typically used for livestock grazing; with distinctive zones of lowland heaths and inned river valleys (reclaimed marshland).

6

Dark night skies – intrinsically dark at night with our own galaxy (the Milky Way) visible.

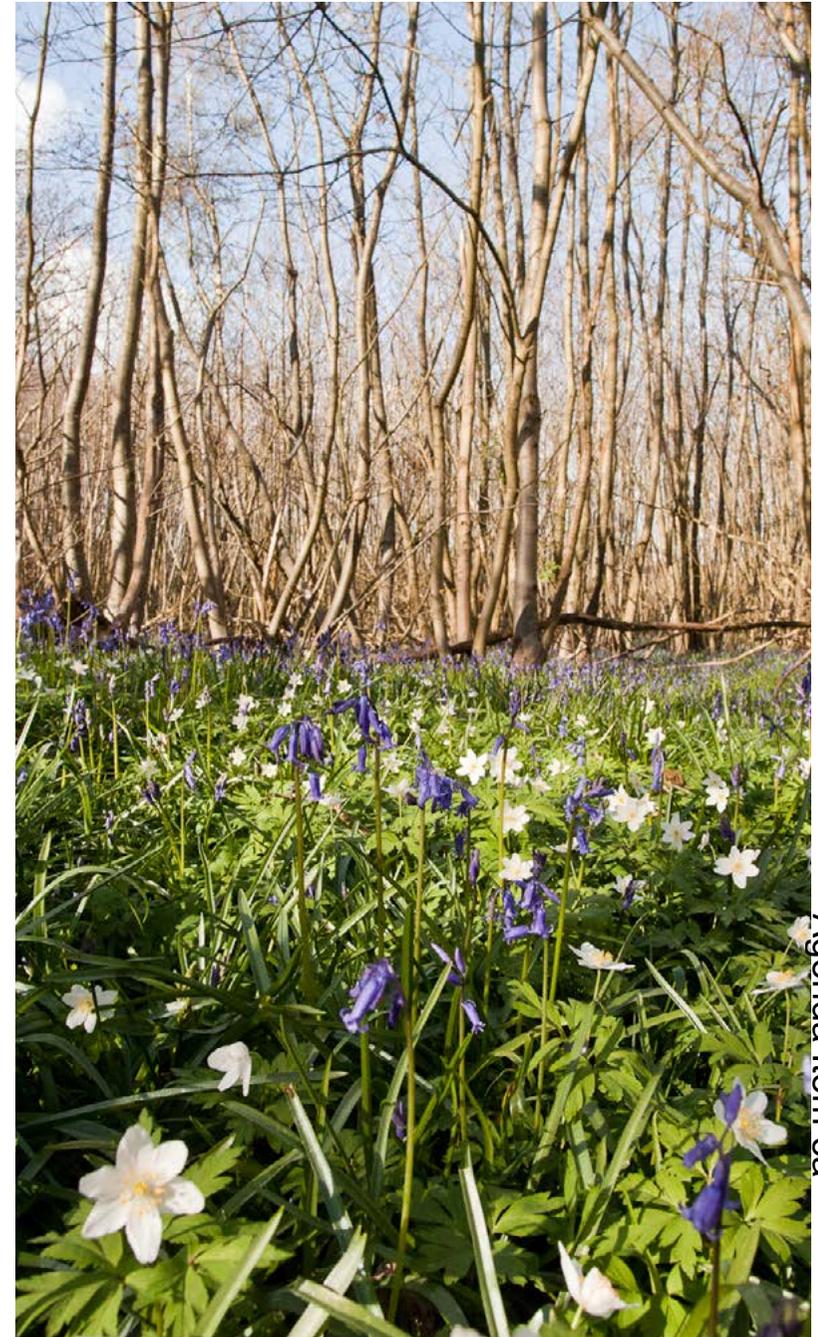
7

Aesthetic and perceptual qualities – arising from the interaction of people with the landscape, including the notion of a quintessential English pastoral landscape, intimacy of scale, a sense of history and timelessness; rurality and tranquillity; glimpsed long views; freedom to explore and make connections with the natural world, and a rich legacy of features and ideas left by writers, poets and gardeners inspired by the landscape.

8

Land-based economy and rural living – with roots extending deep into history, and which has visibly and culturally shaped the landscape

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Character Components

The following sections of the Plan describe each of the core components that underpin the natural beauty of the High Weald AONB in more detail, including **key characteristics** for conservation and enhancement, and the **top five issues**. It sets out for each component a series of **objectives** along with **actions** recommended to guide the activities of partners and stakeholders.

The Actions are set under three headings:

“The partnership will...”

this means actions for the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee (JAC)

“Public bodies should ...”

this means actions for all relevant authorities⁹ including Local Authorities, Parish Councils, Highways Authorities, Statutory undertakers (such as telecoms, water and energy companies etc), and government departments and ALBs (arm’s length bodies) – such as Defra, Natural England, Historic England, Highways England, the Environment Agency and the Forestry Commission.

“Others can assist conservation and enhancement of natural systems by...”

this means actions for landowners, farmers, community groups and other organisations including environmental NGOs.

Cross-cutting themes

Over the next 20 years, the High Weald AONB is facing a number of drivers of change which have the capacity to impact significantly on its core character, and which need to be addressed in this plan period.

Addressing the interconnected threats of the climate emergency, biodiversity, and soil health are priorities for everyone over the next five years, as we can mitigate many of these threats if real-world action is taken now. The challenge will be to capitalise on the High Weald AONB’s ability to restore nature, grow healthy food and reduce carbon emissions while supporting vibrant and diverse rural communities.

The **drivers of change** set out in Part 2 of the Plan are cross-cutting issues which can affect each of the core character components and their objectives. That section of the Plan sets out our strategic principles and priorities for focusing resources and targeting investment on cross-cutting programmes that address these themes.

9. As defined in Section 85 of the CRoW Act



Cross-cutting themes: Drivers of change 2024-2029



Loss of soil and degradation of soil health

Soil is an essential resource. Soil loss and degradation affect the AONB’s ability to produce healthy food, but soil also provides a huge array of other benefits from carbon sequestration and nutrient cycling to restoring the water cycle and flood mitigation. Degraded soil biology affects the health and biodiversity of above and below ground ecosystems that depend upon it, with soil erosion causing sediment loss which undermines the health of our river systems.



People and Access

Inequitable access to the countryside means missing out on the range of health and wellbeing benefits associated with being able to spend time in nature and unequal access to the experience of living and working in the countryside. It concerns everyone today, as well as future generations. Disengagement with the natural world because of a lack of fair access impedes societies’ ability to robustly tackle issues affecting the natural world.



Biodiversity crisis

While the High Weald retains rich assemblages of species (particularly associated with its patchwork historic countryside), habitat loss, pollution, pesticide use and inappropriate/lack of management of habitats have cumulatively harmed species diversity and abundance across key habitats such as ancient woodland and permanent grassland. The loss of plant and animal species affects the High Weald’s ability to be a functioning and resilient landscape.



Climate Emergency

This global issue threatens almost every aspect of the planet and our lives from economics to biodiversity, human health and wellbeing, to infrastructure and food production. The High Weald is already seeing changes in economic land use, more harmful tree diseases and increased flooding. The UK has committed to a legally binding net zero target by 2050 with interim targets to achieve a 68% reduction in UK carbon emissions by 2030 on 1990 levels (Climate Change Conference COP26).



Planning & Development

The scale of housebuilding in the High Weald AONB is currently at an unprecedented level; the High Weald is experiencing the highest level of housing growth of any AONB in England.^{10,11} Pressure from ever increasing numbers of new developments is eroding the historic settlement pattern of the High Weald and the rural landscape with its intrinsic sense of naturalness. Meeting the climate, biodiversity and inequality challenges of the next 20 years will require transformational change in the way that development is planned for and delivered in the High Weald AONB. Being nationally designated for their outstanding natural beauty, AONB landscapes should be exemplars of sustainable planning and design.

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10. [An-independent-review-of-housing-in-Englands-AONBs-2012-17.pdf\(cpre.org.uk\)](#)
 11. [Beauty-still-betrayed.pdf\(cpre.org.uk\)](#)



CHARACTER COMPONENT

Natural Systems (Geology, Soils, Water and Climate)

The High Weald AONB is characterised by a deeply incised, ridged and faulted landform of clays and sandstone creating soils which are highly variable over short distances. 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.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Impressive coastal cliffs of interbedded sandstones and clays (Hastings Cliffs to Pett Beach SSSI and Hastings Cliffs Special Area of Conservation); natural, dynamic, evolving and rich in Lower Cretaceous fossils.
- A principal ridge (Forest Ridge) running east – west from Horsham to Cranbrook with an attached ridge (Battle Ridge) extending to the sea at Fairlight.
- A pattern of faults and folds that distinguishes the High Weald from the rest of the south and east of England, with a high concentration of springs associated with fault lines.
- Numerous small streams descending the main ridges in narrow steep-sided valleys (gills), historically often dammed to power industry with many 'pond bays' and 'hammer ponds' surviving.
- Distinctive outcrops of sandstone in the form of crags (popular with climbers) and inland sea cliffs, gill stream bed and banks, old quarries, and along road edges associated with the survival of rare cryptogam communities (ferns, lichens, liverworts and mosses).
- A high density of pits, quarries and ponds resulting from a long history of stone quarrying, surface mining and marl extraction.
- Locally-distinctive geological materials – sandstone, clay bricks and tiles, and Horsham stone – contributing to high-quality vernacular architecture.
- Carbon-rich soils, often undisturbed, that are distinguished by their variability over short distances – characterised as slowly permeable, seasonally wet, slightly acidic clayey soils, with pockets of sandy acidic soils.
- Heavily channelised and intensively managed river valleys in the eastern High Weald (Rother, Brede and Tillingham) originating in the medieval period, with natural floodplain wetlands rare.
- A high density of ponds, five times higher than the national average, with a wide range of pond types supporting significant species such as great crested newts and emerald dragonflies.
- An oceanic climate featuring cool temperatures relative to the latitude, a narrow annual temperature range with few extremes, and rain throughout the year.

Natural and cultural capital – fact and figures

● 7.6km of eroding sea cliffs designated an SSSI in recognition of the considerable biological, palaeontological and geological interest. ● A unique Lower Cretaceous mammal fauna at Fairlight, one of a handful of localities in the world to have yielded early Cretaceous mammal remains. ● 671 inland sandstone outcrops. ● >315sq km of undisturbed soils. ● 18.6 million tonnes of carbon stored in High Weald soils (to 150cm depth). ● Crowborough Beacon, the highest point at 242m above sea level. ● Headwaters of seven river catchments – Medway (Beult, Eden and Teise), Rother (Brede and Tillingham), Thames (Mole), Arun, Adur, Ouse and Cuckmere. ● 253km of main river channel supporting nationally rare species such as otter and water vole; and coarse and salmonid fisheries. ● A European hotspot for gills. ● 4,613km of water courses in total, including tributaries and streams. ● 13,401 ponds (9/sq. km compared with a national average of 1.8/sq. km) with an estimated 1600 supporting great crested newts. ● 769 springs. ● Five reservoirs including Bewl Water, the largest body of inland water in the South East. ● 20 sq. km of wetlands including reedbeds, lowland fens, coastal and floodplain grazing marsh, purple moor grass and rush pastures. Home to a rich array of birds, including reed warbler and marsh harrier.



TOP 5 ISSUES

1

Climate crisis – the impact of rising temperatures and extreme weather events such as flooding, drought, inundation, tidal surges and storms.

2

Pressure on sensitive geological features from invasive species and recreation.

3

Soil health, the need to improve soil conservation and prevent detrimental soil erosion.

4

Pollution (and diffuse pollution) affecting biodiversity – including from public and private sewage treatment facilities; artificial fertilisers, pesticide and fine sediment run-off into ponds, streams and rivers.

5

Invasive species in rivers, water bodies, wetlands and bankside vegetation.

OBJECTIVE G1

To restore the natural function of rivers, water courses and water bodies.

Rationale

To improve water quality, water resource and structural habitats associated with water; to enhance the role of rivers, water courses and water bodies in supporting and increasing biodiversity, cooling the environment, protecting people and communities from flooding, and promoting enjoyment of wetlands.

OBJECTIVE G3

To pursue net zero across the High Weald without compromising its characteristic landscape beauty.

Rationale

To ensure that transformative mitigation and adaption policies are tailored to the High Weald’s defining landscape character.

OBJECTIVE G2

To protect landform and geological features including sandstone outcrops.

Rationale

To conserve landform and topography on which the High Weald’s character depends, and maintain nationally important geological exposures, allowing for erosion where appropriate, conserving the fern, moss and liverwort communities they support, and protecting their value as significant sites of prehistoric archaeology in the AONB.

OBJECTIVE G4

To restore soil health across the High Weald.

Rationale

To increase carbon sequestration and storage potential of soils, as well as water holding capacity to reduce flooding following high rainfall. Improve the soil ecosystem which supports above-ground and below-ground biodiversity and habitats across the High Weald. Healthy soil has higher nutrients for plants, which reduces the need for artificial fertilizer use in the long-term.

Ambitions for 2029

Harnessing the regenerative power of natural systems and restoring their health will need to be the focus of land-use policy to prevent climate and ecological collapse. Monitoring of pollutants and operations damaging to water, air and soil will need to be improved, enforcement strengthened, and government support targeted at best practice. Climate mitigation and adaptation policies at a local level will need to be guided by the Management Plan in order that solutions are tailored to protect natural beauty.

Further information on maintaining the natural systems of the High Weald landscape, including best practice guidance and practical advice, can be found at www.highweald.org.

ACTIONS

The Partnership will ...

- a. Produce a climate cooling and net-zero plan for their own operations utilising near-term science-based targets, with the intention of achieving net zero for its own operations by spring 2029.
- b. Work with partners to develop a climate cooling and net-zero vision for the High Weald landscape, taking into account the particular character components of the natural beauty of the High Weald, to inform and guide partner decision-making (refer to Cross-cutting theme: Climate Crisis Priorities for detail).
- c. Promote regenerative land management (including maintaining woodland cover) focusing on soil health.

Public bodies should ...

- d. Ensure developments seek to avoid substantive alterations to landform.
- e. Ensure new developments and land use changes protect undisturbed soils, minimise use of permanent impermeable surfaces, and ensure best practice is complied with to protect soils during construction from compaction, pollution and erosion.
- f. Design for new development to maintain and improve natural geomorphological processes (i.e. natural bank erosion) and natural flood capacity.
- g. Ensure water is retained / slowed e.g., by sustainable drainage systems (SuDS), being aware of possible impacts on vulnerable heritage assets, and supporting grey water recycling schemes.
- h. Seek solutions (such as clear-span bridges) for crossing water courses that minimise adverse impacts on river and stream habitats; avoiding new culverts and remove existing culverts where possible.
- i. Work with landowners and other organisations to agree an invasive species control plan for water systems and geological sites.

- j. Resist the use of carbon credit offsetting where the technologies exist to reduce carbon emissions on-site.
- k. Promote ambitious climate cooling scenarios that lead to the earliest reductions in emissions and urban temperatures (refer to Cross-cutting theme: Climate Crisis Priorities for detail).
- l. Support the recovery of High Weald watercourses, including headwaters, by restoring natural processes in order to benefit a range of aquatic and riparian habitats and associated wildlife.
- m. Support fossil fuel-free and public transport initiatives, encouraging walking, cycling and other travel alternatives where possible.

Others can assist conservation and enhancement of natural systems by...

- n. Leaving buffer zones of minimum 5m (10m on slopes) along streams, rivers and ponds.
- o. Encouraging rivers, streams and ponds to develop naturally, with targeted support for vulnerable species such as water vole and rare habitats such as floodplain woodland.
- p. Allowing natural processes and adopt approaches that allow nature to express its capacity to sequester carbon e.g., natural regeneration.
- q. Producing protection plans for ferns, mosses and liverworts at vulnerable sandrock sites.
- r. Adopting soil regeneration approaches to the management of farmland, public spaces and gardens, to prioritise soil health, including minimal soil disturbance practices e.g., no ploughing.
- s. Avoiding run-off of sediment, inorganic fertilizers, pesticides and pollutants into streams, rivers and ponds.
- t. Pursuing appropriate management of ditches and ponds for wildlife and farming.
- u. Allowing targeted riparian woodland creation in appropriate locations primarily through natural regeneration.



CHARACTER COMPONENT

Settlement

The High Weald AONB is characterised by dispersed historic settlements of farmsteads, hamlets, and late medieval villages and market towns founded on trade and non-agricultural rural industries. The landscape setting of these settlements underpins the distinct and picturesque small-scale landscape character, with rolling pastures and small ancient woodlands of the countryside interspersed with the rich clay-tiled roofscapes of historic buildings.



KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- High density of historic farmsteads surrounded by their own fields, with a long continuity of settlement in the same place; their position strongly influenced by topography and routeways.
- Villages and towns mostly of medieval origin located at historic focal points or along ridge top roads, typically centred around open areas used for meeting places and trade, with markets' charters granted in the 13th and 14th centuries.
- Hamlets occurring around the junction of routeways or small commons (which became greens or forstals), or as clusters of cottages serving a particular industry.
- No significant nucleation prior to the 13th century (apart from Battle).
- Large-scale settlement extensions after AONB designation in 1983 are uncharacteristic.
- Pockets of small wayside cottages (peasant settlement enclosing roadside commons or later worker cottages) interspaced with fields.
- Distinctive settlement types and pattern in the eastern High Weald relating to history of the Rother Estuary and river trade.
- Separation between settlements formed by fields associated with individual historic farmsteads, and historic field systems abutting and containing historic settlement.
- Frequent interconnected green spaces within villages linking to the countryside and offering glimpse views to countryside beyond.
- Verdant character of settlements, with substantial soft landscaping; grass verges, lush hedgerows edging front curtilages, and full tree canopies breaking up the built form.
- Frequent – den and – fold place names echoing the area's history of pasturing cattle and pigs.
- Farmsteads typically arranged around routeways, with loose courtyard plan-types common and dispersed plan-types particularly characteristic. Tend to be relatively modest, typically comprising a farmhouse and a barn, often aisled to at least one side with small-scale ancillary structures, mostly for cattle, which face into their own, generally small, yards.
- High numbers of pre-1750 timber-framed farm buildings with typologies representing locally-distinctive historic agricultural practices, including oast houses and other structures associated with the hop industry (hop-pickers' huts); where a complete range exists, these are rare and particularly significant.
- High concentrations of historic buildings in all settlement types, many listed, whose form and appearance reflects historic and socio-cultural functions (such as the prevalence of craft industries), with locally distinctive typologies, including medieval Wealden Hall Houses (found either as rural farmhouses, or incorporated into the fabric of villages and towns, and often much disguised through later alterations), and features such as catslide roofs.
- Villages and hamlets typically unlit contributing to intrinsically dark skies landscapes.
- A limited palette of local materials intrinsically linked to geology and landscape character, reinforcing local distinctiveness: clay as tiles and brick, timber as weatherboard and framing, and some localised instances of stone.

Natural and cultural capital – fact and figures

- 17 market towns and villages with populations >2,000, the largest being Battle with a population >6,000.
- 11% households classified as isolated farms (compared with an average of 8% across all protected landscapes).
- 98.3% households in areas classified as rural.
- >3,500 historic farmsteads.
- 5,274 listed buildings.
- 57 medieval parish churches.
- 50 registered parks and gardens on Historic England register.
- 64 village conservation areas.
- 91 scheduled ancient monuments.



TOP 5 ISSUES

1

Increase in greenfield development pressure for housing, threatening the character of the AONB.

2

Generic layout and design of new housing developments failing to reinforce AONB character.

3

Erosion of AONB character through the cumulative effects of suburbanisation, including the residential fragmentation of farmsteads; the extension of residential curtilage boundaries, additional annexes and outbuildings, inappropriate boundary treatments, hard surfacing and kerbing, and large intrusive replacement buildings.

4

Declining housing affordability, including lack of social housing and key worker housing suitable for land-based workers.

5

Infill development eroding the greenness and open space of villages, threatening the character of settlement and reducing green connectivity and opportunities for community enjoyment.

OBJECTIVE S1

To protect the historic pattern and character of settlements.

Rationale

To protect the distinctive character and landscape settings of towns, villages, hamlets and farmsteads, remove despoiling influences, and maintain the hinterlands and other relationships (including separation and green infrastructure) between settlements that contribute to local identity.

OBJECTIVE S3

To conserve the distinct built heritage of the High Weald.

Rationale

To protect and preserve the character and setting of heritage assets (designated and non-designated); historic traditional buildings and built features distinct to the High Weald area, including the historic public realm (e.g., traditional signs, railings, milestones and paving treatments).

OBJECTIVE S2

To enhance the architectural quality of the High Weald and ensure new development reflects the character of the High Weald in its siting, scale, layout and design.

Rationale

To enhance the beauty and quality of buildings in the High Weald, and ensure new development reflects intrinsic High Weald character and place-making, embedded with a true sense of place, along with re-establishing the use of local materials and rich colour palette as a means of protecting the environment and adding to local distinctiveness.

‘[development should be] fully sympathetic to, and in scale with, the land use and local building style’.

Lord Strang, Chairman of the National Parks Commission, speaking about designated landscapes in 1959.

‘Places and buildings... tend to be enriching elements in the sum of scenic beauty’.

Report on National Parks 1945

Ambitions for 2029

Conserving the dispersed historic settlement pattern, which arose before the advent of the private car, will require positive planning and innovative sustainable transport strategies. New housing development will be small-scale and in keeping with the character of the area. Its location and design will be based on meeting local needs (including affordability and housing mix) through high quality and landscape-led place-making and design principles that reflect intrinsic High Weald character, embedded with a true sense of place, without stifling innovation and creativity in the use of local materials and net zero technologies. The energy performance of existing housing stock will be upgraded, whilst still preserving the special character and local distinctiveness of the historic built environment and heritage assets.

Further information on maintaining the settlement pattern of the High Weald landscape, including best practice guidance and practical advice, can be found at www.highweald.org

ACTIONS

The Partnership will ...

- a. Develop technical appendices to support the High Weald Housing Design Guide, on topics such as sustainable and net zero design, soft landscaping, and the public realm.
- b. Develop and deliver training and capacity-building programmes for LPAs and other partners regarding the Housing Design Guide, to improve design scrutiny in planning decision-making.
- c. Seek to support LPAs in developing landscape-led planning policies that contribute to net zero regarding settlement in the AONB, including location of development and sustainable transport strategies (refer to Cross-cutting theme: Climate Crisis Priorities for detail).
- d. Support neighbourhood planning groups to utilise the AONB Management Plan, data and guidance.
- e. Promote the desirability of the reduction of housing pressure and pressure for greenfield development in the AONB.

Public bodies should ...

- f. Promote use of the High Weald Housing Design Guide and historic landscape characterisation to guide settlement planning and to help avoid generic approaches to layout and design of new development.
- g. Ensure there is reference to the AONB Management Plan and to the AONB Housing Design Guide in local plans, neighbourhood plans and other public documents, and ensure its use as material consideration in planning decisions; planning policy, site allocations and development management.
- h. Pursue landscape-led positive planning approaches to settlement planning and housing delivery in the AONB, seeking to prioritise the delivery of new housing primarily through small-scale development consistent with AONB character, recognising the potential for harm through the cumulative effects of separate developments on the designated landscape.
- i. Seek to deliver a mix of housing sizes and types that respond to local needs, including the specific requirements of land-based workers and affordable housing.

- j. Identify and protect areas of separation between settlements and green/blue infrastructure connections across settlements, for both landscape setting and ecological values.
- k. Seek to minimise erosion of AONB character through suburbanisation in rural areas, including landscape-intrusive replacement dwellings, extensions to residential curtilages, annexes, and smaller interventions such as new accesses and solid fences, which have a cumulative effect.
- l. Ensure the design and maintenance of highways and the public realm, including street furniture, has regard to local distinctive character and avoids suburbanisation or generic approaches.
- m. Protect and preserve the character and setting of historic traditional buildings and features distinct to the High Weald area, including medieval hall houses, catslide roofs, oast houses and other traditional agricultural buildings, structures such as cattle sheds and hoppers' huts, and the compositional qualities of farmsteads.
- n. Pursue a listed building review to tackle the under-listing of historic farm buildings, along with seeking to increase local listing.

Others can assist conservation and enhancement of High Weald settlement by ...

- o. Using the High Weald Housing Design Guide in the earliest stages of the process of developing proposals to inform High Weald specific, landscape-led approaches to layout.
- p. Adopting a local and renewable materials first procurement policy, and supporting activities which celebrate and promote local products and services.
- q. Making space for wildlife to thrive around buildings, gardens and urban spaces and the public realm, and encouraging planting for nature with native species of local provenance and pollinator-friendly plants.
- r. Avoiding operations which sterilise soil or cover it with impermeable materials or plastic grass.



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CHARACTER COMPONENT

Routeways

The High Weald AONB is characterised by historic routeways (now roads, tracks, bridleways and paths), the oldest being in the form of ridge-top roads and a dense system of radiating droveways. These are often narrow, deeply sunken and edged with trees, hedges, wildflower-rich verges and boundary banks. These locally distinctive lanes and rights of way often display quietness and rurality in their visual and perceptual character, and they are valuable green infrastructure, creating high public accessibility within the AONB and good connections between settlements.



KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- A dense, radiating network with a variety of origins including:
 - Droveways, used for moving livestock, radiating out to pre-historic sites on the edge of the Weald.
 - Ridgeways on high ground and often running east-west, closely associated with pre-historic sites and medieval trading settlements.
 - Roman roads cutting across these patterns and strongly associated with iron-working sites.
- Typically present by the 14th century, with many extending back into pre-history and pre-dating settlements.
- Sunken routeways ('holloways') found on sloping land as a result of long use and erosion combined with water run-off.
- 'Braiding' common resulting from people, animals and vehicles finding alternative routes through impassable areas.
- Earth banks, lynchets and ditches typically indicating the former width of the routeway or to separate users from farmland or woodland.
- Wide grass verges common, indicating the historic width of routeways and their function as linear common grazing.
- Species-rich verges as well-preserved relics of their woodland or grassland habitat.
- Small-scale variations in habitat associated with a complex mixture of substrates, aspects and moisture levels supporting a rich biodiversity, especially invertebrates.
- Frequent sandstone exposures, adding diverse assemblages of specialist plants and animals.
- Linear nature facilitating foraging and dispersal and contributing significantly to the ecological interconnectedness of the High Weald.
- Veteran trees and ancient roadside coppice (often showing evidence of laying) frequent, providing niches for lichens and deadwood-dependent beetles.
- Many lost, stopped or diverted routeways evidenced by holloways, earth banks and depressions in the ground.
- Associated heritage public realm features – pre-1964 fingerposts, 'black and white' road signs, roadside milestones.
- Archaeology and cultural associations in the eastern High Weald from trade and the practice of exporting heavy goods (e.g., timber and iron) by floating them at high tide on waterways navigable until the late 13th century.

Natural and cultural capital – fact and figures

- 2,570km of public rights of way. ● More than 75% of public rights of way are historic (i.e., present on Ordnance Survey maps from at least 1860). ● 1,873km roads.
- More than 80% of roads are historic (i.e., in existence since at least 1800). ● The High Weald is crossed by one the most famous routeways in English history – the one that took King Harold's army from victory at Stamford Bridge to defeat at Hastings in 1066. ● Two main Roman roads (London-Lewes and London-Hassocks/Brighton). ● Droveways dating to the Anglo-Saxon period and earlier for moving livestock (pigs and cattle). ● More than 4,400km of highly interconnected green infrastructure bounded by flower-rich verges, hedges and woods.



TOP 5 ISSUES

1

Extinguishments of public rights of way (PRoWs) and diversions away from the historic route.

2

Loss of historic roadside character through development and erosion from motor vehicles and wide agricultural machinery, particularly in wet conditions

3

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Damage to paths, tracks and Byways Open to All Traffic from the erection of fences; erosion from off-road vehicles, inappropriate surfacing and planting, fly-tipping, and ploughing up of lost routeways.

4

Insensitive management of veteran trees/roadside coppice and poorly planned verge cutting regimes and ditch clearance, resulting in the smothering of woodland flora on shady banks with wood chip, and of wildflowers on relic grassland verges with grass cuttings/spoil.

5

Insensitive highway engineering including passing bays, deep visibility splays to entrances, and urbanising features such as roundabouts, signage and lighting.

OBJECTIVE R1

To maintain the historic pattern, morphology and features of routeways.

Rationale

To maintain and restore a routeway network that has a symbiotic relationship with settlement location, hinterlands and identity, and is a rare UK survival of an essentially medieval landscape; to protect the individual archaeological features of historic routeways such as sunken lanes; and to avoid harming character of routeways with urbanising features.

OBJECTIVE R2

To protect and enhance the ecological function of routeways.

Rationale

To protect, and improve the condition of, the complex mix of small-scale habitats along routeways, including verges, for wildlife and nature recovery, and maintain routeway boundaries as part of a highly interconnected habitat mosaic.

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Ambitions for 2029

Routeways walked for hundreds of years will need protection from unnecessary diversions, alterations, or suburbanisation, while the historic and ecological importance of associated routeway features such as verges, hedges, ditch and bank systems, and roadside coppice, to connect and restore nature will need to be recognised, protected and appropriately managed. A re-prioritised hierarchy of routes, with functional routes for pedestrians, cyclists, public transport, and other active travel, connecting homes, schools, services and businesses may be needed to meet the net zero challenge, along with improved public access to the countryside for leisure.

ACTIONS

The Partnership will ...

- a. Provide training for highway management engineers and contractors to ensure all roadside verges are managed sensitively for landscape character, including biodiversity and archaeology.
- b. Provide guidance to PRow teams in local highway authorities for considering historic routeways in the High Weald in diversion/ extinguishment applications.

Public bodies should ...

- c. Identify historic routeways in highway improvement plans (including Rights of Way Improvement Plans (ROWIPs)) and consider management tailored to enhance their historic character, including early intervention to protect banks.
- d. Ensure there is reference to the AONB Management Plan in Local Transport Plans (LTPs), and ensure its use to inform highways works and to support funding bids
- e. Avoid diversion of historic routeways and have regard in decision-making and in the planning process, to the historic alignment of roads, tracks and paths, .
- f. Assess, and where appropriate recognise, historic routeways as non-designated heritage assets in the planning process.
- g. Resist new access points that would damage the character of sunken routeways.
- h. Discourage lane widening, the introduction of lay-bys, or casual parking that erodes or dilutes the pattern of routeways.
- i. Identify ecologically rich historic routeways in biodiversity and green infrastructure planning.

- j. Prioritise the specialist management of ecologically rich road verges in highway management, including following best practice advice¹²; implementing appropriate cutting regimes, avoiding smothering with chip piles or grass cuttings and ditch dredging, and refraining from planting non-native species.
- k. Support the identification, retention and restoration of traditional fingerposts, railings, boundary stones and turnpike features (e.g., milestone and toll houses), adding to the relevant Historic Environment Record where appropriate.
- l. Adopt careful approaches to any upgrading proposals to historic routeways as part of access enhancement, and seek to take enforcement action against unauthorised works, to ensure proposals do not adversely affect the natural beauty of the High Weald (refer to Cross-cutting theme: People & Access Principles for detail).

Others can assist conservation and enhancement of High Weald routeways by

- m. Avoiding fencing and other activity such as the use of machinery which damages routeway archaeology (including ditches and banks) or that alters its historic alignment.
- n. Encouraging the identification and protection of ecologically rich roadside verges and alerting the relevant Highways Authority to their presence or damage.

¹² [Managing-grassland-road-verges-2020.pdf\(plantlife.org.uk\)](https://www.plantlife.org.uk/resources/12-managing-grassland-road-verges-2020.pdf)

Further information on maintaining the historic routeways of the High Weald landscape, including best practice guidance and practical advice, can be found at www.highweald.org.



CHARACTER COMPONENT

Woodland

The High Weald AONB is characterised by the great extent of woodland including ancient woods, gills and shaws, the product of traditional long-term management. The nationally important assemblage of ancient woodland in the High Weald has immense wildlife, landscape and historical value, while the wider cumulative visual character of trees and hedgerows dividing small irregular fields is fundamental to the verdant nature and appearance of the landscape.



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KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Highly interconnected and structurally varied mosaic of many small woods, larger forests and numerous linear gill woodlands, shaws, wooded routeways and outgrown hedges, and isolated trees.
- High proportion of woodland is categorised as ancient woodland (46%), typically broadleaved coppice with a rich ground flora, with many more woodlands equivalent in conservation interest. A further fifth of woodland is protected 'plantations on ancient woodlands' (PAWS), much of which is under restoration.
- Many irregularly shaped small woodlands interlinked with shaws, isolated trees, thick hedges and wooded sunken lanes, forming an intimate part of the farmed landscape.
- A number of very large woods lying mostly along the high sandy ridges, such as Dallington and Bedgebury; and remnants of the area's medieval hunting forests, including at Worth Forest and Ashdown Forest.
- Visible evidence of historic use and exploitation (including coppice stools, stubs, pollards, boundary bank and ditch systems, routes and tracks; remains of Roman and medieval iron-working such as slag heaps and ponds, and large earthworks relating to the harnessing of waterpower to fuel furnaces, forges and mills).
- High density of gill woodlands (deeply incised ravines with particularly humid and relatively stable microclimates) – the oldest and least disturbed woodland in the south east supporting a community of plants, vascular and non-vascular, not found together anywhere else in Europe, and important for rare plant species such as small-leaved lime, hay-scented buckler fern, Tunbridge filmy-fern, and rare invertebrates including beetles and molluscs.
- Frequent patches of wet woodland associated with surface water in the form of steep sided streams, springs, wet flushes and water-filled extraction pits, important for regionally distinctive species such as smooth-stalked sedge.
- Large numbers of isolated trees (often remnants from lost woodlands or hedges), such as in-field trees that provide additional connectivity to the wider landscape, as well as shelter and food source to a wide range of species.
- A stronghold for characteristic species such as dormice, and remnant populations of rare species such as pearl-bordered fritillary butterfly.
- Open woodland mosaics of wooded heath, which support both heath plants such as heathers and trees, and act as a transitional habitat.
- Considerable variability in woodland types and tree forms over short distances reflecting the variety of soils, micro-climates and drainage conditions (Principle National Vegetation Classification communities are W10 and W8 with some W15 and W16 on sandier ridges).
- Wood-pasture and parkland, mostly originating from once extensive historic deer parks; an archaeological and cultural feature, open habitats or open heath supporting veteran/ancient trees and their associated wildlife.
- Nationally significant resource of epiphytic (plants that grow on other plants rather than the soil) and dead-wood dependent species supported by a wealth of veteran trees.
- A traditionally strong commercial woodland industry focused on coppice and locally grown hardwoods.
- A culture of small-scale management by people using hand tools to produce a wide variety of products mostly for local use.
- Trees used for boundary markers (including outgrown old laid hedges, stubs and pollards), many of which are accessible on public rights of way.

Natural and cultural capital – fact and figures

● 28% woodland cover (nearly 3x English average). ● 83% broadleaved woodland, the majority as coppice. ● Highest coverage of ancient woodland in any protected landscape (3/4 all woodland or 19% land cover) covering 273sq km of undisturbed woodland soil. ● >2,800 parcels of ancient woodland under 2ha. ● Nationally significant: 8% of England's ancient woodland resource. ● <22% ancient woodland classified as Plantations on Ancient Woodlands (PAWS). ● 191sq km gill woodland in > 1,800 sites supporting internationally rare cryptogams. ● 56sq km UK BAP priority habitat: wood pasture and parkland. ● More than 7.5m tonnes of carbon stored in woodlands and their soils with an additional > 0.75m tonnes sequestered every year. ● 3sq km traditional orchards containing 34 apple varieties.



TOP 5 ISSUES

1

Predicted increase in tree diseases such as ash dieback and spruce bark beetle, partly through imported stock or soil, and continued damage from invasive species including rhododendron, grey squirrel and deer damage from over-population of deer across the High Weald.

2

Procurement practices and lack of investment restricting market growth for higher value locally sourced wood products.

3

Lack of management where needed, particularly cessation of traditional coppicing affecting ground flora, and fauna species such as fritillaries.

4

Impact of increasing mechanisation and machinery size on soils, the variation and structural complexity of woodlands, and archaeology.

5

Impact of development close to ancient woodland resulting in increased noise and disturbance, and pressure to fell trees and hedgerows as part of development, (including post-development) with a cumulative impact on ecology and reduction in tree cover.

OBJECTIVE W1

To maintain and restore the existing extent and pattern of woodland cover and particularly ancient woodland.

Rationale

To ensure irreplaceable habitats and biodiversity loss are repaired for the benefit of nature and future generations. To maintain a key component of the cultural landscape, and to preserve the high levels of carbon storage in woodland soils and biomass.

OBJECTIVE W3

To protect the archaeology and historic assets of AONB woodlands.

Rationale

To protect the historic environment of the AONB woodlands.

OBJECTIVE W2

To protect and restore the ecological quality and functioning of woodland at a landscape scale.

Rationale

To increase the viability of the woodland habitat for wildlife, by identifying and extending the area of appropriately managed woodland (including restoring plantations on ancient 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.

OBJECTIVE W4

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, and to support a working countryside.

Ambitions for 2029

With the beauty and biodiversity of woodlands in the High Weald already under threat from a combination of pests and diseases, disturbance, a warming climate and invasive species, protection will need to focus on fostering healthy and resilient woodlands and buffering through natural regeneration to allow nature to thrive. Tackling invasive species and deer will be a priority. Non-intervention approaches will become more common unless traditional coppice regimes are being maintained or woodlands are being managed for high-quality timber. In these cases, management will be predominantly small-scale with industrialised mechanical harvesting avoided to protect archaeology and soils. Local timber and underwood will once again be essential materials for buildings, fencing and other uses.

ACTIONS

The Partnership will ...

- a. Support landscape scale initiatives and nature recovery projects to reverse the decline in key woodland species and protect and enhance vulnerable habitats such as gill woodlands and wet woodland.
- b. Seek to ensure agri-environmental schemes and similar grant schemes are tailored to the specific needs of the High Weald woodland.

Public bodies should ...

- c. Resist development that risks the loss or deterioration of ancient woodland or veteran trees, including ASNW and PAWS, through direct and indirect impacts as set out in the Natural England and Forestry Commission 'standing advice' **Ancient woodland, ancient trees and veteran trees: advice for making planning decisions**
- d. Ensure appropriate buffer zones to woodland, (minimum 15m zones, when justified by survey, otherwise 25m) to protect from the detrimental direct and indirect impacts of nearby developments, including activity and light spill.
- e. Recognise the ecological and landscape value of non-designated woodland and trees, and ensure design of new housing development retains existing woodlands, shaws and other trees in and adjacent to schemes, for ecological and landscape character benefits.
- f. Require woodland archaeology assessments for woodland which would be affected by development, and provide data to county Historic Environment Records, ensuring this is used in the planning process.
- g. Protect ancient woodland soil and ground flora from inappropriate management practices such as heavy machinery damage and chipping-to-mulch, and to consider such practices as part of assessments of felling licence applications and in highways management / statutory undertakers' protocols.
- h. Enhance and restore shaws and gill woodlands.

- i. Support appropriate commercial woodland management, in particular tailored support for a vibrant timber economy in the High Weald woodland landscape.
- j. Promote the use of small dimension roundwood timber in construction and use of untreated local timber for traditional purposes such as fencing, public realm seating, signs and weatherboard.
- k. Adopt UK tree and plant health biosecurity policies and support local provenance tree nurseries.
- l. Tailor environmental land management support to control invasive species, including landscape-scale deer management; grey squirrel eradication; and removal of rhododendron and other damaging invasive plants from ancient woodland, particularly gill woodland.

Others can assist conservation and enhancement of woodlands by:

- m. Controlling invasive species such as rhododendron, grey squirrels and deer.
- n. Avoiding activities, such as fencing or use of heavy machinery, which damage archaeological features (e.g., ditch and bank systems, holloways and saw pits).
- o. Maintaining stock-proof fences and hedgerows around ancient woodland to avoid livestock damage.
- p. Avoiding use of large-scale machinery and instead using traditional techniques such as hand cutting, horses or small-scale machinery for woodland management to avoid damage to High Weald woodland.
- q. Allowing natural regeneration in and around woodland where appropriate.
- r. Keeping woodlands, including buffer zones, free of litter, garden waste and ornamental plants.
- s. Demonstrate responsible woodland access; avoiding disturbance to breeding birds or trampling damage to ground flora.

Further information on maintaining woodland in the High Weald landscape, including best practice guidance and practical advice, can be found at www.highweald.org.



CHARACTER COMPONENT

Fieldscape and Heath

The High Weald AONB is characterised by an intricate and scenic mosaic of small, irregularly shaped and productive fields often bounded by hedgerows, shaws and small woodlands and in-field trees, and typically used for livestock grazing and small-scale horticulture; within which can be found distinctive zones of lowland heath and inned / reclaimed river valleys. Predominantly undisturbed and highly productive Grade 3 good agricultural grazing land, reflecting the typical and historic agricultural practices of the area, and as such is intrinsically valuable to the landscape character.



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KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- A generally irregular field pattern with individual fields relatively small (less than three hectares).
- Fieldscape characterised by historic farmsteads surrounded by their own fields resulting from medieval farming in severalty i.e., land held by individuals rather than in common.
- Strong influence exerted by topography with many field systems aligned to or 'hanging' from (at right angles to) linear features such as watercourses or ridge-top roads.
- Predominantly pastoral mixed farming with an absence of industrial scale livestock farming, and undisturbed soils contributing to carbon sequestration.
- Fields, mostly permanent pasture, used for grazing livestock with some small-scale horticulture and cropping.
- Medieval fieldscape character dominant, with a high proportion of field systems created by assarting (woodland clearance) with sinuous mixed woody boundaries and shaws, and thick hedges common.
- Boundary ditch and bank features typical, along woodland edges or topped with hedges and veteran trees.
- A rich, extensive network of ancient mixed species hedgerows of high ecological and landscape character value.
- Wide, verdant historic hedgerows traditionally managed by laying.
- Unmanaged fields quickly succeed back towards woodland because of abundant tree seeds from the pattern of small woodlands bounding many fields.
- Nationally important fragments of species-rich grassland (such as NVC MG5), supporting an incredibly rich variety of plants, animals, and grassland fungi.
- High proportion of fragmented species-rich grassland scattered within a landscape containing a high proportion of good quality semi-improved grasslands.
- Traditional orchards and hop gardens scattered across the landscape forming part of the visual fieldscape and also providing dead and decaying wood for invertebrates, and a mosaic of other habitats.
- A frequency of deer parks and later 18th-century estates.
- Ashdown Forest (an extensive area of common land and one of the largest continuous blocks of lowland heath, semi-natural woodland and valley bog in the south east) supporting internationally important populations of nightjar and Dartford warbler.
- Distinctive areas of wooded heath and lowland heath scattered along the sandy ridges supporting a complex mosaic of plant communities, rare species such as marsh clubmoss, and more than half of UK's dragonfly species.
- Fragmented grass and ericaceous heath is found particularly on old forest ride systems and along woodland ridges and old hedge banks throughout the High Weald.

'The existence of a flourishing and progressive agriculture is fundamental to...the preservation and enhancement of the characteristic landscape.'

Report of the National Parks Committee, Sir Arthur Hobhouse, 1947



CLICK FOR MAPS

Natural and cultural capital – fact and figures

● >1,500 farm holdings (2nd highest number of holdings in an AONB) with >750 livestock holdings. ● 17,000 RPA registered parcels of land <1.5ha. ● Average farm size is less than half the national average. ● 70% of fields remain unaffected by reorganisation in the late 20th century. ● >12,500km of hedgerows and field boundaries providing homes for pollinating insects and a source of wild food. ● 220sq km land owned by conservation organisations or designated under international or UK law to protect wildlife, including 64sq km internationally important sites and 51 SSSI's covering 55sq km. ● <3% land cover known wildflower meadows with estimated <40% fields semi-improved grassland with potential for enhancement. ● Nearly 50% of AONB supported by government-funded schemes to encourage environmentally sensitive land management. ● 85% of land is Grade 3 and 4 under the Agricultural Land Classification. ● <5% agricultural holders under 35 years old. ● Steep decline in livestock numbers, with sheep and cattle numbers down by one-third since 2000.

TOP 5 ISSUES

1

Fragmentation of farm holdings due to an increase in non-farming land ownership and loss of farm infrastructure e.g., barns at a holding level

2

Declining agricultural workforce and consequential reduction in sustainable food production

3

Increasing costs of maintaining grazing infrastructure (including reducing supporting agricultural infrastructure such as livestock markets and abattoirs) and costs of managing significant levels of associated habitats such as hedgerows.

4

Loss of green fields to development and infrastructure, or conversion to other land uses such as woodland.

5

Loss of high value grasslands (unimproved and semi-improved) and hedgerows through land use change, inappropriate management and lack of management, leading to fragmentation of habitats, affecting biodiversity and species resilience.

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OBJECTIVE FH1

To secure agriculturally productive use for the fields of the High Weald, 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, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, 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.

OBJECTIVE FH3

To protect and enhance the ecological function of field and heath as part of the complex mosaic of High Weald habitats.

Rationale

To improve the condition, landscape permeability and connectivity of fields and heaths and their associated and interrelated habitats (such as hedges, trees, woodlands, ditches, ponds and water systems) for wildlife.

OBJECTIVE FH2

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.

OBJECTIVE FH4

To protect individual archaeological features as well as historic assets and pattern of fields and heath.

Rationale

To protect the historic environment of the AONB that includes the pattern of fields, and individual archaeological features.

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Ambitions for 2029

The management of fieldscapes will need to change substantially over the next five years, with regenerative approaches to food production and nature recovery becoming the norm. The comprehensive decline in biodiversity will not be reversed by focusing on nature reserves only. Fieldscapes will need to be restored so wildlife can thrive there. The small-scale nature of the High Weald's fields are ideally suited for productive farming using regenerative agricultural practices. The smaller, permanent grass fields suiting holistic planned livestock grazing with the grass and surrounding trees and hedges providing nutrient-rich forage for cows, sheep and other livestock. These will need to be interspersed with wilder areas providing reservoirs for pollinators and other wildlife. New and innovative approaches, such as agroforestry, will need to be trialled with layered production of nuts, soft and top fruit becoming more common, taking advantage of the High Weald's ability to grow trees and grass well. Small-scale vegetable production using regenerative agriculture practices to supply local markets will need to increase, drawing on the High Weald's mixed farming history. Chemical input from pesticides and artificial fertilizers will need to be drastically cut. There may be a small increase in tree cover and scrub, but most of the fieldscape and heathy areas will remain as open habitats.

ACTIONS

The Partnership will ...

- a. Seek to ensure agri-environment schemes and other farming support schemes are tailored to the specific needs of the High Weald landscape.
- b. Prepare best practice guidance for sustainable land management of the High Weald.
- c. Facilitate landscape scale initiatives aimed at reversing biodiversity loss associated with field and heath management.
- d. Continue to provide a High Weald specific land management advisory service (specialising in regenerative approaches) to landowners and managers, including providing support to farmers entering agri-environment schemes.
- e. Support and facilitate scientific research in collaboration with academic institutions to further knowledge and understanding of the semi-improved grassland spectrum, and support dissemination of best practice management to advisors and site managers.
- f. Provide specialist advice to support the management of boundary features including hedgerows, coppice and veteran trees.

Public bodies should...

- g. Require development to protect and enhance existing field patterns, including hedges, ditches or other boundary features, and where possible to restore them when lost, and in particular avoid harm to medieval field systems in planning and decision-making, especially where there is a high degree of intactness or relationship with other notable landscape and heritage features.
- h. Develop and deliver tailored support for pasture-fed livestock farming utilising regenerative grazing and soil conservation management techniques.

- i. Recognise in decision-making the food productivity value and quality of grade 3a and 3b soils as being of greater importance to the High Weald's pastoral agriculture economy and landscape character than simply the ALC grade.
- j. Promote and enforce the Hedgerow Regulations 1997, in recognition of the importance of hedgerows in the High Weald.
- k. Foster small-scale horticulture (soft and top fruit, nuts and vegetables) and associated necessary infrastructure.
- l. Support development of an audit of unimproved and semi-improved meadows.

Others can assist conservation and enhancement of fieldscape and heath by...

- m. Developing veteran tree replacement plans for hedges and shaws.
- n. Utilising local provenance wildflower seeds and plant plugs to create or enhance grassland.
- o. Restoring, protecting and managing hedgerows as part of a diverse hedgerow mosaic, reinstating lost hedgerows, and ensuring hedges are cut only between September and March to avoid damage to wildlife
- p. Avoiding new woodland planting on medieval fieldscapes and heath, and on species-rich grassland, to protect grassland and heathland biodiversity.
- q. Protecting local and heritage breeds and crop varieties to preserve genetic diversity.
- r. Proactively encourage management and monitoring of local wildlife sites and review the designation of new sites.
- s. Sensitively managing and restoring lowland heathland as a key habitat.

Further information on maintaining the fieldscapes of the High Weald landscape, including best practice guidance and practical advice, can be found at www.highweald.org.

CHARACTER COMPONENT

Dark Skies

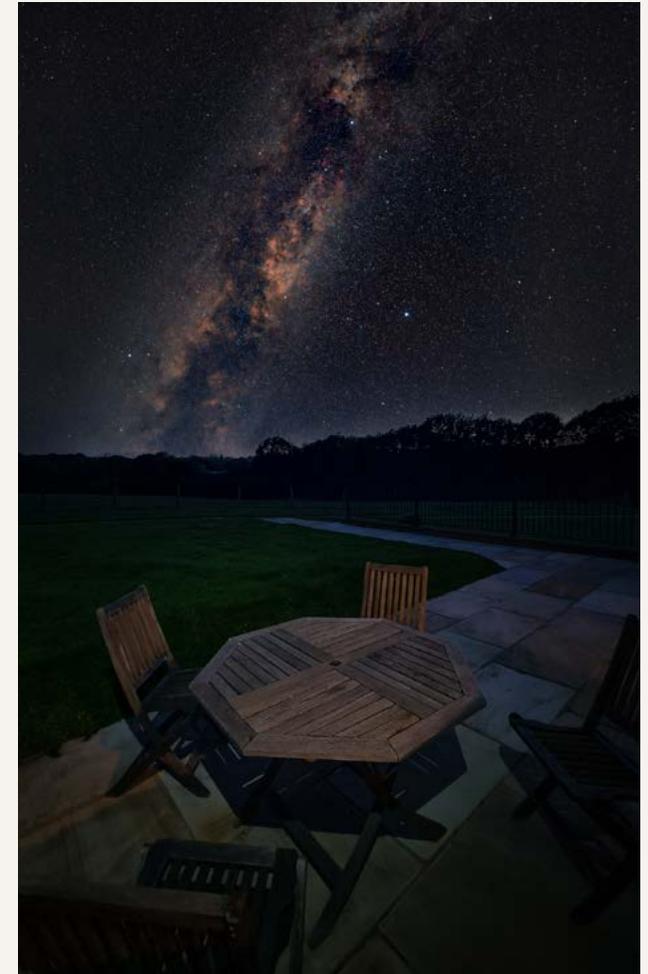
The High Weald AONB is characterised by having some of the darkest skies in the south-east of England. This gives the AONB a sense of remoteness and peacefulness and connects the natural environment to the cultural and historic landscape.



Agenda Item 6a

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Intrinsically dark landscapes with a sense of naturalness.
- Some of the intrinsically darkest skies in Southern England, with the least skyglow.
- Our own galaxy, the Milky Way, is observable, as well as the planetary bodies.
- Key constellations such as Orion, Ursa Major and Cassiopeia are visible to the naked eye.
- Deep sky objects are visible to the naked eye, such as the Andromeda Galaxy and Orion Nebula.
- Many rural villages with few street lamps or no street lighting.
- Numerous unlit roads, including A-roads, throughout the High Weald.
- A range of nocturnal species which are dependent on dark skies for feeding, including Natterer's bat, serotine bat, brown long-eared bat, common pipistrelle, noctule bat, Bechstein's bat, dormice, hedgehog, the heart and marsh mallow moths, and glow-worms.



CLICK FOR MAPS

Natural and cultural capital – fact and figures

● 41 of the 99 parishes within the AONB have wholly dark or intrinsically dark skies. ● A further 15 having 95% coverage of intrinsically dark skies. ● 20 parishes in the AONB have collected light meter readings. ● 15 of the 17 UK bat species are found in the High Weald, all of which are protected.

TOP 5 ISSUES

1

Lack of minimum standards for external lighting that can be enforced. Standards are needed to set out basic principles of dark skies lighting and signpost to guidance and advice where needed.

2

Increased light pollution in rural areas from a variety of buildings and structures including new developments (street lighting and domestic light spill); housing designed with extensive glazing, such as wrap-around or floor-to-ceiling windows; external security lighting; rural out-buildings; public buildings and spaces such as railway stations; camping and glamping sites, and domestic lighting used to light-up homes and gardens at night.

3

Sky glow from adjacent built-up areas (including areas adjacent to the AONB), which reduces views of celestial bodies such as the Milky Way and Orion, leading to a loss of public connection and enjoyment of night skies.

4

Impacts on local wildlife, with light pollution disrupting circadian rhythms, migration, feeding and breeding across all animal groups including invertebrates, mammals, birds and amphibians.

5

Lack of education on the importance of dark skies to human health and wellbeing, as well as their significance to the natural environment.

OBJECTIVE DS1

To preserve the dark skies of the High Weald AONB by minimising light pollution, obtrusive external lighting and internal light spill from domestic, commercial and public premises in both existing and new developments within the High Weald, and from highways lighting.

Rationale

To protect and maintain the existing dark skies within the High Weald for the benefit of all, including future generations, for our health, wellbeing and enjoyment, to increase our understanding and sense of place in the universe; and for the benefit of wildlife and to reduce energy consumption.

OBJECTIVE DS2

To protect wildlife and habitats from light pollution across the High Weald.

Rationale

Light pollution affects a wide range of nocturnal species and those out during the day, from feeding to finding a mate and the ability to safely migrate. Light pollution is an additional stress to habitat loss for already declining populations of many species across the High Weald.

‘Artificial light at night has revolutionized the way we live and work outdoors, but it has come at a price. When used thoughtlessly, lighting disrupts wildlife, damages human health, wastes money and energy, contributing to climate change, and it blocks our view of the starry sky’.

International Dark-Sky Association

Ambitions for 2029

Protection of the night-time environment of the High Weald, for nature, and to ensure astronomical dark sky objects such as the Milky Way remain visible to the naked eye, will require the level of artificial light at night to stay at its present low level, with everyone (individuals, communities, businesses including developers and public bodies such as Highways Authorities) committed to environmentally responsible approaches to outdoor lighting, and adopting new technologies.

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ACTIONS

The Partnership will ...

- a. Promote dark skies awareness and education, including walks and talks aimed at a diverse range of people and organisations, across different geographical areas of the High Weald, and the promotion of International Dark Skies Week.

Public bodies should ...

- b. Include 'Dark Skies' policies in Local Plans and support their inclusion in neighbourhood plans, which seek to maintain dark skies in rural areas and reduce dark skies light pollution in urban areas in the AONB, and ensure the use of such policies in the decision-making process.
- c. Follow the Institute of Lighting Professionals (ILP) guidance on reducing obtrusive lighting, and other relevant guidance to aid protecting dark skies, including ensuring that lighting designers use exterior light control environmental zone E1 to inform any proposed lighting in, or affecting the setting of, the AONB.
- d. Protect wildlife-rich habitats such as ancient semi-natural woodland from external lighting, and where lighting is needed, require minimised and ecologically informed lighting schemes regarding location, direction, lux levels, colour temperature and light fitting design.
- e. Seek to reduce light pollution by ensuring that flood-lit facilities such as sports pitches and car parks are turned off when not in use, through agreements and planning conditions.
- f. Work with organisers of light festivals to reduce impacts, including avoiding light and illumination shows in or near to wildlife sensitive areas.

- g. Avoid new street lighting where possible and ensure any street lighting required for junctions on adopted roads is kept to the minimum necessary and adheres to best practice in terms of location, illuminance and equipment design and light temperature, to avoid unnecessary skyglow and light spill.
- h. Resist large areas of glazing in new building designs, especially wrap-around glazing and floor-to-ceiling windows, to minimise light spill, especially in rural areas with intrinsically dark skies.

Others can assist conservation and enhancement of dark skies by ...

- i. Following best practice for external lighting on domestic premises including gardens and garages, to minimise light pollution.
- j. Ensuring new external lighting is installed at the lowest height possible to achieve lighting levels, and is angled downwards (including roof lighting), and using dark sky friendly fixtures.
- k. By using sensors to switch off lighting when not needed, to reduce light pollution and save energy.
- l. Collecting local light meter readings and using satellite data to inform policies at a parish level and highlight light pollution hot spots.

Further information on maintaining the dark skies of the High Weald landscape, including best practice guidance and practical advice, can be found at www.highweald.org.



CHARACTER COMPONENT

Aesthetic and Perceptual Qualities

Aesthetic and perceptual qualities are sense based, and are experienced as a result of people's interaction with natural beauty and their immersion in it, within the High Weald's landscape.



KEY CHARACTERISTICS¹³**History-related qualities such as ...**

- a. a sense of history and timelessness arising from an ancient countryside with a human-scale agricultural tapestry; veteran and ancient trees; medieval forests, heaths and commons; churches, historic buildings
- b. tangible legacies from the iron and wood industries (such as hammer ponds and place names) and major historic events such as the Battle of Hastings in 1066.

Qualities associated with emotion and imagination such as ...

- c. a sense of intimacy, enclosure and remoteness owing to the heavily treed landscape.
- d. a sense of wonder, renewal and connection with the natural world arising from the proximity of wildlife and opportunities for immersion in nature.
- e. a sense of freedom arising from access to a dense network of public rights of way and quiet roads suitable for walking, cycling and horse riding, and opportunities to discover many accessible green spaces (including sandrock areas and rivers, reservoirs and coast) and unexpected features such as the 'mini-landscapes' of gill streams.
- f. a deep sense of rurality unusual in South East England.

Character and gestalt qualities such as ...

- g. the homely, pastoral feel to the whole landscape arising from its human-scale pattern and productivity.
- h. colour palette of greens (vegetation) and browns (clay, timber and iron) representing the materials from which the landscape is constructed.
- i. a rich and varied biodiversity.
- j. a recognisable and unifying mosaic of open field and wooded habitats.

Sensory qualities such as ...

- k. unexpected panoramic and long views, often uninterrupted, extending out along the valleys beyond the High Weald with natural skylines and forested ridges occasionally punctuated by church spires, and often framed by field gates and wooded holloways.
- l. quietude and tranquillity, with large areas of natural rural soundscape and perceived distance from urban noise.
- m. natural soundscapes including the ability to enjoy varied birdsong.
- n. exposure to seasonal sensations such as wind and warmth, and diurnal fluctuations in light and dark.
- o. Vivid seasonal changes including the whites and blues of ancient woodland ground flora in the spring and the oranges and browns of autumnal trees and woodlands.

Symbolic and inspiration qualities such as ...

- p. the idea of the High Weald as a 'quintessential English pastoral landscape'
- q. the association of dark autumnal nights and local tradition of High Weald village bonfire societies.
- r. the legacy of physical features and ideas left by writers, artists, poets, gardeners and craftspeople inspired by the landscape such as Kipling's house at Batemans, Christopher Lloyd's house and garden at Great Dixter, the Cranbrook Colony of artists, and A.A. Milne.
- s. traditions illustrating the close relationship between nature and place including skills and crafts, agricultural shows, traditional breeds, and locally produced food and drink.
- t. distinctive public realm features such as fingerposts and milestones.

13. Quality categories based on Brady 2003

Natural and cultural capital – fact and figures

● >120,000 residents in the AONB and >700,000 people living within 5km of the National Landscape boundary. ● 2,126km footpaths, 383km bridleway, 61km byway (density 1.8km per sq.km). ● 83% population within 5km of a ≤100ha natural greenspace site. ● 4 disused railway lines – Cuckoo Trail, Forest Way, Worth Way and The Hop Pickers Line. ● 87.3km of mainline railway and 41km of heritage railway line. ● 30 manor houses, castles and gardens open to the public, including Battle Abbey (the most visited English Heritage site after Stonehenge). ● 2km of climbable sandrock.



TOP 5 ISSUES

1

Declining knowledge, connection and involvement with the countryside and its role in producing food and materials.

2

Increasing visitor numbers leading to urbanising infrastructure around villages and popular sites, and lack of awareness of the countryside code by new users, creating tension between different user groups.

3

Difficult accessibility for many, particularly those from urban areas, with declining or expensive public transport services and lack of travel routes for pedestrians, cyclists and riders, declining rights of way maintenance, and lack of signage.

4

Erosion of rurality and tranquillity through 'urbanising' development including new housing, camping/ glamping accommodation and activity, telecoms equipment, traffic and noise (including aircraft), including cumulative impacts.

5

Degradation of nature, including biodiversity decline, erosion of habitats and damage to natural systems reducing people's rich experience of nature.

OBJECTIVE PQ1

To increase opportunities for learning about and celebrating the High Weald's character and aesthetic qualities, and to promote and facilitate contributions by communities and individuals to the conservation and enhancement of the High Weald.

Rationale

To help develop emotional connection to the landscape, encouraging and enabling people to care for the High Weald and support its conservation.

OBJECTIVE PQ2

To protect the unspoilt rural landscape with its intrinsic sense of naturalness, valued views, and the extent of green space which foster experiences of rurality and tranquillity.

Rationale

To prevent the loss of contained green space, glimpsed and long views, and tree-canopied skylines, especially regarding developments that fringe existing settlements in the High Weald, which would impinge on people's perception of greenness and rurality.

OBJECTIVE PQ3

To foster and promote equitable access and informal enjoyment of the High Weald landscape and the integrated management of its resources for the enjoyment of natural beauty by all.

Rationale

To meet the demand for informal recreation from residents and those living close to the AONB, whilst ensuring infrastructure, services and activities are consistent with conserving and enhancing natural beauty and its quiet enjoyment for this and future generations.

N.B. For clarity, the pursuance of the above objectives or actions set out in this section should not harm the other character components or be at the expense of their contribution to the natural beauty of the High Weald AONB.

Ambitions for 2029

Policy and actions will need to protect the physical features that experiencing natural beauty relies on, as well as enabling fair access to it. Conserving and enhancing the High Weald will increase its contribution to a 'Natural Health Service' for people now and in the future, drawing on the area's aesthetic qualities to foster enjoyment and wellbeing, and encourage access for everyone to so that everyone feels welcome and included, while ensuring that nature and beauty are not harmed. Improved and fair access will not just relate to opportunities for recreation but to everything that a naturally functioning healthy countryside can provide including clean air, clean water, healthy food, and the opportunity to learn new skills and interact with nature.

ACTIONS

The Partnership will ...

- a. Convene relevant stakeholders to develop best practice and collaborative approaches to managing High Weald greenspaces, including an access strategy that sets out areas for strategic investment to meet increasing population needs and increase access for all users in the High Weald AONB
- b. Coordinate and deliver the primary school education programme to encourage children to enjoy and understand the landscape, including its history and wildlife.
- c. Promote health walks, celebratory landscape-inspired outdoor events, self-guided trails and other outdoor activities encouraging the wider community into the landscape (refer to Cross-cutting theme: People & Access Principles for detail).
- d. Develop and manage the High Weald website and produce information and interpretation promoting the High Weald and its special qualities.

Public bodies should...

- e. Include information about the High Weald AONB on websites and help to promote the purpose and objectives of the AONB Management Plan and the High Weald Charter for Residents and Visitors, encouraging care for the countryside and community engagement.
- f. Recognise and seek to address the potential harm to landscape character, including tranquillity and wildlife, from intensified recreational and tourism related activity (refer to Cross-cutting theme: People & Access Principles for detail).
- g. Ensure that planning decisions (site allocations and development management decisions) consider the impact of development on the intrinsic rural character of the landscape and seek to avoid intrusive development.

- h. Use the High Weald Housing Design Guide for best practice on incorporating green-ness into new developments, by including grass verges, trees and shrubs, and greenspaces, to ensure a strong sense of place and help minimise noise intrusion.
- i. Ensure that installations of infrastructure and equipment for telecoms and utilities services are located and designed so as to avoid introducing urbanising features (such as security fencing, lighting etc) into the rural landscape.

Others can assist conservation and enhancement of aesthetic and perceptual qualities by...

- j. Promoting, sustaining and expanding volunteer heritage and conservation groups.
- k. Sharing best practice in visitor management, and producing visitor management plans for sensitive sites and areas.
- l. Promoting the rich cultural, artistic and historical associations with the landscape, and highlighting local distinctiveness in the visitor 'offer', including those associated with farming and forestry.
- m. Maintaining rights of way, particularly promoted routes, and enable responsible and fair access for all to the landscape.
- n. Seeking to retain and enhance panoramic long-distance public viewpoints to enable people to connect with the High Weald and its natural beauty.
- o. Choosing native hedges, shrubs and trees for boundaries for domestic curtilages.
- p. Supporting conservation measures that protect a wide variety of bird species.

Further information on maintaining the aesthetic and perceptual qualities of the High Weald landscape, including best practice guidance and practical advice, can be found at www.highweald.org.



CHARACTER COMPONENT

Land-based Economy and Rural Living

The High Weald AONB is characterised by a broad-based economy but with a significant land-based sector and related community life focused on mixed farming (particularly family farms and smaller holdings), woodland management and rural crafts.



Agenda Item 6a



KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Land-based workers at a proportion higher than the rural average.
- Strong historic relationship with London and other employment areas on social character and commuting patterns.
- Tendency for greater self-sufficiency in smaller communities to the east of the area, away from major population centres.
- Retention of woodland workers and their families who have a multi-generational relationship with, and whose livelihoods rely on, the area’s coppice woodlands.
- A landscape that suits traditional management owing to its small-scale nature and hedged bank and ditch boundaries.
- Strong rural community life based around small towns and villages supported by a network of valued and accessible local services and amenities, such as village halls, shops and post offices, clubs and societies, and infrastructure including bus services.
- Predominantly pastoral mixed farming with an absence of industrial scale farming.
- Other traditional mixed and well-integrated land-uses including orchards, hops, vineyards and soft fruit, and land-based crafts and processing.



Lord Strang, Chairman of the National Parks Commission in 1959 called on the government to

‘Secure modern standards of living in the countryside with improved rural housing and new small rural industries to provide employment’ but observed that these must be ‘fully sympathetic to, and in scale with, the landscape and local style of building’.

Natural and cultural capital – fact and figures

- Agriculture, forestry and fishing account for 13% of businesses (employing 8% of the workforce) compared with 3% in the south east (employing 1% of the workforce).
- 38% of employment is in micro businesses compared with 17% in the south east.
- 29% of the working age population are retired compared with 21% in the south east.
- Rural incomes are slightly lower than those in the south east but average house prices are 42% higher.
- Self-sufficient in cereals, fruit and lamb but an under-supply of potatoes, beef, fresh vegetables and salads.



TOP 5 ISSUES

1

Low wages and lack of affordable housing and well-designed workspace affecting recruitment and retention of workers and constraining ability of land-based businesses to thrive.

2

Holdings which are typically small (by national standards) struggling to remain economic in the current market under traditional livestock management regimes and uncertainty over future agri-environmental schemes; compounded by reducing agricultural infrastructure, such as livestock markets and abattoirs, while high cost of land and decline in affordable farm tenancies are a barrier to new entrants to agriculture.

3

Changing land use away from traditional agricultural enterprises, which cumulatively threatens long-term food production.

4

Loss of traditional skills owing to ageing workforce and contracting farm and woodland economies, and lack of economic value in land-based products constraining innovation.

5

Closures and cuts to rural services and amenities, including bus services, Post Offices, village shops, pubs and banks.

OBJECTIVE LBE1

To improve returns from, and thereby increase entry and retention in, farming, forestry, horticulture and other land management activities that conserve and enhance natural beauty.

Rationale

To sustain an economically viable land management sector, with a particular emphasis on sustainable and small-scale farming and forestry.

OBJECTIVE LBE2

To reconnect settlements and residents with the surrounding countryside, and maintain and improve rural amenities and services that support communities within the context of the rural settlement pattern.

Rationale

To foster community life, and enhance the synergy of the local economy, society and environment, and the relationship with the surrounding countryside and wild species that defines sustainable rural settlement.

OBJECTIVE LBE3

To improve agricultural and forestry infrastructure (including the provision of appropriate affordable housing and workspaces for land-based workers), along with skills development for rural communities and related sectors that contribute positively to conserving and enhancing natural beauty.

Rationale

To foster land-based economic activities – including heritage conservation, sustainable tourism and outdoor education – that support conservation of the AONB. To provide opportunities for economic activity that supports appropriate land management objectives and AONB designation.

N.B. For clarity, the pursuance of the above objectives or actions set out in this section should not harm the other character components or be at the expense of their contribution to the natural beauty of the High Weald AONB.

Ambitions for 2029

A renaissance in land-based activity and rural living will be needed to meet the net-zero challenge. Support should be focused on reconnecting people with the land and driving innovation in carbon-neutral agricultural and timber infrastructure, small-scale food production, and forestry and rural skills development. Investment in land-based education, skills, and businesses will need to be significantly enhanced to ensure sufficient land management capacity is created alongside the resilient and flexible skills required to adapt to a warming, more unpredictable climate. Innovative mechanisms to deliver affordable housing for local people, including land-based workers, will need to be explored, such as developing local criteria for key workers, exploring local thresholds for First Homes, and supporting local community land trust ambitions (whilst still having regard to the other Management Plan objective, particularly those relating to Settlement). Increased working from home will continue to stimulate community activities, rural services, and demand for access to countryside resources creating opportunities for new relationships with nature.

ACTIONS

The Partnership will ...

- a. Work collaboratively with local authorities to ensure rural business strategies and investments meet the requirements of the AONB management plan.
- b. Work collaboratively with partners to support and promote apprenticeships and training in rural skills.
- c. Promote the need for national policy and support to be tailored to maintain viable farming and forestry in the High Weald.

Public bodies should ...

- d. Plan for appropriate development to ensure continuing vitality of local communities and viability of community services, including seeking to deliver a mix of housing sizes that responds to local needs and key worker housing, including for land-based workers.
- e. Engage positively with mechanisms capable of delivering affordable housing and housing tailored to the specific needs of land-based workers for rural housing needs.
- f. Seek to retain and support rural services and amenities including bus services, village shops, pubs and Post Offices, and support investment in rural services such as improved rural broadband and digital connectivity across rural areas and community transport initiatives.
- g. Ensure that proposals for farm diversification projects, (including camping /glamping sites), conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the High Weald, and would support, and not adversely impact on, the agricultural viability of a holding in terms of retention of sufficient productive land and compatible uses.

- h. Support maintenance and development of agricultural infrastructure and food processing facilities e.g., abattoirs and livestock markets.
- i. Promote, use, and resist removal of, agricultural occupancy conditions and seek to retain capacity for land management within farmsteads.
- j. Ensure support for farming and associated rural development is tailored to the particular needs of the High Weald.
- k. Support organisations offering career introductions to the land-based sector, and explore opportunities to work collaboratively with others to offer viable longer-term tenancies to young farmers and new entrants.
- l. Collate and maintain AONB level data on farming and forestry.

Others can assist conservation and enhancement of the land-based economy by...

- m. Supporting and investing in improved working conditions and manufacturing technology for land-based businesses.
- n. Retaining affordable farm tenancies and seeking creating new affordable tenancies, jobs and accommodation for new entrants to land-based businesses.
- o. Facilitating and encouraging collaborative farming, food processing, and marketing enterprises.
- p. Supporting initiatives that develop skills in land management and rural crafts, and promoting and celebrating local crafts.
- q. Establishing buy-local procurement policies and choosing locally produced food, fencing and furniture.

Further information on supporting the land-based economy in the High Weald landscape, including best practice guidance and practical advice, can be found at www.highweald.org.

Cross cutting themes: programmes, principles for action, and investment strategy 2024-2029

Achieving the Management Plan’s objectives and its 2029 targets will require urgent and ambitious action by all to address the main drivers of change and cross-cutting themes.

This section of the Plan sets out our strategic aims for focusing resources and targeting investment on cross-cutting programmes that address these main drivers and can deliver multiple benefits across the High Weald’s character components.

To change course on climate and nature recovery, and to improve equality, inclusivity and diversity of access for people to enjoy nature, participate in the countryside and sustain a decent living, there will need to be action and investment at multiple levels, and new collaborative partnerships within the AONB and connecting to adjacent areas. There is a need to address ‘Shifting Baseline Syndrome’ through education and understanding; recognising that the human-led biodiversity crisis has shifted people’s perception of what good environmental condition looks like. Local creative solutions will need to be found to

reconcile competing national priorities at a High Weald level, while conserving its distinctive character, but key threats are national and long term, requiring action at a national level.

Despite current threats, there are many actions and policy solutions that will help the High Weald AONB landscape remain culturally and environmentally important for future generations. To do so, this Management Plan recommends that actions by all stakeholders should adopt the following hierarchy:

1. **Avoid** harm to wildlife, climate and natural systems.
2. **Restore** and regenerate nature and natural systems.
3. **Transform** our relationship with nature at multiple levels, such that nature and beauty are protected for their non-instrumental value as well as the joy they bring and services they provide to people.¹⁴



14. (Based on the mitigation hierarchy used by Environmental Impact Assessment and the action framework proposed by the Global Commons Alliance)

The key drivers are interconnected; the climate crisis is in part driving the biodiversity crisis. But loss of biodiversity is exacerbating climate change. Extreme weather events, such as flooding and increased surface water run-off, erode soil, soil erosion releases carbon dioxide back into the atmosphere, and so it goes on. However, this means that a solution or mitigation

for one of the drivers is often part of the solution or mitigation for another priority, especially regarding more nature-focused solutions which result in win-win outcomes. A good example of this is the reinstatement of lost hedgerows, which confers multiple benefits:

EXAMPLE

Multi-benefits of hedgerow restoration; hedge-laying, replanting lost hedgerows and gapping-up

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- **Provides habitats** – shelter and food resource for multiple wild species above and below ground, including for pollinators
- **Protects freshwater ecosystems** – slows soil run-off and pollution
- **Improves connectivity between habitats** – provides corridors for species to move along between patches of habitat
- **Reduces the need for pesticide use** – by providing a habitat for common pest predators
- **Protects soils from erosion** – reduces runoff, improves soil health
- **Provides protection for crops** – provides shelter from wind
- **Improves structure and drainage of soils** – improves soil health and increases soil biota



- **Increases carbon storage and sequestration** – in both the soil and plant biomass
- **Cuts down wind speeds** – protects crops and other habitats, reduces wind throw of trees
- **Provides natural flood prevention** – soil can hold more water and reduces runoff
- **Helps regulate water supply to crops** – better water storage capacity of the soil
- **Enhances and maintains a key characteristic of the High Weald’s cultural landscape** – hedges are an integral landscape feature to the High Weald
- **Absorbs noise and pollution** – increases tranquillity
- **Provides shelter and winter feed for livestock** – supports farmers to keep livestock outside all year round and reduces costs
- **Makes available ‘wild’ food for foraging** – provides access for people to experience the rural environment

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Delivery & Investment Strategy

The following sections of the Plan set out our principles and priorities for focusing resources and targeting investment on each of the cross-cutting themes.

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Effective delivery of the Management Plan is dependent upon:

Statutory regulation and enforcement of national minimum standards for air, soil and water quality, and greenhouse gas emissions.

Adequate resourcing for the public bodies, including the High Weald Partnership, responsible for coordinating and implementing necessary actions.

Alignment of rural support and environmental land management schemes with the character of the High Weald and aims of this Management Plan.

Alignment of planning policy, including local development plans, neighbourhood plans, and development management decision-making, with the character of the High Weald and aims of this Management Plan.

Alignment of strategies and investment plans of other Section 85 relevant authorities (for example Local Transport Plans, Climate Change Action Plans, Economic Growth strategies, Drainage and Wastewater Management Plans) with the character of the High Weald and aims of this Management Plan.

Appropriate regulatory protection for landscape character and biodiversity.

Suitable data and forecasting to aid monitoring and review.

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The primary means through which the Plan’s cross-cutting investment priorities for soil health, biodiversity and nature recovery, achieving net zero, and improving access, will be delivered is through the range of targeted national investment programmes, agri-environmental schemes, local grant programmes, along with strategic and project-based funding allocations through partner agencies, which should be informed by the specific investment priorities under each cross-cutting theme.

Further details and up-to-date information on current grant schemes can be found on the High Weald AONB website at [Grants – High Weald](#).



DRIVERS OF CHANGE

Restoring Soil Health and Regenerative Land Management

Soil health underpins the unique character and distinct form of the High Weald's landscape and biodiversity. Soils are one of the most valuable natural resources we have and are critical to life on Earth. Recognising the importance of soil and its linchpin role in planetary health means prioritising soils and soil health across the High Weald AONB.

Healthy soil, like any other ecosystem, is complex with abundant biodiversity. Soil biodiversity is made up of thousands of species such as springtails, nematodes, fungi and bacteria, many of which are microscopic. These species account for between a quarter and a third of all species on Earth. A teaspoon of healthy soil is estimated to contain billions of organisms from thousands of different species.

Protecting and enhancing soil health provides better food security through increased self-sufficiency. Healthy soil provides a medium in which to grow our food, and underpins many ecosystem services that sustain life, including healthy water systems. The loss or degradation of healthy soils has a knock-on effect to these services and is a major problem because soil creation is an extremely slow process, taking anywhere between 100 to 1,000 years for one inch of soil to form.

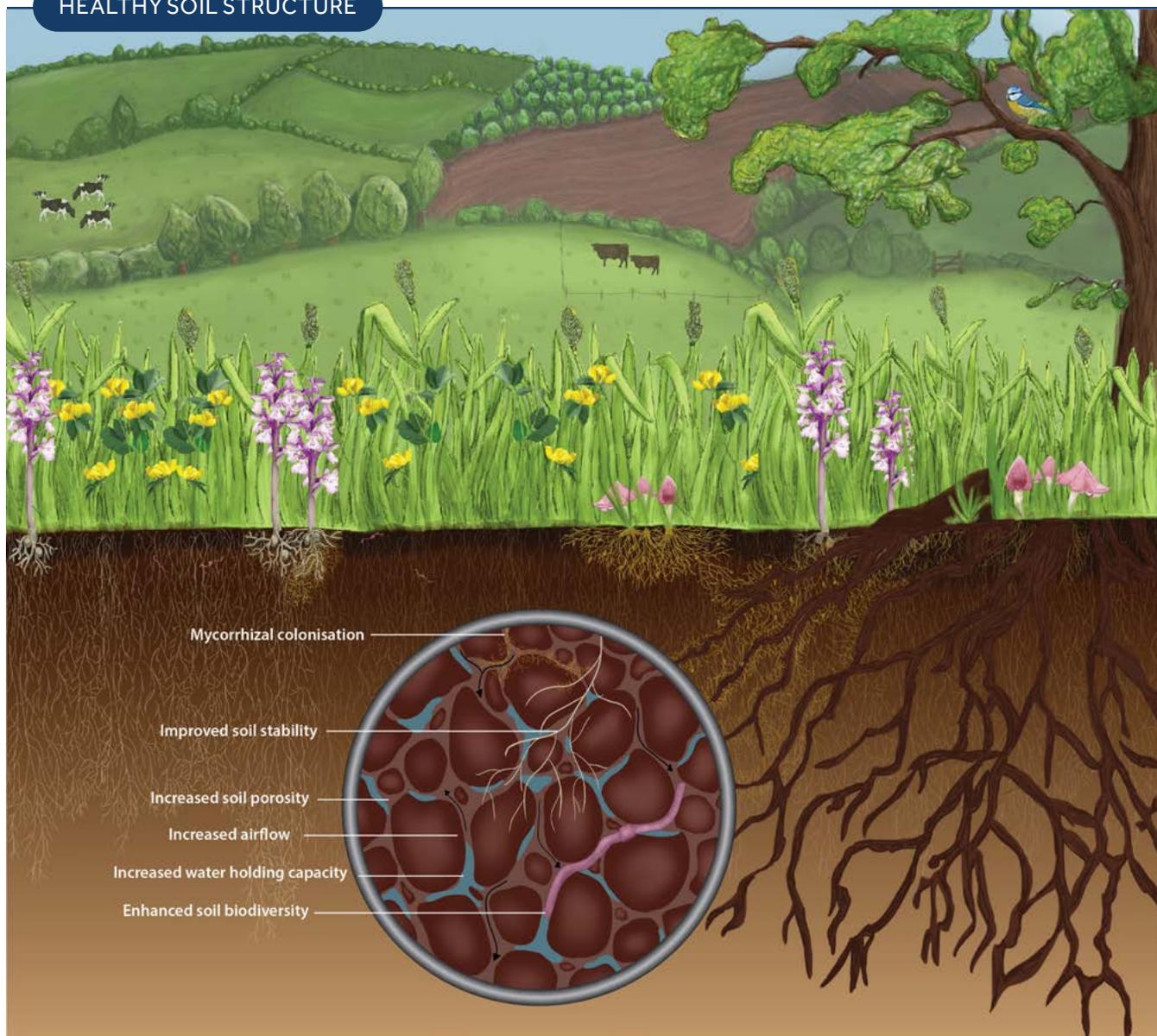
Damage to soils from compaction, erosion and use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides degrades soil structure, affects its ability to absorb and hold water, depletes soil biodiversity, reduces plant growth capacity, and affects nutrient flow to below ground food webs. This leads to a reduction in soil functioning which compromises its ability to store carbon and imbalances soil nutrient content,

Soil and soil health underpins all the character components of natural beauty in the High Weald. Protecting and restoring soils helps restore natural systems, enhances the ecological function of fields, and improves food production and the economic returns from farming and horticulture.

“The soil is the great connector of lives, the source and destination of all. Without proper care for it, we can have no life.”

Wendell Berry (writer and farmer)

HEALTHY SOIL STRUCTURE



SOIL HEALTH: PRINCIPLES & INVESTMENT PRIORITIES 2029

The priority for delivering soil health in the High Weald AONB over the next five years is through the continued investment in the promotion and guidance of soil monitoring and regenerative agricultural practices for soil health and restoration. This will help conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the High Weald landscape by helping to deliver objectives of the Management Plan character components.

The High Weald AONB Partnership recommends that the following practices and actions are pursued in the High Weald in relation to soil health:

Regenerative agriculture and horticulture practices

Many of the techniques associated with regenerative agricultural practices will lead to pastures becoming more resilient to the climate crisis and reduce their vulnerability to droughts; mitigate for flooding by increasing water infiltration in the soil; reducing sediment run-off, and increase carbon storage because of healthier root and fungal networks. Helpful practices include:

Practising no- or min-till farming – reducing or stopping mechanical disturbance by ploughing and discing helps to rebuild the soil ecosystem.

Reducing or eliminating the reliance on chemical pesticides and artificial fertilizers, to improve soil health

Adopting rotational grazing practices – short duration high-density grazing techniques, which improve pasture and grazing productivity, increase water retention and the drawdown of carbon from the air and its storage in the soil, and enhance the soil ecosystem.

Increasing agroforestry and multi-layered growing – incorporating trees and hedges into the farm enterprise, growing trees for their fruit or nuts, planting crops between rows of trees, or grazing livestock amongst rows of trees.

Utilising cover cropping – growing a non-commercial crop for the benefit of the soil, both to prevent soil erosion, and to improve the soil health for future crops.

Adopting companion / intercropping – growing two complementary crops together to utilize space and ensure soil coverage.

These techniques can be underpinned by assessing and monitoring soil health; collecting baseline data which can be used to adjust management approaches.



SPOTLIGHT ON ...

Regenerative Agriculture

Regenerative agriculture is a suite of practices that put soil health front and centre, allowing farming to be more in tune with nature. As a result, it is seen as a more climate resilient approach to farming whilst also supporting nature recovery.

Regenerative agriculture starts with building healthy soil by focusing on rebuilding organic matter and the natural living biodiversity in the soil. This improves the ground's ability to:

- draw down carbon from the air and store it underground,
- hold and clean water,
- help wildlife above and below the ground,
- produce nutrient-dense food year after year.

Regenerative agriculture also delivers on climate change via minimally disturbing soils, which improves soil carbon storage and sequestration, and aids nature recovery from the ground up. The High Weald landscape of small, irregularly shaped fields is ideally suited to regenerative agriculture, and a growing number of farms across the High Weald are incorporating regenerative practices, particularly with livestock grazing.



DRIVERS OF CHANGE

Nature Recovery and Biodiversity

Biodiversity is a fundamental component of natural beauty and enriches the distinctive landscape patterns of the High Weald AONB. Biodiversity drives opportunities for people to access and engage with the natural world and fosters understanding of the importance of the High Weald AONB. In 2020, the UK Government committed to the UN target of protecting 30% of the UK's land for nature by 2030. Recovering nature in the High Weald AONB means giving nature more space, providing quality, well-managed habitats and ensuring connectivity between those habitats; in other words, providing bigger, better, more and joined-up places for nature.



The High Weald AONB contains many different habitats and landscape features that collectively support a wide diversity of species. Habitats range from broadleaf woodland to wildflower meadows, open heath and sandstone outcrops to ponds, rivers and coastal cliffs. The importance of the region's biodiversity stems not only from the rarity and variety of species, but also from the ancientness, interconnectedness and assortment of the habitats that support them, and the quality and tranquillity of these habitats. The essentially medieval origin of the High Weald landscape, with its patchwork of small-scale and linear features created through long-standing human-environment interactions, significantly enhances the region's ecological connectivity and its resilience. In the High Weald, the biodiversity value of its landscape is greater than the sum of its parts.

All areas and habitats in the High Weald are valuable for supporting nature recovery, and nature recovery is fundamental to conserving all the character components of natural beauty, from ancient woodlands which support a wide range of plants, and animals including birds, bats and invertebrates, to the numerous undisturbed pastures that support wildflower species and waxcap communities. This plan supports the protection and recovery of all characteristic species, from the small invertebrates to reintroductions of charismatic fauna.

Statutory requirements relevant to Nature Recovery

The Environment Act (2021) has brought with it responsibilities for local authorities in the fight to halt biodiversity loss, and it is important that this Management Plan is utilised to ensure appropriate and consistent delivery of the statutory duties arising from the Environment Act (2021):

LOCAL NATURE RECOVERY STRATEGIES (LNRS)¹³

- LNRS are prepared by 'responsible authorities'; in the High Weald National Landscape these are East Sussex County Council, West Sussex County Council, Kent County Council and Surrey County Council.
- LNRS underpin the national Nature Recovery Network (NRN) by establishing spatial mapping and planning tools to identify existing and potential habitat for wildlife and agreeing local priorities for enhancing biodiversity.
- LNRS identify investment opportunities for nature locally, rather than being the delivery mechanism for nature recovery.
- All public bodies must have regard for any relevant LNRS.

The LNRS regulations require responsible authorities to engage with supporting authorities, as well as other local partners (such as National Landscape partnerships), to develop their strategy so that it can build on existing or planned nature recovery and environmental work and align with relevant strategies.

BIODIVERSITY NET GAIN (BNG)

BNG is legal mandate for a minimum 10% net gain in biodiversity associated with new developments. Developers must demonstrate this net gain in biodiversity for new developments from early 2024 onwards. The gains should be achieved on site. Where this is not possible, off-site gains can be considered and agreed with the LPA.

Importantly, the provision of BNG does not override the 'mitigation hierarchy' set out in paragraph 186 of the National Planning Policy Framework. The National Planning Policy Guidance makes it clear that "*Biodiversity net gain complements and works with the biodiversity mitigation hierarchy set out in NPPF paragraph 175a [now 186a]. It does not override the protection for designated sites, protected or priority species and irreplaceable or priority habitats set out in the NPPF. Local planning authorities need to ensure that habitat improvement will be a genuine additional benefit and go further than measures already required to implement a compensation strategy.*" (Paragraph: 024 Reference ID: 8-024-20190721).

Within the High Weald AONB, it is important that BNG proposals are informed by a robust understanding of the habitat typologies and systems of the High Weald, evidenced by accurate baseline survey information regarding habitat condition and protected species, in order that they are designed to provide a genuine positive contribution to local biodiversity and habitats. Proposed enhanced or new habitats should function as a meaningful part of the wider connected High Weald habitat mosaic, with reference to the components of natural beauty set out in the Management Plan, and should support the Nature Recovery principles set out in the Management Plan. Importantly, the pursuance of 'biodiversity units' within the metric should not inadvertently harm existing on-site or site-adjacent habitats through their loss or reduction in their connectivity to wider habitat networks, nor should the pursuance of BNG result in works that would cause wider harms to the landscape and scenic beauty of the AONB.

13. Local nature recovery strategy statutory guidance (publishing.service.gov.uk)

High Weald habitat and 30x30

In 2022, the UK Government joined the international commitment to protect 30% of land and sea for nature by 2030, known as 30x30. The target requires areas to be effectively conserved and managed while integrated into the wider landscape and respecting the rights of local communities.¹⁴

Protected areas such as the High Weald AONB, and their dedicated Partnerships, are at the forefront of national work to conserve, protect and restore nature-rich habitats across our landscapes. The High Weald already has complex and interconnected nature-rich habitat with many areas in sympathetic low input management. Through protecting these areas and their inter-connectivity, along with improving the quality of habitats through investment via agri-environmental schemes, wilding and adoption of regenerative land management, the High Weald could further contribute to 30x30 objectives, creating a wildlife-rich heart at the centre of the south-east. The approach in the High Weald should:

- Identify, protect and prevent damage to wildlife-rich core sites (including semi-natural habitats such as ancient woodland) from pollution, pesticides, poor management, over-exploitation, invasive species, disturbance, and habitat destruction and development, and manage appropriately to enhance biodiversity
- Buffer and link core sites, and manage nature, to support a connected and resilient ecological network
- Restore wildlife richness to its pre-industrialised farming baseline across the wider landscape by, for example, fostering management of land for multiple objectives, investing in approaches that maximise nature recovery alongside food production, allowing natural processes to flourish, and creating structural diversity.

14. An extraordinary challenge: Restoring 30 per cent of our land and sea by 2030 (parliament.uk)

The High Weald Partnership will therefore look to promote land management and habitat restoration schemes delivering healthy soils and quality habitats that will benefit species of flora and fauna characteristic of the High Weald. For example:

the characteristic structural woodland and hedgerow flora of the High Weald, such as oak, chestnut, beech, hazel, hornbeam and hawthorn, along with wood anemone, bluebell, wood melick, coralroot bittercress and black bryony, and lichens and fungi such as chicken-of-the woods, supporting fauna including the dormouse, greater spotted woodpecker, marsh tit, flycatcher; white admiral, brown hairstreak and silver washed fritillary butterflies, and a number of bat species, including Bechstein's bat, Natterer's bat and noctule bat.

fields, including grassland flora such as Dyer's greenweed, green-winged orchid and waxcap fungi, supporting fauna such as the barn owl, fieldfare, yellow meadow ant, and a number of grasshopper species; and arable field species such as the brown hare and skylark.

lowland heath, with its carefully balanced mosaic of different vegetation including heather, acid grassland, bare ground, gorse and scrub, and supporting flora such as marsh gentian and marsh clubmoss, supporting fauna such the common lizard, adder, nightjar, linnet and Dartford warbler.

routeways and road verges with their characteristic flora such as primrose, cuckoo flower, common spotted orchid, oxeye daisy, birds foot trefoil; supporting fauna such as the orange tip butterfly and glow worms.

river and wetland-based habitats, including wet grasslands, ditches, ponds, floodplains and gill woodlands, supporting a range of bryophytes (mosses and liverworts, including handsome woollywort) along with other flora such as frogbit, scaly male fern, marsh violet, ragged robin, and fox sedge and tufted sedge, supporting fauna including snipe, woodcock, lapwing wild brown trout, bullhead, brook lamprey, great crested newt, and insect species including caddis flies and beautiful demoiselle, along with foraging opportunities for a number of bat species such as Daubenton's.

historic buildings and gardens, farmsteads and churchyards, supporting birds such as the house martin, swallow, swift, and lesser spotted woodpecker, along with a number of bat species (including common pipistrelle, serotine and brown long-eared) and the hedgehog, slow worm and red mason bee.

N.B. many species of fauna rely on a combination of these habitats for different purposes, e.g. nesting, foraging, roosting, and so the interconnected nature of these habitats is important.

Further information can be found in the High Weald AONB Biodiversity Statement 2014: [High Weald Biodiversity Report](#) Detailed advice regarding the management / restoration of each of these habitat types can be found at www.highweald.org

RECOVERING NATURE: PRINCIPLES AND INVESTMENT PRIORITIES 2029

Delivering nature recovery within the High Weald over the next five years is through investment in programmes and actions which enhance habitats, increase biodiversity, and build a more resilient and connected network for wildlife across the area. These actions feed into Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) and are the nature recovery priorities for agri-environment schemes in the High Weald AONB, both of which help to deliver global ambitions to protect 30% of land and sea for nature by 2030 (known as 30x30). These also deliver the largest gains towards nature, stack benefits for climate change and soil health, and conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the High Weald landscape by helping to deliver objectives for character components.

The High Weald Partnership recommends that the following priorities are pursued in relation to nature recovery:

Restoration of species rich grasslands – identification, audit and appropriate management of our most threatened habitat in the High Weald (often undervalued, under recognised and over or under managed) with buffering and improved connectivity achieved by protecting semi-natural grassland and enhancing modified grassland.

Recovery of the abundance of characteristic High Weald species and habitats – focusing on understanding the specific habitat needs of the range of species and adapting management accordingly.

Deer management – active strategies to reduce deer numbers to prevent over-population of deer having a significant impact on the flora of High Weald woodlands and other habitats.

Hedge restoration and reinstatement – hedge-laying, gapping-up and replanting lost hedgerows, including intermittent hedgerow trees, to provide habitat for a variety of species, and provide connectivity between parcels of woodland and species rich grasslands.

Creation and management of scrub and wilder boundaries – allowing for outgrown hedges, scrub and tall grasses which provide structural diversity between different habitats, and support wildlife by providing additional shelter, feeding and breeding sites, as well as being valuable habitats with their own ecosystem and dependant species.

Restoration of a pesticide and pollution free environment – avoidance of air, soil and water pollution (especially water pollution from septic tanks and sewage treatment plants) and significant reduction in the use of chemical pesticides and artificial fertilisers to allow freshwater ecosystems and insect populations in the High Weald's rivers and tributaries and ponds to recover.



SPOTLIGHT ON ...

Wilding

Wilding allows restoration of naturally functioning ecosystems at nature's pace. It does not always equate to abandonment and can be far more nuanced. Expert guidance may be needed, and species introduction should be carried out with careful planning and in collaboration with landowners and neighbours. Projects in the High Weald AONB should consider:

- Small-scale wilding projects which help buffer other core habitats, provide connectivity across the landscape, but do not adversely impact on land which is needed for agriculture or is being managed to enhance other vulnerable habitats such as species-rich grassland.
- Agricultural wilding projects using livestock, preferably traditional breeds such as Sussex cattle.
- Working with adjacent landowners to explore the reintroductions of lost species and expansion of diminished species (such as beavers, pine martens and white-letter hairstreak).
- Wilding which complements the existing medieval landscape character.



DRIVERS OF CHANGE

The Climate Crisis: Achieving Net Zero

The High Weald AONBs distinctive Atlantic climate is found nowhere else in the south east of England. These cool and wet conditions which are found predominantly in gill woodlands are a distinctive part of the natural beauty of the High Weald, however climate change threatens these Atlantic microclimates.



Agenda Item 6a



A dramatic reduction in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions is required to prevent the world reaching an unassailable tipping point. To ensure the UK reaches its target of net-zero GHG emissions by 2050, the UK carbon budget target is an emissions reduction of 68% (compared to 1990 levels) by 2030, which includes shipping and aviation emissions, as a stepping stone towards the 2050 goal.

Tackling the climate crisis in the High Weald AONB requires a net-zero emissions, rather than a carbon neutral, strategy. Referring to emissions seeks to tackle all greenhouse gas emissions, not just carbon dioxide. Net-zero strategies actively work to reduce emissions by setting targets, rather than off-setting or compensating current emissions.

LOCAL AUTHORITIES' DECLARATION OF A CLIMATE EMERGENCY

Since 2019, local authorities nationally have been declaring climate emergencies and producing action plans to tackle the emergency. Most of the fifteen local authority partners to the High Weald AONB have produced plans and set net-zero carbon targets.

CARBON SEQUESTRATION IN THE HIGH WEALD

The High Weald AONB already stores large amounts of carbon in its soils owing to the undisturbed nature of many grasslands (fields) and ancient semi-natural woodlands, making a sizeable contribution to climate mitigation:

- Up to 26.8 million tons of carbon (0-150cm depth) is stored in High Weald soils.
- Woodland covers 28% of the High Weald AONB, well above the national average, and as such the amount of carbon dioxide sequestered across this landscape is substantial, averaging 149,910 tons of carbon a year.

Predicted changes in the climate for the south east of England suggest hotter, drier summers, and warmer wetter winters. Extreme weather events will also become more frequent, of longer duration and greater intensity. These changes pose a threat to the character of the High Weald landscape, impacting both its cultural and natural heritage.

For example, increases in damaging storm events are likely to exacerbate erosion of the coastal cliffs at Hastings, and cause further tree loss, escalating flooding of properties and infrastructure. The changes to our climate will alter the delicate biodiversity found in the High Weald's woodlands, grasslands and heathlands, as some species struggle to adapt and survive whilst others move in, with the potential for increased pests and tree diseases in woodlands. Some habitats found across the High Weald AONB are particularly sensitive to the climate crisis, such as rivers and gill streams, and other wetter habitats. Woodland and grassland will also be affected by hotter, drier summers and wetter winters.

The climate crisis will affect all the character components of natural beauty in the High Weald in different ways, but the AONB can support climate change mitigation; trees and soils are crucial to carbon sequestration. As a nationally protected landscape, the AONB's priority for climate change mitigation is nature-based solutions which simultaneously work to mitigate aspects of the climate crisis, cool the local environment and restore naturally functioning systems; while changes in agricultural practices, such as regenerative farming practices, can improve carbon sequestration and lead to greater water-holding capacities in soils.

CLIMATE CRISIS: PRINCIPLES AND INVESTMENT PRIORITIES 2029

Whilst the High Weald AONB stores and sequesters large amounts of carbon dioxide, this is not a replacement for continued work towards net-zero emissions targets.

The priority for addressing the climate crisis in the High Weald AONB over the next five years is building a resilient landscape for future generations through investment in nature-based solutions, modal shifts in transport, and landscape-led renewable energy solutions.

The High Weald AONB Partnership recommends that the following practices and actions are pursued in the High Weald in relation to the climate crisis:

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Development of nature-based solutions

i.e., those solutions which provide mitigation to the climate crisis through rebuilding the natural functioning of ecosystems. For example, floodwater attenuation (e.g., ‘slow-the-flow’ projects), natural cooling systems, and increasing carbon storage in soils and woody plants.

Developing renewable energy appropriate to the landscape

Renewable energy systems in the High Weald can be best accommodated into this small-scale landscape through smaller scale and domestic projects, and small-scale shared community installations, for example prioritising solar panels on roofs of existing development, (particularly on the larger roofscapes of modern commercial and agricultural buildings, and avoiding external roofscapes of historic and listed buildings), in gardens and on brownfield land (depending on visibility in the landscape), rather than solar fields.

Promoting modal shifts in transport

Including shifts away from car-centric thinking in planning and development, supporting continued investment in existing public transport options and development of other community transport initiatives, coupled with reductions in speed limits to support walking and cycling options.

Achieving net zero in housing design

Including following the principles of whole life carbon assessment, considering not just energy efficiency measures in the in-use operation of buildings, but also embodied energy (including use of existing building stock and sustainable use of materials such as sustainably sourced timber in new buildings), water recycling, and site-wide design strategies such as sustainable drainage systems, layouts that minimise natural resource requirements, and soft landscaping to support climate resilience.



SPOTLIGHT ON ...

Tree Cover

Increasing tree cover is a nature-based solution to help mitigate the climate crisis through helping to store more carbon dioxide. The High Weald already has the highest cover of woodland in England. However, increases in tree cover can be accommodated in the High Weald through increased scrub habitat (managed), thickened hedgerows, in-field trees, wood pasture (ideally by natural regeneration) and the planting of fruit or nut trees. The importance of the High Weald’s small-scale medieval fieldscape means large woodland creation schemes are usually unsuitable. Instead:

- Hedges can accommodate trees either directly planted or left to mature through natural regeneration.
- Agroforestry – introducing trees to the farmed landscape within fields. These trees can also provide shelter for livestock.
- Instead of new planting, land can be left to naturally return to woodland through natural regeneration.
- Urban tree planting within towns and villages throughout the High Weald.
- Reinstating traditional woodland management, such as coppicing, where it has been lost is often more important than planting new woodlands.

Right tree, right place, right reason.

Agenda Item 6a

DRIVERS OF CHANGE

People and Access

The High Weald AONB provides respite from the highly developed south east of England, spread over four counties, with over 700,000 people living within 5km of the High Weald AONB, as well as being accessible to those in London, Brighton and other cities in the south east. The AONB contains a high amount of publicly accessible countryside, along with a range of landscape-based leisure destinations popular with both residents and visitors alike.



There is a wealth of countryside with public access across the High Weald which includes 2,570 km of Public Rights of Way, Country Parks at Hastings and Buchan, long distance trails such as the Cuckoo Trail and the Forest Way, Forestry Commission woodlands, and both council and eNGO-run reserves such as Crane Valley, Brede High Woods, Broadwater Warren and St Leonard’s Forest. Popular leisure destinations include Ashdown Forest, the largest area of open access land in the south east; Bewl Water, the largest area of inland water in the south east; Harrison’s Rocks, a 1.5km sandstone climbing crag, and Bedgebury Forest, with its 22km of cycle tracks, along with a number of parks, gardens and estates throughout the AONB. Meanwhile, the heritage railways that operate within the High Weald provide a further means of viewing and enjoying the countryside.

We are intimately connected to the natural world, and it is now readily accepted that exposure to nature and natural environments, especially those of good quality, confers many benefits to human health at every age, socio-economic status, gender and ethnicity. Meanwhile, a deeper understanding of biodiversity and the natural world affects our connection to it and how we interact with it. Understanding how the rural environment is managed increases environmental awareness and supports appreciation of countryside. People’s opportunity to experience the natural beauty of the High Weald relies on fair access – for example, to experience the tranquillity of woodlands, to be able to afford to farm or work land within the High Weald, or to use the extensive network of public rights of way. However, for a variety of reasons not everyone has equitable access to the natural environment. Barriers may include disabilities which prevent access or limit interpretation and enjoyment, lack of supporting facilities and infrastructure, including transport, and financial barriers. Improving equity, inclusivity and diversity of access for people to enjoy nature in the countryside, and to farm and sustain a decent living there, requires transformational policies at a national level, along with innovative local solutions and collaborative partnerships that empower communities.

Increased access, however, also brings additional pressures on the natural beauty of the High Weald AONB and its character components, particularly around popular visitor destinations. Pressures include disturbance of habitats, increased activity, traffic and pollution, and additional infrastructure such as car-parking facilities, hard-surfacing, lighting and signage. Innovative and landscape-led solutions, including sustainable transport plans and carefully tailored visitor management, will be required to balance the positive benefits of improved access with the duty of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB.

Maintaining and improving access to the High Weald in a landscape-led manner sensitive to local character, and with responsible behaviours, will help support objectives relating to historic routeways, public enjoyment objectives to experience rurality and tranquillity, including dark skies, and the reconnection of settlements to the surrounding countryside. The public network of historic routeways can also play a valuable role in meeting the net-zero challenge in association with sustainable transport options.

COUNTRYSIDE CODE

The new Countryside Code, relaunched in 2021^{15,16}, seeks to help people of all ages and backgrounds to enjoy the health and wellbeing benefits that nature offers, while affording nature the respect it deserves. It aims to help everyone enjoy the countryside in a safe way, encouraging people to act responsibly when visiting the outdoors, by respecting those who manage the land, and by looking after our natural environments and the livelihoods of those who work there.



15. [The Countryside Code: advice for countryside visitors – GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/94221/countryside-code-2021.pdf)
 16. [The Countryside Code: advice for land managers – GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/94221/countryside-code-2021.pdf)

PEOPLE & ACCESS PRINCIPLES AND INVESTMENT PRIORITIES 2029

The priorities for delivering People and Access within the High Weald AONB over the next five years are set out below.

Investment is required to enable the High Weald to offer fair access to the widest range of people. Although the High Weald AONB has a rich network of public rights of way and nature reserves, not all people are able to reach these, or use them. The following priorities and actions will help people to access the High Weald and secure a wide range of health and wellbeing benefits, whilst conserving and enhancing its natural beauty. Pursuance of any of these priorities or actions should not involve harm to any of the character components set out in Part 1 of this Plan, nor cause harm to the biodiversity of the area.

Promotion and maintenance of the High Weald's extensive public rights of way network – including:

- mitigating damage from the effects of climate change
- encouraging their use for active travel for recreation, short journeys connecting to towns and villages, wellbeing, and appreciation of the historic and cultural landscape
- designating quiet lanes
- keeping bridleways and footpaths clear, ensuring paths, gates, bridges and benches are in working condition, and signposts and other signage are maintained, and
- promoting responsible public access, supporting promotion of adherence to the countryside code.

Improving transport into and around the High Weald – developing innovative solutions to active and shared transport solutions for those who live and work in and close to the AONB.

Management and landscape-sensitive improvement of green space infrastructure – to support a range of access needs and recreation opportunities, whilst ensuring infrastructure and activities are consistent with conserving and enhancing the High Weald's natural beauty and its quiet enjoyment – including

- the development of holistic, landscape-led visitor management strategies for larger tourism destinations, and
- catering for a range of needs including ethnically diverse and socially deprived groups, and those with mobility or visual impairments, including the provision of disabled parking spaces, wheelchair/mobility scooter friendly paths and routes, rest points such as benches, and interpretation boards, waymarked trails or routes.

The quantum, siting and design of onsite infrastructure and furniture must be carefully planned to be consistent with conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the High Weald.

Development of training programmes – in traditional land management practices and skills, and supporting community-led growing initiatives.

Promotion of celebratory landscape-inspired outdoor events and cultural activities – including developing public engagement programmes to address barriers, and promoting the enjoyment of dark skies, and walking festivals, that benefit health and wellbeing, and increase understanding of the natural world.



SPOTLIGHT ON ...

Woodlands and people

Woodlands contribute to a sense of place and provide a link to our past which make them culturally and spiritually important, as well as offering healthy environments to get immersed in.

The High Weald AONB has the highest cover of woodland in England at 28%, which is well above the average of 10% for the rest of the country.

Woodlands often hold a special place in people's hearts and can be awe inspiring places to visit. Research shows that woodlands are also especially good for our wellbeing. Because of their physical structure they are able to screen out noise and other intrusions from the modern world, absorb large numbers of people without feeling crowded, and offer a wide range of activities (Forestry Commission, 2005). The mental health benefits of woodlands are estimated to be worth around £141 million in England alone. This is thought to arise from more natural sounds such as bird song, being physically active and lower air pollution levels (see e.g., Saraev et al., 2020).



DRIVERS OF CHANGE

Planning and Development in the High Weald AONB

Meeting the climate, biodiversity and inequality challenges of the next 20 years will require transformational change in the way that development is planned for and delivered in the High Weald AONB. Being nationally designated for their outstanding natural beauty, AONB landscapes should be exemplars of sustainable planning and design. As the AONB continues to evolve to meet the needs of current and future generations, this must happen in a way that respects its landscape character, natural resources and cultural heritage.



Local Plan Policies and the AONB

Responsibility for planning in AONBs lies with the relevant local authority. The AONB Management Plan does not form part of the statutory development plan, but local planning authorities and neighbourhood planning bodies should take the AONB Management Plan into account when preparing local and neighbourhood plans. AONB Management Plans are also material considerations for making decisions on planning applications within AONBs and their setting.

The 11 districts and boroughs with land in the High Weald AONB each have local plans and strategies that contain policies specific to the AONB, as do many of the parishes that have a 'Made' Neighbourhood Plan. The waste, mineral and highway strategies prepared by the four county councils with land in the AONB may also have AONB specific policies.

As part of their shared ambition to coordinate policies across the AONB, High Weald partners commit to providing a representative with sufficient experience and seniority from each local authority to the Officers' Steering Group (OSG) which meets regularly during the year to build policy consensus and develop joint working initiatives.

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AONB Setting

It is not only development within the boundary of the High Weald AONB that needs to be informed by consideration of the Management Plan; national planning policy and guidance make clear that land within the setting of AONBs often makes an important contribution to maintaining their natural beauty, and here poorly located or designed development can do harm. This is especially the case where long views from or to the designated landscape are identified as important, or where the landscape character of land within and adjoining the designated area is complementary. Development within the settings of these areas will therefore need sensitive handling that takes these potential impacts into account.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and AONBs

National planning policy is set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2023¹⁷. The NPPF applies as a whole to AONBs as it does to non-designated areas and sets out that planning policies and decisions should [inter alia] recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside¹⁸. However, two paragraphs refer specifically to AONBs: paragraphs 182 and 183.

The NPPF and the accompanying Planning Practice Guidance form important material considerations with regard to development management and confirm that:

- **The scale and extent of development in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) should be limited¹⁹**
- **The presumption in favour of sustainable development does not automatically apply within the High Weald AONB (where the application of policies in the Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed, OR where any adverse impacts would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the Framework taken as a whole)²⁰**
- **There is a presumption that planning permission should be refused for major development in AONBs other than in exceptional circumstances and where it can be demonstrated that the development is in the public interest²¹**
- **Policies for protecting AONBs may mean that it is not possible to meet objectively assessed needs for housing and other development in full (where the application of policies in the Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a strong reason for restricting the overall scale, type or distribution of development in the plan area)²²**
- **AONBs are unlikely to be suitable areas for accommodating unmet needs arising from adjoining, non-designated, areas.²³**

17. References to NPPF paragraphs refer to the December 2023 version of the NPPF

18. NPPF 2023 para 180

19. NPPF 2023 para 182

20. NPPF 2023 para 11 (d) and its footnote 7

21. NPPF 2023 para 183

22. NPPF 2023 para 11 (b) (i)

23. NPPG Paragraph: 041 Reference ID: 8-041-20190721

Development in the High Weald AONB

Paragraph 182 of the NPPF states:

‘Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues. The conservation and enhancement of wildlife and cultural heritage are also important considerations in these areas, and should be given great weight in National Parks and the Broads. The scale and extent of development within all these designated areas should be limited, while development within their setting should be sensitively located and designed to avoid or minimise adverse impacts on the designated areas.’

PLANNING PRINCIPLE

1

In order to demonstrate that planning applications are consistent with national policy, and in particular reflect the great weight to be given to the protection of the AONB in the NPPF para 182, and to ensure planning decisions take full account of the importance of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB, the High Weald Partnership recommends that proposals be accompanied by suitable assessment reports which:

- specifically set out how proposals have been informed early in the process by the Management Plan and, where relevant, the High Weald Housing Design Guide;
- set out how any adverse impacts on the character and conservation purpose of the AONB, and on the specific components of character as set out in this Plan, including cumulative impacts, have been avoided or minimised in the proposals. LVIA reports, assessments of impact on scenic beauty, and Design & Access Statements are all useful tools in this regard;
- are used to clearly inform planning decision-makers in considering the scale, extent, location and design of development, in accordance with para 182;

and that production of local plans, site allocation proposals and Neighbourhood Plans should be informed by similar assessments.

Major Development in the High Weald AONB

Paragraph 183 of the NPPF states:

‘When considering applications for development within National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, permission should be refused for major development other than in exceptional circumstances, and where it can be demonstrated that the development is in the public interest. Consideration of such applications should include an assessment of:

- a. *the need for the development, including in terms of any national considerations, and the impact of permitting it, or refusing it, upon the local economy;*
- b. *the cost of, and scope for, developing outside the designated area, or meeting the need for it in some other way; and*
- c. *any detrimental effect on the environment, the landscape and recreation opportunities and the extent to which they can be moderated.’*

Major development as referred to in paragraph 183 of the NPPF is not defined, but Footnote 64 of the NPPF explains:

‘For the purposes of paragraphs 182 and 183, whether a proposal is ‘major development’ is a matter for the decision maker, taking into account its nature, scale and setting, and whether it could have a significant adverse impact on the purposes for which the area has been designated or defined.’

PLANNING PRINCIPLE

2

Noting that whether development is major or not in the context of the AONB (under para 183 of the NPPF) is a matter of planning judgement for the decision maker, the High Weald Partnership recommends that, in forming that judgement, specific consideration be given to the following:

- The potential of the proposal to have a significant adverse impact on the natural beauty for which the AONB is designated and defined, as set out in this Management Plan, for example, where the nature, scale and setting of the proposal could significantly harm any of the character components.
- The potential for such adverse impact from cumulative development

and that on a precautionary basis, such consideration is also applied to the plan-making stage and any proposed allocations for development in the AONB.

N.B. It is important to remember that even where development is not considered to be ‘major’ under para 183, the provisions of para 182 still apply.

New Housing Development in the High Weald AONB

The built character of the High Weald, in terms of settlement form and structure, siting in the landscape, the relationships of buildings to streets, and building form and massing, is highly important to the natural and scenic beauty of the High Weald.

The High Weald Partnership recommends that new development should be 'landscape-led' and consistent with the objectives set out in this Plan and expanded on in the **High Weald Housing Design Guide**²⁴. The Guide sets out the urban design expectations for all new housing developments within the High Weald AONB, with the objective of achieving higher quality and landscape-led design that reflects intrinsic High Weald character, that steers away from generic or suburban layout and design approaches, and that is instead embedded with a true sense of place, without stifling innovation and creativity.

Landscape-led design means using landscape as a framework to understand the site and formulate a design response. The term landscape used here includes landscape history, physical character and perceived qualities, and socio-economic and ecological functioning – all of which contribute to understanding a place. A design response includes issues such as site capacity, layout, form, scale and detailing as well as any landscaping and ecology plans which combine to make a place beautiful and distinctive and integrate it into the surrounding AONB.

As well as providing a brief explanation of the High Weald AONB and its settlement character, the Design Guide format is intended to help structure the design process, with ten Design Themes ranging from **Responding to Site & Landscape Context**, **Layout & Structuring the Site**, and **The Right Built Form**, to more detailed matters such as **Parking Strategies**, **Building Appearance**, and **Reinforcing Local Planting Character**. Each Design Theme contains detailed analysis and advice, illustrated with photographs and diagrams, and a summary checklist, with a particular emphasis on tailoring design approaches to support the overall character and identity of the High Weald. As such, it aligns with the advice in the NPPF (para 133) and in the National Design Guide advocating locally-based design guides and regarding their scope and purpose.



24. Design Guide and Colour Study – High Weald

PLANNING PRINCIPLE 3

The High Weald Partnership recommends that:

- the High Weald Housing Design Guide is used by developers and designers to create schemes which contribute positively to the character and natural beauty of the High Weald AONB, and by Neighbourhood Plan groups to help inform Neighbourhood Plans, and by LPAs to inform planning policies, site allocations and development management decision-making.
- local plan policies for new housing development in the High Weald should aim towards net-zero standards.
- new development should contribute positively to nature recovery, ensuring that the functioning of existing on-site and site-adjacent features and natural processes are protected and enhanced; whilst noting that 10% BNG is a statutory requirement for all relevant development, and achieving gains in biodiversity does not necessarily mean a development meets the wider requirements of planning policy in AONBs.
- local plan policies consider alternative mechanisms to improve delivery and affordability while minimising land take, to help deliver housing within the AONB in a manner that complies with the NPPF, and which can help conserve the character and beauty of the High Weald AONB. For instance, encouraging the subdivision of larger homes into smaller ones and the efficient utilisation of the existing building stock and brownfield sites, along with ensuring that energy-efficient new development makes the most efficient use of land, whilst still having appropriate regard to retaining and incorporating landscape features.

Historic Built Environment in the High Weald AONB

The historic environment is fundamental to the distinctive character, sense of place and natural beauty of AONBs²⁵. The rich built heritage greatly informs the character of the High Weald AONB; historic hamlets and farmsteads are an intrinsic part of the distinct and picturesque landscape, with the rolling pastureland and small ancient woodlands of the countryside interspersed with the rich clay-tiled roofs of historic buildings. Along with the domestic building stock of farmhouses and cottages, building typologies reflect locally distinct historic agricultural practices, for example the distinctive brick roundels of the hop industry's oast-houses, fine timber-framed barns and modest brick cowsheds, dairies and outbuildings.

National planning policy places great importance on the conservation of these Heritage Assets (Chapter 16 of the NPPF) which can be classified as:

- **'designated'** – i.e., those benefiting from statutory designation, such as Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas, and
- **Non-designated'** – other historic features and structures which contribute positively to the physical, historic and socio-cultural character of the area, and which warrant retention and interpretation, and which can be identified in 'Local Lists' (prepared by LPAs or via Neighbourhood Plans), or during the decision-making process.

PLANNING PRINCIPLE

4

The High Weald Partnership recommends that, with reference to the contribution that Heritage Assets and their settings make to the cultural value, character and natural beauty of the National Landscape, appropriate regard is given to their conservation in the planning process, including in planning policy and site allocations process, neighbourhood planning and in decision-making.



Energy Efficiency and Historic Buildings

To help meet net zero ambitions, the energy efficiency of historic buildings is an important consideration; Historic England recognises the urgent need for climate action and believe that England's existing buildings have an essential role to play in fighting climate change. Sustainability in building is not just associated with operational energy consumption, but also the embodied energy used in the construction of buildings, and to meet carbon neutral targets we must recycle, reuse and responsibly adapt our existing historic buildings. Continuing to upgrade, repair and maintain historic buildings makes good social, economic and environmental sense, and will help conserve and enhance the AONB, contributing to the Management Plan objectives and Climate Change priorities.

It is important to recognise that retrofitting measures which may be suitable for modern (post-war) housing stock can be damaging to older buildings, either through causing unacceptable damage to the character and appearance of historic buildings, or through causing damaging technical conflicts with traditional construction.

Historic England's extensive research in the complex area of understanding and improving the energy performance of historic buildings has led to their overarching guidance: **Energy Efficiency and Historic Buildings: How to Improve Energy Efficiency | Historic England**. This sets out their holistic 'whole building approach' which can help in meeting the combined objectives of increasing energy efficiency and sustaining significance in heritage assets while avoiding unintended consequences, and is supported by a more detailed suite of guidance on practical measures.

PLANNING PRINCIPLE

5

The High Weald Partnership recommends that energy efficiency planning policies and decision-making affecting the historic built environment should follow best practice advice from Historic England, in order that energy conservation measures are balanced with conserving the historic environment that contributes to the natural beauty of the AONB.

25. Joint Statement on the Historic Environment in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty | Historic England

Public Realm in the High Weald AONB

The historic public realm across the High Weald plays an important role in defining the special character of the AONB. Historic features such as locally distinctive paving, railings, milestones and historic fingerpost signs, along with red telephone kiosks and letterboxes, contribute positively to the character of the rural public realm. The materials, finishes and elements used within the public realm often make a significant contribution to an area's sense of place, and the retention, sensitive repair, and, where appropriate, reinstatement of such features is important in maintaining the AONB's character.

Rural areas can also suffer suburbanisation through inappropriate creation of footways with raised kerbs, the loss of verges, the introduction of excessive road signage, or of signage and railings in inappropriate modern and generic styles and materials, and the introduction of street lighting. Meanwhile, wildflower verges are part of the High Weald's natural beauty and often a refuge for wildlife that has disappeared elsewhere, and the appropriate management of both woodland verges and grassland verges is important for ecology.

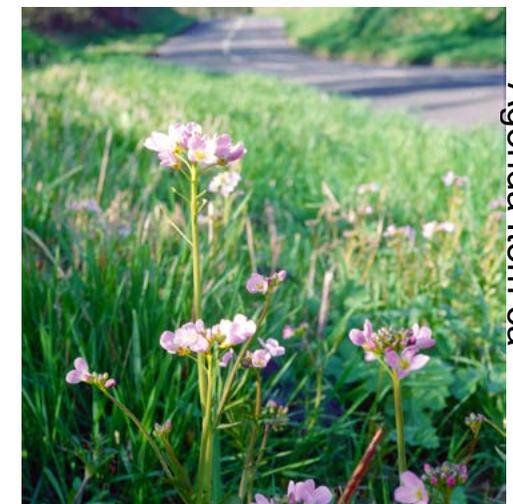
The public realm is also important to the quality of everyday life throughout the AONB, from the accessibility and convenience of bus stops, benches and litter bins, to the community activities and events enabled by quality public spaces.

Meanwhile, considerable new public realm is created in new developments, which offers the opportunity to enhance the landscape character and ecological value of existing retained green infrastructure on-site or adjacent, as well as providing new positive planting to meet BNG requirements. Within new developments, existing site features such as trees, hedgerows, ponds and streams should be retained as part of the public realm to embed a genuine local sense of place in new schemes, while new green spaces and habitats for wildlife should be maximised, with a range of native plantings. Further, green spaces within sites can actively contribute to climate adaptation, and bring with them opportunities to enhance the locality through their management, drawing on local traditional land-management skills (e.g., coppicing) and supporting local industry.

PLANNING PRINCIPLE 6

The High Weald Partnership recommends that:

- Historic public realm features in the AONB are given consideration as Heritage Assets, and should be retained in-situ and repaired appropriately, in order to conserve their contribution to the natural beauty of the AONB.
- Partners responsible for management of roadside verges and works in their vicinity follow best practice advice, including [Managing grassland road verges 2020 \(plantlife.org.uk\)](#).
- Existing trees in villages and towns, including street trees, are retained, managed well, and supplemented where appropriate, to reinforce the verdant character of High Weald settlements and to help with climate adaptation.
- Design choices for new or replacement public realm infrastructure, including paving, signage and lighting, are sensitive to the character of the AONB, use traditional designs and materials, and have regard to the objectives of the Management Plan.
- New public realm soft landscaping schemes are informed by the advice in the High Weald Housing Design Guide regarding creating multi-layered planting strategies of native trees, (including street trees), hedging plants and wildflowers, avoiding ubiquitous, suburbanising planting of ornamental ground-cover shrubs or locally non-native or invasive species.



High Weald Charter for residents and visitors

The following are actions that all residents, visitors and businesses can take to help care for this nationally important landscape.



Buy local products and services from farmers and woodland managers who actively manage their land to benefit the environment

The landscape and wildlife value of the area's woodlands, hedges, meadows, heathlands and field margins are dependent on traditional management. Money invested in products and services that help support this management is money invested in conserving the AONB and its local economy.



Slow down for people, horses and wildlife

Traffic spoils enjoyment of the High Weald for 80 per cent of its residents. Speeding cars kill people, horses, badgers, deer and foxes, and ancient routeways and their rare plants are damaged by inconsiderate driving and parking.



Use less water

Demands for water lead to high levels of water extraction, damaging the wildlife of the AONB's streams, rivers and wet grasslands. Increased demand in future will create pressure for new reservoirs within the AONB.



Take pride in the High Weald – promote its special features and places to family, friends and visitors

Promoting what you find special about the High Weald is the best way of encouraging commitment and action by others to the area.



Help prevent the spread of invasive and harmful plant and animal species

Introduced plant, animal and fish species spread rapidly in the High Weald countryside, competing with our native wildlife and leading to its loss.



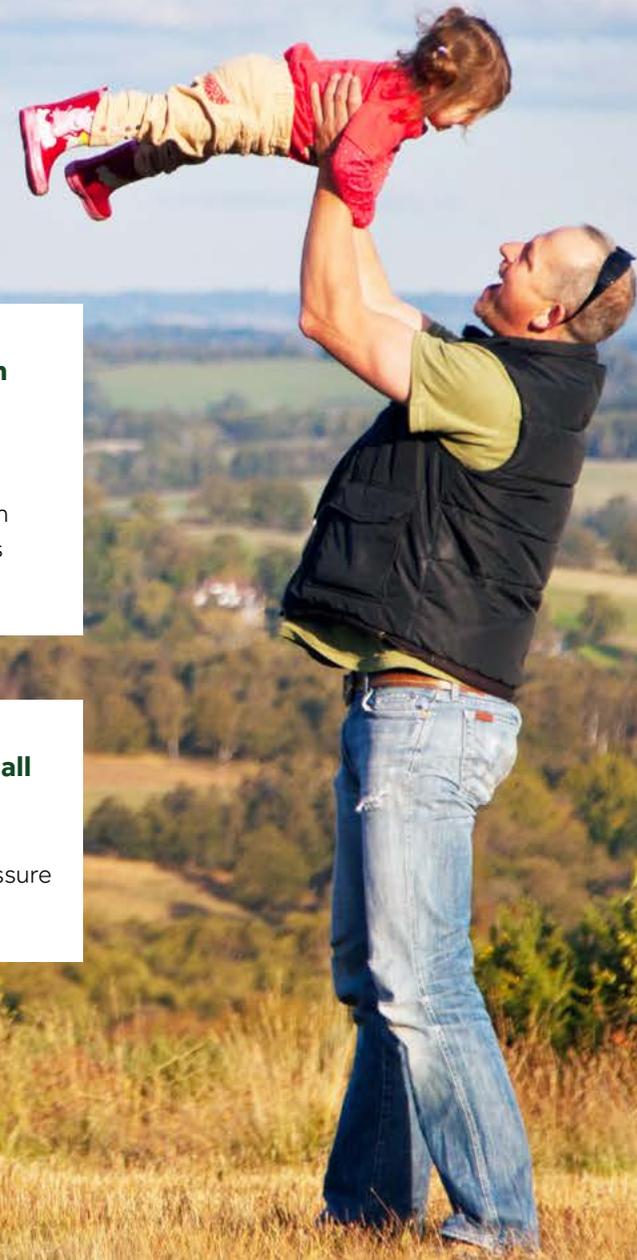
Avoid using the car where possible and consider using renewable energy in your home

Emissions from petrol and other non-renewable fossil fuels contribute to climate change and lead to degradation of valuable habitats such as sandrock, and gradual loss of wildlife such as bluebells.



Have a say

Your views can influence care of the area – use consultation processes operating at parish, district, county and AONB level to steer policy and action that affects the area.



Get involved – support local conservation organisations

With your financial and practical support, local conservation organisations can take action to care for the area such as monitoring threatened wildlife, undertaking practical conservation tasks, and lobbying government.



Manage your land for wildlife and maintain the rural nature of your property

Fields, woodland, paddocks and gardens support valuable and threatened wildlife. Inappropriate materials and features, often associated with urban areas, are leading to the gradual loss of the AONB's valued rural feel.



Respect other users – follow the Countryside Code

Through responsible behaviour we can all use and enjoy the countryside without damaging the enjoyment or livelihoods of others.



Reduce, reuse and recycle, and dispose of all litter responsibly

Litter spoils enjoyment of the countryside for the majority of residents. Less rubbish means less pressure for landfill sites and incinerators in the AONB.

Monitoring

National Monitoring

The government is currently developing a new outcomes framework for Protected Landscapes, including AONBs, which will set targets for their contributions to national environment and climate commitments. Targets set by national government²⁶ will form part of a subsequent Monitoring Addendum to this Management Plan.

Local Monitoring – Indicators of Success

Local Monitoring for the duration of the Management Plan will remain specific to the High Weald landscape, associated with the objectives set out in the Plan.

The Partnership will look to develop a programme to identify appropriate, effective and proportionate mechanisms to measure or judge progress towards the indicators of success, and will seek to work with wider partners to secure a long-term programme of monitoring along with appropriate resources.

Natural Systems

- All water bodies with either a 'good' or 'high' ecological and chemical status.
- 100 per cent geological SSSIs in favourable condition.
- Earthworm numbers consistently high across the High Weald.

Settlement

- Increase in percentage of new developments that accord with High Weald AONB Housing Design Guidance.
- High level of planning appeals dismissed where grounds of refusal were adverse impact on AONB, including non-compliance with High Weald Housing Design Guide.
- Physical and perceived separation between settlements maintained.

Routeways

- Greater proportion of new homes delivered through re-development or small developments.
- Increase in retention of historic public realm features in highways management regimes.
- Fewer public rights of way diversions on historic routeways.
- Increase in proportion of designated wildlife verges with tailored management regimes.

Woodland

- No loss of ancient woodland.
- Increase in proportion of woodland managed to remove invasive species.
- Increase in woodland dependent butterflies.
- Length of hedges restored or replanted.
- Increase in Historic Environment Records (HER) for woodlands.
- Increase in scale and numbers of businesses milling local timber.

Fieldsapes and Heath

- Maintenance of land registered for grazing animals.
- Increase in hedges restored and new hedges planted.
- No loss of Medieval field systems.
- No loss of species rich grassland.
- No loss of lowland heath.
- Increase in connectivity of species-rich grassland.

Dark Skies

- Increased number of LPA development plans (including neighbourhood plans) that include specific dark skies policies.
- No loss of dark skies or tranquillity.

Aesthetic & Perceptual Qualities

- Maintaining the number and frequency of schools undertaking outdoor learning activities.
- Number of volunteer days supporting AONB conservation.
- Proportion of rights of way in good condition.
- Increase in High Weald Walking Festival participants.

Land-based Economy and Rural Life

- Improved conditions for land-based businesses to flourish.
- Increased procurement by public bodies of goods and services which support AONB landscape conservation.
- Increase in average rural incomes.
- High retention of agricultural occupancy conditions.
- Maintained numbers of people employed in land-based and craft sectors.
- No loss of strategic agricultural or land-management infrastructure (e.g. abattoirs, livestock markets, sawmills).
- Improved levels of rural public transport.
- No loss of rural amenities (e.g. Post Offices, pubs).

26. Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk).



Definition of terms

Aesthetic – Concerned with beauty, or the appreciation of beauty.

Assart – Land enclosed from woodland, often still with numerous trees on boundaries.

Biodiversity – In this context covers species richness and abundance, along with genetic diversity and diversity of traits.

Character – A distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements (or components) that makes an area different from other areas.

Conservation – The preservation, protection or restoration of the landscape.

Cryptogam – A plant that reproduces through spores rather than seeds or blooms, such as algae, lichens, mosses and ferns.

Culture – The sum total of people's beliefs, customs, social groupings, knowledge and technology, not inherited through biology.

Dark skies – Where you can see starry skies and our own galaxy, the Milky Way.

Diffuse Pollution – The release of potential pollutants from a range of activities that, individually, may have no effect on the water environment, but, at the scale of a catchment, can have a significant effect.

Field – An area of land, often enclosed, traditionally used for cultivation or the grazing of livestock.

Field system – A group or complex of fields sharing a common character, which appears to form a coherent whole (in the High Weald, this usually results from the influence of topography and land use but also historic features).

Forest – Derives from the Latin nova foresta (literally 'new hunting ground') and originally denoted an area defined by the Normans where deer and other animals were kept for hunting. Forest in this sense does not necessarily refer to a wooded area in the modern meaning of the word but also to heathlands, moorlands, and wetlands.

Geomorphology – Landform origins, and the processes which shape or modify them, such as erosion.

Gestalt qualities – Concepts which refer to the essential nature of a perceptual experience, where the whole is greater than the parts.

Gill – A deep cleft or ravine, usually wooded and forming the course of a stream.

Greenhouse gases – Gases that trap heat in the atmosphere. The gases are water vapour, carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide and fluorinated gases.

Green and Blue Infrastructure – All the individual parcels of natural space and features that, when connected, deliver quality of life and environmental benefits for communities and the nature that thrives within them. Green infrastructure usually refers to land; fields, woods and hedgerows, while blue infrastructure includes water bodies.

Heritage Asset – Defined in the NPPF as a building, monument, site, place, area, or landscape identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, because of its heritage interest. It includes designated heritage assets and non-designated assets identified by the local planning authority (including local listing).

Historic Landscape Characterisation – Method of identification and interpretation of the varying historic character within an area, looking beyond individual heritage assets to an understanding of the whole landscape.

Holloways – Sunken routeways generally in wooded areas.

Human-scale – A pre-industrial farming landscape managed by human labour using traditional tools, created prior to heavily mechanised farming and intensive agricultural practices.

Inned rivers – Reclaimed often marshy land through draining and other engineering techniques of the day.

Key characteristics – Combinations of elements particularly important to character that help make that character distinctive.

Landform – Natural features in the landscape that make up the terrain, such as hills, valleys and plains.

Landscape – An area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.

Landscape-led – Shaped and informed by an understanding of the High Weald's landscape as described in this Management Plan. Landscape-led design means using landscape as a framework to both understand the site – its context, character, qualities and functioning – and to formulate a design response in terms of site capacity, layout and design.

Natural and Cultural Capital – in the context of this Plan, natural capital is the natural resources and habitat of the area, including geology, soils, water, vegetation, and wildlife, while cultural capital includes employment, skills, knowledge, experience and enjoyment.

Natural beauty – For the High Weald AONB, natural beauty is defined by the Statement of Significance.

Natural assets – Biological assets, land and water areas with their ecosystems, subsoil assets and air.

Near-term targets – These outline how organisations will reduce their emissions, usually over the next 5-10 years, to galvanise the action required for longer-term targets.

Net zero – Net zero means that any greenhouse gas emissions created are balanced (cancelled out) by taking the same amount out of the atmosphere. In 2019, the UK government became the first major economy to pass a net zero emissions law with a target that will require the UK to bring all greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050.

Oceanic Climate – A climate sub-type typical of much of north-west Europe, characterised by cool summers and mild winters, with a narrow annual temperature range and few extremes due to maritime influence.

Public Realm – All external spaces that are publicly accessible, such as streets, lanes and paths, verges, village greens and squares, and the features within them, such as signage, lighting and street furniture.

Regenerative agriculture – A system of farming principles and practices that increases biodiversity above and below the soil's surface, restores soil health, rebuilds soil organic matter, improves watersheds and enhances ecosystem services.

Routeway – Any route between places across either land or water.

Setting – The surroundings in which the AONB is experienced by people.

Shaw – A narrow strip of woodland.

Shifting Baseline Syndrome – The generational loss of historic understanding, knowledge and experience of environmental conditions and the acceptance of more recent ecological conditions, erodes sustainable baselines for nature recovery. In practice this means that environmental targets set today would have been considered poor yesterday, whilst what is considered a poor baseline today may sadly be considered a good target in the future if shifting baseline syndrome persists.

Significance – What is special and valued about the AONB to this and future generations.

Species-rich grassland – A grassland displaying a wide variety of wildflowers and grasses with the exact composition varying according to the dynamic interaction of factors such as management, drainage, history and soils.

Sustainable land management – Farming and other land management activity that conserves the character of the AONB, enhances the diversity and biomass of characteristic wildlife, improves soil quality and the functioning of natural systems; and supports local livelihoods and social structure.

Topography – The arrangement of the physical features of an area, including both natural and artificial.

Undisturbed soils – Soils that haven't been disturbed over the long term by activities such as ploughing/chemical input/construction works.

Wooded pasture – The product of historic land management resulting in a typical vegetation structure of large, open-grown or high forest trees (often pollards) at various densities in a matrix of grazed grassland, heathland or woodland.

Zero carbon – Zero carbon means that no carbon emissions are being produced from a product or service.

The following terms are used in the document:

| | |
|------------------------|--|
| CRoW Act | Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2000 |
| HLC | Historic Landscape Characterisation |
| JAC/HWJAC | High Weald Joint Advisory Committee |
| LPA | Local Planning Authority |
| LVIA | Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment |
| NLA | National Landscapes Association (Formerly the National Association of AONBs) |
| NP & AC Act | National Parks & Access to the Countryside Act 1949 |
| NPPF | National Planning Policy Framework |
| NPPG | National Planning Policy Guidance |
| NVC | National Vegetation Classification |
| PAWs | Plantations on Ancient Woodlands |
| RIGs | Regionally Important Geological Sites |
| RPA | Rural Payments Agency |
| SAC | Special Areas of Conservation |
| SSSI | Site of Special Scientific Interest |

Agenda Item 6a

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Disclaimer

Adoption of this management plan by partner authorities does not necessarily imply endorsement of the views and conclusions of documents identified in this Plan as ‘Evidence and further reading’.



Appendix 1:

AONB designation, policy and legal framework

Purpose of designation

The primary purpose of AONB designation is to ‘conserve and enhance natural beauty’²⁷ but the architects of the 1949 Act recognised other underlying principles which were important aspects of the designations’ success. These included the need to maintain a ‘thriving community life’ with particular emphasis on farming and forestry, and the need to promote understanding and enjoyment of the area’s special qualities by people.

These subsidiary purposes – in effect, qualifications of the primary purpose – are those defined in the Countryside Commission statement 1991²⁸, restated in 2006²⁹. The basis for the wording of the subsidiary purposes can be found in the Countryside Act 1968 (section 37):

- In pursuing the primary purpose of designation, account should be taken of the needs of agriculture, forestry and 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.

Although AONBs do not currently have the statutory second purpose of National Parks, which is ‘to promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities [of the area] by the public’, the 1949 Act assumed that AONBs would also fulfil this function^{30,31}, and this intent is reflected in the subsequent duty placed on AONB conservation boards by Section 87 of the CRoW Act 2000 which adopts the same language³².

High Weald designation history³³

The report of the first National Park Committee, set up in 1929, mentioned the wooded hill country of the High Weald, essentially Ashdown Forest, as an area requiring measures to protect its bird interest. A subsequent report in 1945, the Dower Report, included the ‘Forest Ridges (Horsham to Battle)’ in its list of ‘Other Amenity Areas not suggested as National Parks’. Dower had recognised that some areas might not be suitable for National Park status because of their size or lack of ‘wildness’, but they nonetheless required safeguarding for their ‘characteristic landscape beauty’. A follow-up report, the Hobhouse Report, in 1947 included the Forest Ridges in a list of 52 Conservation Areas (largely based on Dower’s ‘Other Amenity Areas...’) which, it proposed, should be designated for their high landscape quality, scientific interest and recreational value. It wasn’t until 1969, following coordinated landscape surveys by county and district councils, that the wider High Weald was put forward to the Countryside Commission for consideration as an AONB. Detailed work on the boundaries was then carried out and designation of the High Weald was confirmed in 1983.

From 22nd November 2023, all AONBs are to be known as National Landscapes. The High Weald National Landscape remains designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and is referred to as such in policy, legislation and guidance. For this reason, this document is still titled and referred to as the High Weald AONB Management Plan. Its statutory purpose remains unchanged.

27. [Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/14/section/1)

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

29. Guidance for the review of AONB Management Plans (Countryside Agency, CA 221, 2006, p.6)

30. [ukpga_19490097_en.pdf \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1949/0097/en.pdf)

31. Report of the National Parks Committee 1947, available to view at [National Landscapes - Historical Papers \(national-landscapes.org.uk\)](https://www.national-landscapes.org.uk/historical-papers).

32. [Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/14/section/1)

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Responsibility for conservation and enhancement of AONBs: the legal framework

AONBs exist within a legal framework which has been progressively strengthened since the first AONBs came into existence after the Second World War.

- **The 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act** made provision for the designation of AONBs and National Parks. It provided AONBs with protection, under planning law, against inappropriate development and gave local authorities permissive powers to take action for ‘preserving and enhancing natural beauty’.
- **The Countryside Act 1968 (Section 37)** placed a responsibility on local authorities, statutory conservation bodies, and civil servants, in exercising their functions under the 1949 Act (as amended by subsequent legislation) to ‘have due regard to the needs of agriculture and forestry and to the economic and social interests of rural areas.’ Within AONBs this means a responsibility to acknowledge and, where appropriate, to promote farming, forestry and the rural economic and social context wherever this can be done without compromising the primary purpose of conserving natural beauty.
- **The Environment Act 1995** confirmed replacement of ‘preserve and enhance’ with ‘conserve and enhance’ in relation to the purpose of National Parks and duties of public bodies towards them.
- **The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CRoW)**, amended by the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023, subsumed and strengthened the AONB provisions of the 1949 Act. It brought the primary purpose in line with that of National Parks, clarified the procedure for their designation, and created a firm legislative basis for their protection and management, giving responsibility for their conservation and enhancement primarily to local authorities. In particular:
 - **Section 82** reaffirms the primary purpose of AONBs: to conserve and enhance natural beauty.
 - **Section 83** establishes the procedure for designating or revising the boundaries of an AONB, including Natural England’s duty to consult with local authorities and to facilitate public engagement.
 - **Section 84** confirms the powers of local authorities to take ‘all such action as appears to them expedient’ to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of an AONB and sets consultation and advice on development planning and on public access on the same basis as National Parks in the 1949 Act.

- **Section 85** places a statutory duty on all relevant authorities ‘...in exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect land [in an AONB] must seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty...’. ‘Relevant authorities’ include all public bodies (county, borough, district, parish and community councils, joint planning boards and other statutory committees); statutory undertakers (such as energy and water utilities, licensed telecommunications companies, nationalised companies such as Network Rail and other bodies established under statute responsible for railways, roads and canals); government ministers and civil servants. Activities and developments outside the boundaries of AONBs that have an impact within the designated area are also covered by the duty.
- **Sections 86 to 88** allow for the establishment in an AONB of a Conservation Board to which the AONB functions of the local authority (including development planning) can be transferred. Conservation boards have the additional but secondary function of seeking to increase public understanding and enjoyment of the AONB’s special qualities. They also have an obligation to ‘seek to foster the economic and social wellbeing of local communities’ in co-operation with local authorities and other public bodies.
- **Sections 89 and 90** create a statutory duty on all AONB partnerships (local authorities and Conservation Boards) to prepare a management plan ‘which formulates their policy for the management of their area of outstanding natural beauty and for the carrying out of their functions in relation to it’, and thereafter to review adopted and published Plans at intervals of not more than five years. Where an AONB involves more than one local authority, they are required to do this ‘acting jointly’. Section 90 also sets out that the Secretary of State may by regulations make provision requiring AONB Management Plans to contribute to the meeting of any target set under Chapter 1 of Part 1 of the Environment Act 2021, and setting out how such a plan must contribute to the meeting of such targets, and setting out how AONB Management Plans must further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB.
- **Section 90A** sets out that the Secretary of State may by regulations make provision requiring relevant authorities to contribute to the preparation, implementation or review of AONB Management Plans, and setting out how such a relevant authority may or must do so.
- **Section 92** makes clear that the conservation of natural beauty includes the conservation of ‘flora, fauna and geological and physiographical features.’

● The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (NERC):

- **Section 99** formally clarifies in law that the fact that an area consists of or includes land used for agriculture or woodlands, or as a park, or 'any other area whose flora, fauna or physiographical features are partly the product of human intervention in the landscape' does not prevent it from being treated, for legal purposes, 'as being an area of natural beauty (or of outstanding natural beauty).'
- **Schedule 7** asserts that an AONB joint committee of two or more local authorities, or a conservation board, can constitute a 'designated body' for the performance of functions allocated to Defra.

The international context

AONBs in England, Wales and Northern Ireland are part of the international family of protected areas. As cultural landscapes, produced through the interaction of humans with nature over time, they have a special significance (together with UK National Parks) of being recognised by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) as 'Category V – Protected Landscapes'. These offer a unique contribution to the conservation of biological diversity, particularly where conservation objectives need to be met over a large area with a range of ownership patterns and governance. They can act as models of sustainability, promoting traditional systems of management that support key species.

Category V protected landscapes are defined by IUCN as:

'A protected area where the interaction of people and nature over time has produced an area of distinct character with significant ecological, biological, cultural and scenic value: and where safeguarding the integrity of this interaction is vital to protecting and sustaining the area and its associated nature conservation and other values.'

The Council of Europe Landscape Convention (2000), ratified by the UK government in 2006, provides a definition of landscape as 'An area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.' This is a rich concept that puts people at the heart of landscape (the commonplace and 'degraded' as well as the eminent), each of which has its own distinctive character and meaning to those who inhabit or visit it.

Since the 1949 Act there has been continuous development in the policy and legislative context of AONBs, shaped by a number of key policy documents including:

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty: A Policy Statement (Countryside Commission & Countryside Council for Wales, CCP356, 1991)

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty: A Guide for Members of Joint Advisory Committees (Countryside Commission & Countryside Council for Wales, CCP461, 1994)

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty: Providing for the future (Countryside Commission, CCWP 08, 1998)

Protecting our finest countryside: Advice to Government (Countryside Commission, CCP352, 1998)

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plans: A Guide (Countryside Agency, CA23, 2001)

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty: A Guide for AONB partnership members (Countryside Agency, CA24, 2001)

Guidance for the Review of AONB Management Plans (Countryside Agency, CA221, 2006)

Guidance for assessing landscapes for designation as National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in England (Natural England, 2011)

Appendix 2:

A brief history of the High Weald

Termed Anderida silva by the Romans, it was referred to as Andredesleah ('leah' suggesting wood pasture) in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, and later as Andredesweald (the high forest of Andred) shortened to Weald in Saxon charters (sometimes associated with weald-bera or den-bera – a right to feed swine in the forest). The Weald is one of the longest lasting regional names in Britain.

Prehistory

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It is possible that the system of moving livestock into seasonal grazing areas in the Weald from the surrounding downs and vales originated in the Neolithic period, or even earlier. Mesolithic and Palaeolithic flint scatters are concentrated close to springs and on the drier ridgetops. There is significant evidence for communities using and clearing woodland, cultivating land and for the formation of heathland by the Bronze Age.

Iron Age ironworks are concentrated around the northern and eastern fringes of the High Weald, enabling the export of iron via tributaries of the River Thames and the Brede and Rother. The location of routeways close to Iron Age forts and camps suggest a degree of control and supervision over trade in livestock, and also the export of iron and other products out of the Weald.

The Roman period (AD 43-420)

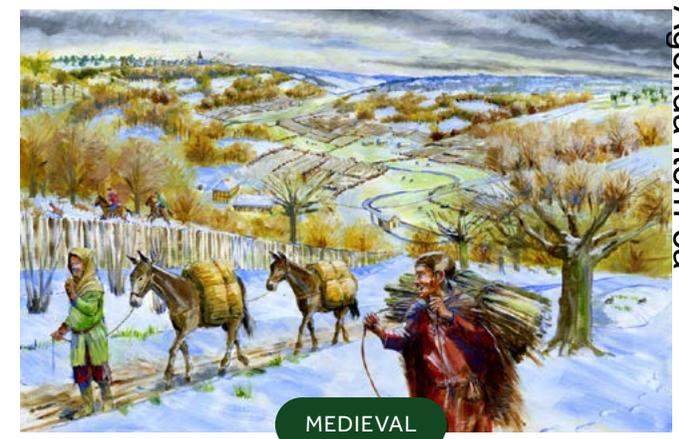
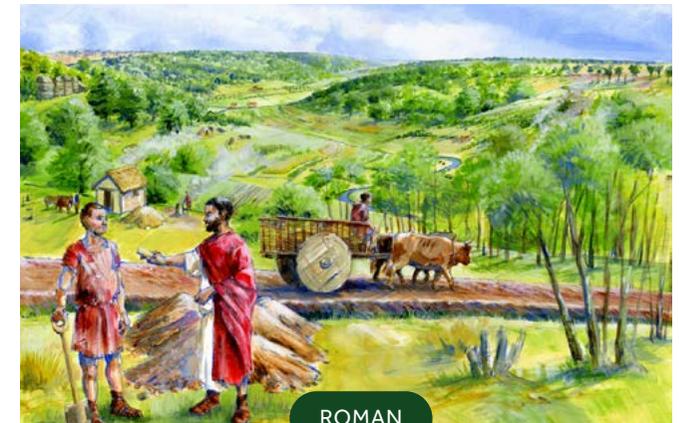
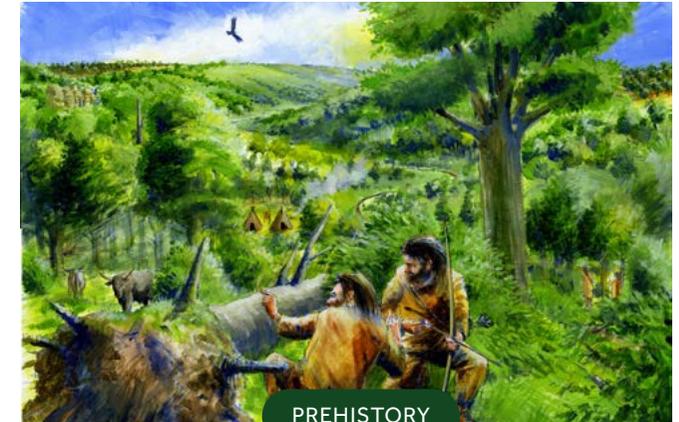
The High Weald was the premier iron producing district in Britannia during the Roman occupation, with up to 2,000 bloomeries scattered across the area and nine industrial scale sites. Iron production, which peaked in the 2nd and first half of the 3rd centuries AD, was located within 3.5km of

known Roman roads and concentrated to the east, where it was managed as an Imperial estate by the Roman Fleet (the Classis Britannica). Here it had good access to the navigable waterways of the Brede and Rother, and to major highways linking to both the London market and the wealthy villas and cornlands of the South Downs.

The Roman roads that intersect the High Weald, and which enabled the movement of military force and the extraction of iron, broadly correspond in their alignment with earlier routeways and in some cases intersect them. Unlike most routeways which avoid boggy ground, Roman roads drove across the landscape and required paved fording points where they crossed rivers and streams. Recorded Roman villas are very rare in the High Weald because the control of the Roman Fleet inhibited the development of private estates.

'Unless a man understands the Weald, he cannot write about the beginnings of England...'

Hilaire Belloc



The Saxon period (420-1066)

Routeways provided the framework for territorial units – called ‘lathes’ in Kent and Surrey, and ‘rapes’ in Sussex – that developed after the Roman period and up to the adoption of counties and then the parish system from the 8th and 9th centuries. These routeways connected parent manors in surrounding arable landscapes to the woodland resources and rich pastures of the Weald, often at distances of 20 or 30 miles apart. These included the temporary swine pastures or ‘dens’ (concentrated in Kent) where pigs and sometimes cattle and sheep were herded to feed on acorns and beech mast in the autumn.

The surveyors for the Domesday Book (1086-7) used pigs as a way of calculating the value and extent of woodland. The right of tenants to graze pigs in wood pasture areas (called ‘pannage’) developed from the 9th century and continued into the 14th and 15th centuries. Other areas along routeways were used as seasonal pastures or stopping-off points, including ‘folds’ and areas which became greens and footpaths within farming settlements.

The medieval period (1066-1540)

The practice of temporary grazing from outlying manors had declined by the 11th century, probably owing to the gradual break-up of the large estates by the Saxon kings through granting of lands to secular and ecclesiastical holders. Between the 9th and 12th centuries, seasonal pastures had developed into individual and clustered groups of farmsteads as more land was enclosed for growing crops and pasturing cattle. By the 14th century, the High Weald’s characteristic dispersed settlement pattern was well established, with the land mostly worked from individual family farms set in anciently enclosed fields for managing crops and pasturing animals carved out of woodland and wood pasture.

The numbers of permanent farmsteads increased until the 14th century, requiring an increasingly dense network of routeways to link them and provide access to fields and common land. A number of new farms were created out

of the woodland from the 11th century. By the late 13th century, the Wealden landscape comprised a scattering of gentry properties intermingled with a mass of small peasant holdings, many of which developed – as a result of amalgamation – in the 14th and 15th centuries into larger freehold properties. Yards in farmsteads were used to manage pigs, which continued as an important part of the local farming economy, and cattle, which continued to be driven out of the area on the hoof for finishing. Cattle became an increasingly important export between the 14th and 18th centuries, and most locally produced corn was produced as animal feed and for home consumption rather than as an export crop.

Villages, such as Goudhurst, Burwash (planned along a ridgeway), Wadhurst and Ticehurst, with marketplaces for trading local products (iron, livestock, cattle hides and woodland products) developed in the 13th century along and at the meeting point of routeways. Fine medieval houses attest to their relative wealth, and their occupants often combined farming with trade.

For five hundred years the rivers of the Eastern High Weald were an important link for trade and war between the wooded interior and the seaports of Winchelsea and Rye, which after the storms of 1285 and into the early 14th century gradually silted. Many routeways connected the Weald to navigable rivers and ports. Timber and firewood, mostly bound for France and Flanders, were the major exports from Kent and Sussex ports through to the 16th century, and the relative ease of export stimulated the woodland industry in this part of the Weald. Up to the late 15th century, the river Rother was navigable to Reading Street, Smallhythe and Newenden, with Henry V’s 1000-ton ship, *The Jesus*, built at Smallhythe in 1414. The last Royal Commission at Smallhythe was Henry VIII’s great ship, the 300-ton *Great Gallyon*, ordered in 1546. Silt and the great storm of 1636 saw the end of the shipbuilding industry, but wooden barges were still moving timber and goods from the interior of the High Weald until the end of the 19th century when the last barge, *Primrose*, was built.

The post-medieval period (1540-1750)

Some colonisation of the woodland continued up to the 17th century, by which time there was a considerable growth in population linked to the growth of industries such as broadcloth manufacture and iron founding. More houses were built along routeways, enclosing areas of common land along them. In some areas, as many as a quarter of families were housed in areas enclosed from wayside common.

The Weald again became a centre of British iron making from the early 16th century, following the successful import of blast furnace technology from the Low Countries in the 1490s, concentrated in the eastern and central Weald but with significant expansion to the north and west. Interconnecting chains of leats, dams and hammer ponds were constructed to provide sufficient head of water for the forges, and wealthy ironmasters built notable mansions such as Gravetye and Great Shoesmiths. The industry declined in the late 17th and 18th centuries as a result of cheaper imports, the rising price of fuel, the successful development of the use of coke, and the loss of naval contracts to provide cannons.

Most of the wool for dyeing was imported from Romney Marsh into the main cloth manufacturing areas around Cranbrook and Tenterden. Cloth was then transported overland by packhorse and, more rarely, wheeled transport to dealers in London. Smaller items including ironwork such as horseshoes and glass were also exported in this way. By the end of the 17th century, many clothiers and ironmasters were moving into cattle rearing in response to the increasing demand for beef. The hop industry developed on an industrial scale from this period, supplying maltings and breweries and stimulating the management of woodlands and shaws for fuel, and the growing of chestnut for hop poles.

The Industrial Revolution (1750-1914)

Over this period, the Weald shifted from a diverse industrial and farming economy to one that was more linked to the development of capital in London and the coastal resorts, and the enjoyment of its landscape by new residents and visitors.

Social commentators Arthur Young, William Cobbet and others noted the ornamental landscapes of the new gentry and admired the area's wayside cottages with their gardens. As droving of livestock continued to decline, there was further enclosure of roadside commons and greens for new houses (called 'purpesture' settlement), mostly driven by the large numbers of smallholders who were bereft of employment on account of the decline in the cloth and iron industries.

Most turnpikes in the High Weald were built on pre-existing highways between the 1730s and 1770s. They were of particular importance in easing the export of timber and corn, and in supplying goods and services for the burgeoning south coast resorts such as Brighton and Hastings. Although many turnpike trusts had closed down by the 1880s, they stimulated property transactions and enabled significant amounts of residential development. These were concentrated in the areas south of Tunbridge Wells and around the Brighton-London road to the west. From the 18th century, a trend in 'pleasure farms' saw some farmsteads converted into residential use, with routeways diverted and made into private drives, which were approached through new ornamental landscapes.

Farmland was reorganised with enlarged fields, existing or straightened hedgerows dotted with trees. Farmsteads were also reorganised often around courtyards to help produce manure for fields yielding more corn for export.

The railway network intensified these developments, often increasing the demand for improved roads to connect new housing to railway stations. Additional cattle yards were built around railway stations (for example at Hawkhurst and Paddock Wood) and rail was increasingly used for

exporting livestock, hops and milk. Railways, and at the end of this period motor cars and buses, also enabled tourism accompanied by guides and books such as Arthur Beckett's *The Wonderful Weald* (1911).

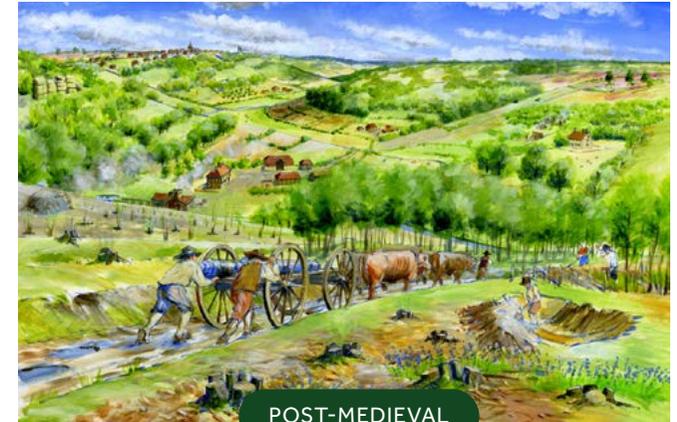
The last hundred years, 1914 to the present

The increased appreciation of the High Weald's historic landscape and heritage has been accompanied by the decline of traditional agriculture, cattle droving (cattle were still being driven to markets in the 1930s) and woodland management. Car ownership increased dramatically, leading to the further decoupling of settlement from land use. The building of bungalows and renovation of historic houses became common, and the areas around the Weald experienced a substantial and disproportionate increase in housing compared to the rest of England in the inter-war period.

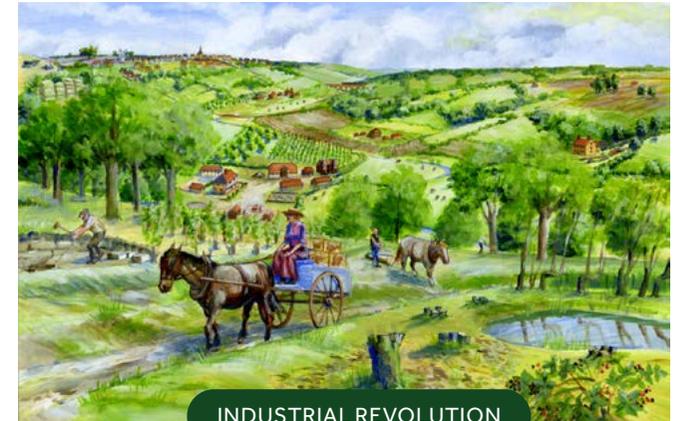
Until the 1950s, the Weald changed at a slower pace than most other regions in Britain. For 700 years prior to this, agriculture and the pattern of fields, hedges and surrounding woodland remained relatively unaltered. Since then, farming and forestry, always difficult on the poor soils, have been pushed further to the economic margins. This decline in mixed farming and woodland management is a major threat to the long-term survival of the High Weald's distinctive landscape character.

Edited and adapted from:

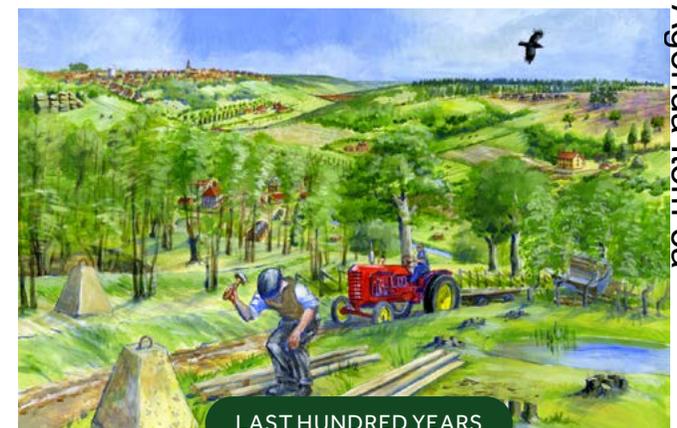
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POST-MEDIEVAL



INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION



LAST HUNDRED YEARS

Notes



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High Weald
National
Landscape
Partnership

www.highweald.org

Item 6 (b) – Sevenoaks District Community Safety Partnership 2024-25 Strategy & Action Plan

The attached report was considered by the Cabinet, and the relevant minute extract is below:

Cabinet – 14 March 2024 (Minute 97)

The Portfolio Holder for People & Places presented the report which set out the Community Safety Partnership Strategy & Action Plan for 2024-25, and outlined the priorities within the Strategy, highlighting that a new priority relating to business crime, such as abuse to shops and stuff had been introduced. A strategic assessment had been undertaken in December 2023, in partnership with the voluntary sector, housing associations, the police, council officers and other partners. Actions for each of the priorities were reviewed every three months, with funding from the Police and Crime Commissioner, to spend across the priorities. People & Places Advisory Committee had considered the same report and recommended its adoption.

Members considered the report, and the Health and Communities Manager advised that Sevenoaks had a low risk for Serious Violence, but it was a county wide priority. The District was in the top 3 safest areas in Kent with low crime statistics.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Members noted that consideration had been given to impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Resolved: That it be recommend to Council that the Sevenoaks District Community Safety Partnership Strategy and Action Plan 2024 – 25, be approved.

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**SEVENOAKS DISTRICT COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP STRATEGY &
ACTION PLAN 2024-25
Cabinet – 14 March 2024**

Report of: Sarah Robson, Chief Officer People & Places & Deputy Chief Executive

Status: For Decision

Also considered by:

- People & Places Advisory Committee – 5 March 2024
- Council – 23 April 2024

Key Decision: No

Executive Summary: The 2024-25 Sevenoaks District Community Safety Strategy and Action Plan is set out in the report and appendices. The plan responds to the community safety priorities identified for the District in the most recent Strategic Assessment.

This report supports the Key Aim of Council Plan and Community Plan.

Portfolio Holder: Cllr. Lesley Dyball

Contact Officer(s): Kelly Webb, Ext. 7474

Recommendation to People & Places Advisory Committee

To make recommendation to Cabinet to approve for the Sevenoaks District Community Safety Partnership Strategy and Action Plan 2024-25.

Recommendation to Cabinet

That Cabinet approves the Sevenoaks District Community Safety Partnership Strategy and Action Plan 2024-25 and agrees for it to be presented to Full Council for sign-off in April 2024.

Recommendation to Council

To approve the Sevenoaks District Community Safety Partnership Strategy and Action Plan 2024-25.

Reason for recommendation: The Council has a statutory duty under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 to produce a strategic assessment and annually refreshed community safety plan.

Agenda Item 6b

Introduction and Background

1. The Crime & Disorder Act 1998 places a statutory responsibility on Sevenoaks District Council, Kent County Council, Kent Fire & Rescue Service, Health, Probation and Kent Police, together with other key partners, to undertake an audit of crime and disorder in the District and co-operate in the development and implementation of a strategy and action plan for tackling local crime and disorder. The audit is known as the Strategic Assessment and provides an analysis of data and trends in relation to community safety.
2. The Strategic Assessment for Sevenoaks District was undertaken in December 2023. As a result, the seven priorities, as ranked in the Strategic Assessment, are:
 1. Serious and Acquisitive Crime including Crime Trends and Serious Violence Duty
 2. Anti-Social Behaviour including Environmental Crime
 3. Domestic Abuse including Stalking and Harassment
 4. Business Crime
 5. Safeguarding (including Mental Health, Prevent, Human Trafficking, Modern Slavery, CSE (Child Sexual Exploitation), Adults at Risk and Protecting Children
 6. Violence against Women and Girls
 7. Drugs and County Lines
3. The draft 2024-25 Sevenoaks District Community Safety Strategy and Action Plan is attached as Appendix A. It sets out the Community Safety Partnership's activity aimed at addressing the above priorities, how each priority will be measured and progress monitored.
4. Working with our statutory and voluntary and community sector partners as well as residents, communities, local businesses and all our stakeholders will be instrumental in keeping the people of Sevenoaks District safe from crime and repeat victimisation and help us achieve our outcomes.
5. The Action Plan is a multi-agency document and is monitored on a quarterly basis by the Community Safety Partnership, to ensure that actions are on target and are helping to meet the identified success measures.

Serious Violence Duty

6. In addition to this year's action plan the Council has a duty to include the Serious Violence Duty. Specific types of crime such as homicide, knife crime, robbery and gun crime, and areas of criminality where serious violence or its threat is inherent, such as domestic abuse, sexual offences, gangs, county lines and drug supply.

7. The Office of the Kent Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) convened a partnership board meeting with relevant strategic authorities (Kent Police, K&M Violence Reduction Unit, Public Health (Kent & Medway), NHS, KCC and District/Borough Councils) in June 2023. The Board will co-ordinate a multi-agency response in developing a Serious Violence Strategic Needs Assessment and Strategy for Kent & Medway by 31 January 2024. Work will be implemented through a Serious Violence Network meeting.
8. The Strategic Needs Assessment (SNA) will provide evidence-based analysis of information relating to the violent crime types, the drivers of crime and the cohorts most vulnerable through the gathering and analysis of data from specified and relevant authorities. The SNA may also draw on qualitative data gathered by the partnership and should identify any gaps in data or intelligence.
9. The SNA findings should be used to define serious violence issues and prioritise bespoke actions that the partnership will take forward.
10. The partnership must collectively develop a strategy outlining the multi-agency response that will take to prevent and reduce serious violence in Kent and Medway.
11. The strategy should comprise of a range of new and existing actions that the partnership will take forward to prevent and reduce the issues and drivers identified in the SNA.
12. Sevenoaks District Community Safety Partnership (CSP) will meet the requirements of the Serious Violence Duty through its Community Safety Plan, Action Plan and Assessment, working alongside partner agencies.

Other options Considered and/or rejected

To not have a plan – rejected as the Council would be failing to comply with its statutory duties under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998.

Key Implications

Financial

There are no direct financial implications of developing a Community Safety Plan but there are a number of budgets within the Council that are directly and indirectly attributed to aspects of the delivery of this plan and ensuring that our District is a safe place to live, work and play. The plan is also one which requires a multi partnership approach and in doing so may require using partners budgets, flexibly in order to maximise the potential outcomes and efficiencies that can be delivered. Police & Crime Commissioner funding plays a critical part in the delivery of the plan. The Council's core costs for staff enable the delivery and monitoring of this action plan.

Agenda Item 6b

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement

The Community Safety Plan is to meet the duties under Sections 5 and 6 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. Section 6 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 places obligations on Community Safety Partnerships to formulate a Strategic Assessment to ascertain the levels and patterns of crime, disorder, antisocial behaviour and substance misuse in their area; in order to identify the priorities for a Community Safety Plan. Following the completion of the Strategic Assessment, the Community Safety Plan is then developed to address the priorities identified by the Strategic Assessment.

The following key risks should be taken into account when agreeing the recommendations in this report:

| Risk description | Mitigation |
|--|--|
| The Community Safety Strategy fails to deliver its priorities. | <p>The actions in the strategy were identified and formulated through consultation with the appropriate Portfolio Holder and relevant stakeholders, together with the production of a strategic assessment.</p> <p>Delivery against the Community Safety Strategy is routinely reviewed, and progress reported quarterly to the Community Safety Partnership and to elected members via the People and Places Advisory Committee and Cabinet, enabling adjustments or remedial action to be taken.</p> |
| Failing to meet the legal requirement of producing a Community Safety Strategy | Producing a Community Safety Strategy is a legal requirement under The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 for all Community Safety Partnerships. This risk can be mitigated by approving the strategy, as per the above recommendation. |

Equality Assessment

The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

Net Zero Implications

The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the council's ambition to be Net Zero by 2030. There is no perceived impact regarding either an increase or decrease in carbon emissions in the district, or supporting the resilience of the natural environment.

Safeguarding

This strategy supports our Safeguarding Policy and includes a priority focusing on safeguarding adults and children at risk.

Community Impact and Outcomes

This document helps reduce the community impact and improve outcomes, by

tackling and reducing certain crime types. The plan ensures a partnership approach to provided targeted initiatives to increase feelings of safety and reassurance.

Wellbeing

Wellbeing is at the heart of the strategy. Experience of crime impacts on the mental and physical health of victims, families and those witnessing or participating in criminal and anti-social behaviour. By developing a partnership approach to crime and disorder, this strategy tackles issues impacting wellbeing including substance misuse, domestic abuse and other criminal and anti-social behaviour.

Conclusions

Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) are statutory bodies which exist in all local authorities. The Council has a statutory duty under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 to produce a strategic assessment and annually refreshed community safety plan. CSPs are expected have a Plan to direct their delivery with an annual strategic needs assessment to ensure that the priorities remain relevant and appropriate and an annual performance report to monitor milestones and impact.

This strategy is aligned to national crime and disorder plans, and to other local plans in key areas such as safeguarding, to ensure we are all working towards the same goals; that we properly understand the issues; are able to address the risk factors that increase the likelihood of somebody becoming an offender or a victim of crime and work together effectively to reduce this risk. As such, prevention is central to our approach.

It is recommended that the report Community Safety Partnership Strategy & Action Plan 2024-25 is approved.

Appendices

Appendix A – Sevenoaks District Community Safety Partnership Strategy and Action Plan 2024-25

Background Papers

Strategic Assessment for the Sevenoaks District

Sarah Robson

Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Officer – People & Places

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Sevenoaks District

Community Safety Partnership Annual Action Plan 2024-25 DRAFT



Action Plan 2024-25
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Introduction

The Community Safety Plan is to meet the duties under Sections 5 and 6 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. Section 6 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 places obligations on Community Safety Partnerships to formulate a Strategic Assessment to ascertain the levels and patterns of crime, disorder, antisocial behaviour and substance misuse in their area; in order to identify the priorities for a Community Safety Plan. Following the completion of the Strategic Assessment, the Community Safety Plan is then developed to address the priorities identified by the Strategic Assessment.

The Sevenoaks District Community Safety Partnership brings together all of the agencies in the District who can have an impact on crime, anti-social behaviour and the fear of crime. A list of partners is set out on page 25. The Partnership has three overarching aims. They are to:

- Reduce and detect crime
- Reduce anti-social behaviour and the fear of crime
- Strengthen community involvement

Each year the Partnership, in common with all of the Community Safety Partnerships in Kent, undertakes an assessment of crime and disorder in the District, using data provided by partners and feedback from residents. The assessment identifies the priority issues for the next year using the following rationale for each community safety type:

- Whether there is significant community concern
- Whether there is an increasing trend
- Whether it contributes to a high volume of crime
- The level of harm it causes
- How well it is performing compared with other parts of Kent
- Whether the Partnership can add value to the work

This Action Plan identifies where we can best work together to achieve results.

Priority Issues for Sevenoaks District in 2024-25

Sevenoaks District continues to be one of the safest places to live in Kent.

The Strategic Assessment was undertaken during the winter of 2023 and identified seven priorities for the Partnership to tackle during 2024-25. The data referred to in this Action Plan is based on the Strategic Assessment, and uses data between 1 October 2022 – 30 September 2023, unless otherwise stated. Trends in the identified priorities continue to be monitored on a quarterly basis and the first monitoring will be available in July 2024.

The seven priorities, as ranked in the Strategic Assessment, are:

- Safeguarding (including Mental Health, Prevent, Human Trafficking, Modern Slavery, CSE (Child Sexual Exploitation), Vulnerable Adults and Protecting Children
- Serious and Acquisitive Crime incl crime trends & Serious Violence Duty
- Drug and County Lines¹
- Business Crime
- Violence against Women & Girls
- Domestic Abuse incl Stalking & Harassment
- Anti-Social Behaviour incl Environmental Crime

Although the Partnership's main focus will be the seven priorities, it will continue to monitor and plan for trends in crime and other community safety issues and address them through the Community Safety Unit's daily briefings and other tasking arrangements in order to reduce recorded crime.

Strategic Drivers

Serious Violence Duty: The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 22 received Royal Assent in April 2022, with statutory guidance issued in December 22. Part 2 of the Act creates a requirement for specified authorities to collaborate and plan to reduce or prevent serious violence. Changes have also been made to the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 to

¹ County Lines refer to organised ways of dealing drugs

ensure that preventing and reducing serious violence is a priority for CSPs. Within Kent, new Partnership arrangements are being developed to ensure that agencies can comply with this new duty.

Budgets: Many partner agencies are faced with depleting budgets and savings needing to be made, both as a result of covid, worsening national finances and cost of living. This will impact upon community safety delivery both in terms of resources available for delivery, staff and grants available. This has been considered in the formation of this Community Safety Plan and how those resources available can be best used to ensure the delivery of the identified priorities.

Kent Police Neighbourhood Policing Model: The new Neighbourhood Policing Model was implemented in Summer 2023 and has seen changes in the way they respond to neighbourhood-based issues. The Partnership will need to integrate these changes into our existing delivery models.

Cost of Living: The Cost of Living Crisis continues to impact on residents as well as individual agencies. These impacts need to continue to be monitored by partners and the impact on delivery against our priorities.

The Action Plan

The Action Plan sets out the overall targets for the Community Safety Partnership. It does not include details of the numerous activities already undertaken by partners, town and parish councils, the voluntary sector and others as part of their day-to-day work, but highlights activities in addition to core work, which partners will undertake throughout the forthcoming year. All priorities include actions around public perception and reducing repeat offenders/victims.

Funding and monitoring

Funding for the actions included within the Action Plan is available from a number of sources, including partners' own budgets, Police & Crime Commissioner's (PCC) funding which is allocated to district Community Safety Partnerships, and other small amounts of funding from a variety of sources.

Regular monitoring will take place to ensure that individual projects continue to deliver positive results as well as value for money and that this Action Plan is on target.

Equalities

In preparing the action plan, issues such as equality and diversity were considered to ensure that everybody feels safe in the District.

The Community Safety Partnership recognises that everyone has a contribution to make to our society and a right to access services without being discriminated against or disadvantaged because of their:

- Race, colour, nationality, ethnicity.
- Gender, marital status or caring responsibility.
- Sexual orientation.
- Age.
- Physical or mental disability or mental health.
- Religion or belief.
- Health status.
- Employment status.

ACTION PLAN 2024-2025: SUCCESS MEASURES

All recorded crime

All Victim Based Crime – Maintain position in the lowest 3 District/Borough in the County.

Serious & Acquisitive Crime incl Crime Trends and Serious Violence Duty

Improve the position of Vehicle Crime and Burglary within the County.

Working with partners reduce the numbers of serious violence with injury in the District.

Safeguarding (including Prevent, Mental Health, Human Trafficking, Modern Slavery, CSE (Child Sexual Exploitation), Vulnerable Adults and Protecting Children)

Deliver training on all types of Safeguarding.

Maintain position in the lowest 3 District/Borough in the County for Human Trafficking/Modern Slavery and CSE.

Drugs and County Lines

Reduce the number of County Lines across the District.

Number of young people engaged with around drug misuse.

Business Crime

Maintain position in the lowest 3 District/Borough in the County for shoplifting.

Increase number of convictions for Business Crime.

Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG)

Increase VAWG Walks compared to previous year and work with the community on feelings of safety.

Implement a West Kent Action Plan on VAWG.

Domestic Abuse Stalking and Harassment

Reduce the number of repeat victims of stalking & harassment and domestic abuse.

Increase training for partners and communities on Domestic Abuse and Stalking and Harassment.

Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) incl Environmental Crime

Maintain position in the lowest 3 District/Borough in the County.

Serious & Acquisitive Crime incl Crime Trends and Serious Violence

Acquisitive crime consists of Burglary (Residential and Commercial and Business) and Vehicle Crime (Theft of and Theft from – TOMV and TFMV). Although there have been rises and falls throughout the time period, the number of reported crimes are relatively low, but they do sit high in county comparisons. These types of crime have a high impact on the local community. We would also look at crime trends for example we know that catalytic convertors, keyless car thefts, high value car types such as Range Rovers and cable thefts do have trends over time across the District.

Criminals behind serious and tactical crime often intimidate and create fear, which is intended to prevent the local community reporting what they see. Often the criminals behind this don't even have to try hard to do this – instead relying on word of mouth and reputation. Organised Crime Groups (OCGs) have been tackled using a more targeted approach by partners, including cross-border partners. Trends are monitored at the monthly Serious Crime & Tactical Meeting. The most common crime types associated with these groups is commonly organised theft.

Specific types of crime such as homicide, knife crime, robbery and gun crime, and areas of criminality where serious violence or its threat is inherent, such as domestic abuse, sexual offences, gangs, county lines and drug supply.

| Crime Type | Recorded Offences/Incidents | | | | | County Position | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------|-----------|----------|------------|-----------|-----------------|-------|
| | This Year | Last Year | % Change | No. change | Direction | 21/22 | 22/23 |
| Robbery | 34 | 36 | -5.6% | -2 | ▼ | 2 | 2 |
| VAP | 2806 | 3214 | -12.7% | -408 | ▼ | 1 | 1 |
| Sexual | 213 | 247 | -13.8% | -34 | ▼ | 1 | 1 |
| Possession of weapons | 65 | 69 | -5.8% | -4 | ▼ | 3 | 2 |
| Public Order | 405 | 538 | -24.7% | -133 | ▼ | 1 | 1 |

Serious Violence Duty

The Serious Violence Duty requires specified authorities to work together to prevent and reduce serious violence, including identifying the kinds of serious violence that occur in the area, the causes of that violence and to prepare and implement a strategy for preventing and reducing serious violence. The Office of the Kent Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) convened a partnership board meeting with relevant strategic authorities (Kent Police, K&M Violence Reduction Unit, Public Health (Kent & Medway), NHS, KCC and District/Borough Councils) in 2023. The Board is co-ordinating a

multi-agency response in developing a Serious Violence Strategic Needs Assessment and Strategy for Kent & Medway by early 2024. Work will be implemented through a Serious Violence Network meeting. The assessment findings will be used to define serious violence issues and prioritise bespoke actions that the partnership will take forward. The partnership will collectively develop an action plan outlining the multi-agency response that to help prevent and reduce serious violence in Kent and Medway. This should comprise of a range of new and existing actions that support local Community Safety Partnerships take forward this priority to prevent and reduce issues.

The cost of living crisis

The cost of living has become an issue of major political concern in the UK. The subsequent war in Ukraine and consequential energy challenges, followed by rising inflation and interest rates, have added to the mounting concern and resulted in large scale government interventions. The cost of living crisis is putting more people at risk of crime. Acquisitive crime often increases in periods of economic downturn.

| Serious and Acquisitive Crime including Crime Trends and Serious Violence | | | | |
|--|--|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------|
| | Priority Action | Lead Agency | Other Partners | By When |
| 1.1 | Monthly Serious Crime & Tactical Group to address crime trends for the District and to deliver partnership actions/initiatives. Identifying Organised Crime Groups (OCG) | Serious Crime & Tactical Group (SCTG) | Kent Police All Partners | Ongoing |
| 1.2 | Number of My Community Voice/Twitter & Facebook posts updating residents on crime trends and where positive arrests have been made in relation to acquisitive crime, crime trends and serious violence | Kent Police SDC | All Partners | Ongoing |
| 1.3 | Work with Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) on reducing the number of serious violence and including joint projects to address certain crime types such as knife crime | VRU | CSU All | Ongoing |
| 1.4 | CSU to offer reassurance and follow up visits following burglary and vehicle crime, including free giveaways to protect cars, out buildings. Greater use of Community Warden resource in follow up visits in communities where CWs are based | CSU KCC Wardens | PCSOs | Ongoing |

| | | | | |
|-----|---|---------------------|-----|-----------|
| 1.5 | Serious Violence Duty to be added to the Serious Crime & Tactical Group (SCTG) to discuss specific crime types such as Specific types of crime such as homicide, knife crime, robbery and gun crime, and areas of criminality where serious violence or its threat is inherent, such as domestic abuse, sexual offences, gangs, county lines and drug supply and take forward actions including an Needs Assessment | Kent Police | All | Monthly |
| 1.6 | Analytical data to be provided by Kent Police on acquisitive crime and violent crime to look at crime trends/offenders for the partnership and SCTG to take forward | Kent Police SCTG | All | Monthly |
| 1.7 | Child Centred Policing Team to develop and promote a schools programme on Serious & Violent Crime | Kent Police VRU | CSU | Sept 2024 |

Anti-Social Behaviour including Environmental Crime

ASB accounts for the second largest recorded issue when compared to individual crime types in the District. Figures show 1,221 recorded incidents of ASB occurring within the District were reported to Kent Police. The District had the lowest number of ASB reports in Kent even though there was an increase of 11.6% (127 reports).

The CSU Daily tasking's meetings dealt with 420 ASB/Community Safety calls from October 2021 - September 2022. This is a decrease of 8 calls (1.9%) compared to same period last year. All actions were followed up and residents were kept updated in all actions unless they had been reported anonymously. SDC, Police, and West Kent Housing attend the CSU daily tasking on a daily basis. The CSU has continued meeting daily even though Police implemented changes to the CSU from 1 June 2023.

Recorded incidents of anti-social behaviour were higher in the period from October 2022 until September 2023. The total number of ASB reports received by the Council during October 2022 and September 2023 equals 88 calls. This is 2 less calls than the same period last year, when 90 calls were received, which equates to a 2.2% decrease in calls received. Sevenoaks Town & St Johns had the highest number of reports of anti-social behaviour to the District Council with 10. Dunton Green & Riverhead and Swanley Whiteoak was 2nd highest with 9.

The highest type of anti-social behaviour reported is Nuisance Behaviour with 31 reports. This is followed by Vehicle related nuisance. Calls by type are always higher than reports received as residents can report more than one type at a time.

During the period of October 2022 and September 2023, 39 Anti-Social Behaviour warning letters and 46 Acceptable Behaviour Agreement contracts were issued to named individuals. 6 Acceptable Behaviour Agreement Breach letters were also served.

There have been 10 Community Protection Warnings served and 6 Community Protection Notices served.

A PSPO (Public Spaces Protection Order) public consultation was undertaken for The Vine, Sevenoaks in regards to consistent ASB. As a result, the public consultation response was overwhelmingly positive in terms of supporting the introduction of the PSPO and the order will be brought into force in early 2024. At the time of writing this there is a current PSPO consultation out for vehicle nuisance in Halstead and if approved will be implemented in May 2024.

SDC CCTV

From 1 October 2022 to 30 September 2023 the CCTV Control Room at Sevenoaks District Council assisted the police with 91 arrests for this period. They also dealt with 2,889 Emergency Out of Hour calls, 8 unauthorised encampments, 1 mental health safeguarding case and 139 Missing people and vulnerable persons.

West Kent Housing

From 1 October 2022 – 30 September 2023 WKHA received 1091 complaints of antisocial behaviour and other community safety related matters. This is an increase of 10% over the same period for the previous year.

SDC Environmental Health

Between 1st October 2022 and 30th September 2023, the Environmental Protection Team received 1,086 service requests relating to issues within Sevenoaks District, this is 13 less than the same period last year, a 1% decrease. Of the 1,086 Service Requests received by Sevenoaks, 470 relate to matters associated with noise and 616 relate to non-noise related service requests such as dog fouling, accumulations and other anti-social activities.

SDC Direct Services

SDC received 357 reports of abandoned vehicles for the period October 2022 – September 2023. This is a 60.18% increase compared to the same period in the previous year. Of the 357 reported vehicles only 2.2% (8 vehicles) were genuinely abandoned and required removal. Last year's percentage of vehicles removed against number reported was 6.5%.

Graffiti

Graffiti reports to the Council have decreased by 17 reports this year with 40 recorded incidents (incl offensive). There were 6 offensive graffiti reports between October 2022 and September 2023 all of which were removed within the 48 hour deadline set by Sevenoaks District Council.

KCC Community Wardens

A valued element of the Community Warden role remains the uniformed presence which helps build community confidence and reassurance by reducing crime, the fear of crime, deterring ASB, improving access to local authorities and fostering social inclusion. The warden's overriding objective remains '*to create safer and stronger communities*'. They work closely with/on behalf of other operational units within KCC and Community Safety Partners to address a wide range of issues. However, following approval from KCC's Cabinet in February 2024, the budget for the wardens service will be reduced by 50% over the next two years, which will see the warden service move to a more geographically targeted service based on local needs in both rural and urban communities.

| ASB incl Environmental Crime | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|---|----------------|
| | Priority Action | Lead Agency | Other Partners | By When |
| 2.1 | Increase number of enforcement interventions and prosecutions for fly tipping using all actionable evidence. Increase the number of partnership, cross border and community working actions in repeat locations. | SDC Direct Services CSU | KCC Wardens PCSOs Housing Assoc | March 2025 |
| 2.2 | Increase the number of referrals from partners to the District Contextual Safeguarding Meeting (DCSM) for young people and Community MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference). This will include talking and working with partner agencies on how to refer | KCC Youth Services Kent Police | KCC Youth Offending Services Probation Services Mental Health Schools All Partners | March 2025 |
| 2.3 | Reduce the number of young people entering the Criminal Justice System for the first time | All Partners | | March 2025 |
| 2.4 | Continue to set up Task and Finish Groups to deliver a focused approach to reducing repeat ASB and use ASB Powers through the 2014 ASB Act where appropriate such as Closure Orders, Community Protection Notices and Criminal Behaviour Orders. Invite Community Wardens to Task & Finish Groups where issues pertain to their home communities. Team members have a great breadth of knowledge (issues, useful local stakeholders etc) that would enhance the partnership approach and ensuing actions. | CSU | All | March 2025 |
| 2.5 | Partnership Activities in line with National & International events for example ASB Awareness Week 1-7 July 2024 National Hate Crime Awareness Week 14-21 October 2024 Euros June 2024 | Police WKHA/Moat Housing SDC | All Partners | March 2025 |

| | | | | |
|-----|---|-----|--|------------|
| 2.6 | Number of community safety events either attending on behalf of another organisation or arranged by CSU | CSU | Police KCC Community Wardens Housing Assoc | March 2025 |
| 2.7 | Number of site visits and task and finished groups attended to address ASB | CSU | | March 2025 |

Domestic Abuse incl Stalking & Harassment

Please note: Domestic Abuse incidents are not reported as violence against the person. If there has been no violence recorded. For example, if there was a verbal altercation, this would be recorded as a Domestic Abuse Incident and not Violence against the Person and that is why the numbers are different.

It is important to remember that these figures are only representative of domestic abuse that was reported to the Police and it is widely recognised that there is a figure of domestic abuse, which remains unreported. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 has given more powers and increased responsibility to the Police, Courts and local authorities for the protection of victims of domestic abuse.

Domestic Abuse incidents in the Sevenoaks District have decreased by 419 crimes (16.8%). The District has the lowest number of Domestic Abuse incidents in the county (071)², Please note: Domestic Abuse incidents are not always reported as violence against the person, if there has been no violence recorded.

Sevenoaks District Council and the CSP fund a number of projects to address domestic abuse, including:

- 12-week Freedom Programme runs 6 x a year including 2 evening sessions and 3 x 12 week Recovery Tool Kit, which is a follow on from the Freedom programme. On average 8-10 women attend these programmes.
- Community Domestic Abuse Perpetrators Programme runs weekly on a Wednesday evening. For this time period the programme is run online with an average of 8 men attending weekly. The programme is a rolling programme that runs for 27 weeks.
- DAVSS (Domestic Abuse Voluntary Support Services) provides a support service for low and medium risk victims. In the period 1 October 2022 to 30 September 2023, they supported the following number of people in the Sevenoaks District – previous assessments have shown statistics at a West Kent level.

² Apparent inconsistency in annual figures arises from the classification of ‘incident’. Domestic abuse ‘incidents’ are not necessarily violent and can refer to verbal disputes which have been reported to Kent Police; as such, not all incidents make it into statistics for violence against the person.

| Oct 21-Sept 23 | Oct 2022 - Dec 2022 | Jan 2023 - March 2023 | April 2023- June 2023 | July 2023 - Sept 2023 | Total |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------|
| Referrals (Total, including Men) | 75 | 65 | 59 | 58 | 127 |
| Referrals (Men) | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 8 |
| Children supported | 113 | 119 | 79 | 80 | 391 |
| Repeat cases | 4 | 7 | 7 | 6 | 24 |
| Total of volunteer case work hours | 1099 | 1153 | 831 | Not recorded | 3083 |

Look Ahead belongs to a consortium of organisations called Kent Integrated Domestic Abuse Service (KIDAS). Between 1 October 2022 to 30 September 2023, they received the following referrals:

| Oct 22-Sept 23 | |
|-----------------------|-----|
| IDVA referrals | 334 |
| Refuge referrals | 31 |

Look Ahead continue to work in partnership with Police and the Vit Pro team. This service supports victims who were repeat or hard to reach and non-engagers. Look Ahead currently run two support programmes currently Own My Life and Phoenix. There were over 90 participants in these programmes during the reporting period.

There were 904 reports to Police for stalking and harassment for the Sevenoaks District. This is a decrease of 275 compared to the same period last year (Oct 2021- Sept 2022. Protection Against Stalking (PAS) provided the following update for use of their full advocacy and short-term support services:

| | Jan - Mar 23 | | | Apr - Jun 23 | | | Jul - Sep 23 | | |
|-----------------------|------------------------------|---|--------------|------------------------------|---|--------------|------------------------------|---|--------------|
| | Full Advocacy Support | Short Term (Initial Support & Safety Advice) | TOTAL | Full Advocacy Support | Short Term (Initial Support & Safety Advice) | TOTAL | Full Advocacy Support | Short Term (Initial Support & Safety Advice) | TOTAL |
| Tunbridge Wells | 12 | 32 | 44 | 13 | 27 | 40 | 12 | 21 | 33 |
| Sevenoaks | 12 | 21 | 33 | 8 | 17 | 25 | 11 | 19 | 30 |
| Tonbridge and Malling | 7 | 12 | 19 | 20 | 29 | 49 | 9 | 30 | 39 |

| | | | | | | | | | |
|------------------|-----------|------------|------------|-----------|------------|------------|-----------|------------|------------|
| Maidstone | 18 | 55 | 73 | 10 | 40 | 50 | 20 | 62 | 82 |
| Dartford | 6 | 8 | 14 | 8 | 30 | 38 | 10 | 39 | 49 |
| Gravesend | 0 | 1 | 1 | 8 | 42 | 50 | 8 | 37 | 45 |
| Sub total | 55 | 129 | 184 | 67 | 185 | 252 | 70 | 208 | 278 |
| | | | | | | | | | |
| Rest of Kent | 14 | 31 | 45 | 17 | 40 | 57 | 5 | 43 | 48 |
| Outside of Kent | 5 | 100 | 105 | 10 | 71 | 81 | 6 | 69 | 75 |
| Outside of UK | 0 | 8 | 8 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 3 | 3 |
| Total | 74 | 268 | 342 | 94 | 298 | 392 | 81 | 323 | 404 |

Domestic Abuse incl Stalking & Harassment

| | Priority Action | Lead Agency | Other Partners | By When |
|-----|---|--|-------------------------------------|------------|
| 3.1 | Support national campaigns including: International Women's Day 16 Days of Action Deliver a Conference within the 16 Days of Action | DAVSS WK Domestic Abuse Forum KCC Commissioned Service | All Partners | On Going |
| 3.2 | Work with DAVSS & Look Ahead to ensure that all victims of domestic abuse can receive support | DAVSS | WK Domestic Abuse Forum | March 2025 |
| 3.3 | Support the Kent DA Steering Group and its sub groups to develop and deliver work in support of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 | West Kent DA Forum KCC Commissioning Team | All Partners | On Going |
| 3.4 | Delivery of funded programmes including Freedom Programme, Community Domestic Abuse Perpetrators Programme, Recovery Tool Kit and DAY programme in schools. | CSP | DAVSS PAS Look Ahead | Ongoing |
| 3.5 | Take forward actions from the West Kent Domestic Abuse Conference held in December 2023 tackling services for young people and addressing the effects of abuse for young people | West Kent DA Forum LookAhead PAS DAVSS | Housing Associations Kent Police | Ongoing |

Domestic Abuse incl Stalking & Harassment

| | Priority Action | Lead Agency | Other Partners | By When |
|------|---|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------|
| 3.6 | Achieve DAHA accreditation for the Council in partnership with the CSP and other partners | SDC CSU SDC Housing | Housing Associations | June 2024 |
| 3.7 | Deliver safe packages for PAS clients to include personal alarms, window lock, safety information | CSU | PAS | May 2024 |
| 3.8 | Deliver awareness training on stalking and harassment to local community groups and practitioners | PAS | West Kent Domestic Abuse Forum | On Going |
| 3.10 | Work with Domestic Abuse Services, Kent Police and Protection against Stalking on tackling Forced Marriages, Female Genital Mutilation and Honour Based Violence and link with the Serious Crime Duty | DAVSS LookAhead Police PAS | West Kent Forum CSU | December 2024 |

Safeguarding including Young People, Adults at Risk, Child Sexual Exploitation, Modern Slavery, Human Trafficking, Prevent, Care Act and Mental Health

Safeguarding includes Young People, Adults at Risk, CSE, Modern Slavery, Human Trafficking, Prevent, Care Act, Missing Children and Mental Health.

Legislation places a statutory duty on local councils as well as some of the other partner agencies to protect the vulnerable under these crimes. It is also a major contributor to the Kent Police Strategy and is considered a community concern.

The cost of living, the subsequent war in Ukraine and consequential energy challenges, followed by rising inflation and interest rates, have added to the mounting concern and resulted in large scale government interventions. The cost of living crisis is putting more people at risk of crime. This includes those being exploited by criminals (for example young people being groomed to carry drugs, used to launder criminal money or sexually exploited).

Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery

For the period of 01/10/22 - 30/09/23, Kent Police recorded 4 Modern Slavery & Human Trafficking related investigations in the Sevenoaks District.

Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)

There were 3 reports of CSE in the Sevenoaks District. The Community Safety Manager continues to be a CSE Champion for the CSP and District Council.

Prevent

There have been 4 referrals to the Kent Channel and Prevent Multi-Agency Panel, which have been progressed to ensure a multi-agency approach to identify and support individuals at risk of being drawn into terrorism. The Channel Panel is an early intervention scheme that supports people who are at risk of radicalisation and provides practical support tailored to individual needs. It can help people to make positive choices about their lives.

Child Grooming: Model type

Within Kent, the predominant 'Model' type experienced is the 'Inappropriate Relationship', where child grooming involves an offender having an inappropriate amount of power or control over a young person, due to a large age gap, or a disparity in wealth or status. Similarly to the relationship model, the young person may believe that they are in a loving relationship, whereas they are actually being manipulated by the person they are with.

Child grooming isn't limited to any one medium, with child grooming online becoming more common. However, other types of 'Model' experienced also include, 'Gangs', 'Peer to Peer' and 'Trafficking', but to a much lesser extent. There have been occasions in Kent where females who have initially been highlighted as potential victims have later come to notice as facilitators and potential perpetrators of CSE.

Adults at Risk

When a person goes missing from their care home or home Kent Police will complete an At Risk of Going Missing Form which will be completed with the details of location found, any medical history and contact details for their GP and family contact with a recent photo. Should they go missing again this information can be sent to officers to assist in the fast locating of the person.

There were 1029 reports across the District to KCC Social Services of Adults at Risks/Concerns.

Vulnerable Young People

The DCSM (District Safeguarding Contextual Meeting) is held every month and from the period 1 October 22- 30 September 23 over 50 young people and locations have been discussed by partner agencies. The Police new structure has a child centered policing team and figures for them will be available in next year's assessment.

Mental Health

The CSU daily tasking's have seen an increase in mental health in ASB and Domestic Abuse cases. The number of people sectioned under 136 between 1 October 2022 – 30 September 2023 was 12, a decrease of 8 compared to same period in the previous year and lowest in the County.

Safeguarding including Young People, Adults at Risk, Child Sexual Exploitation, Modern Slavery, Human Trafficking, Prevent, Care Act and Mental Health

| | Priority Action | Lead Agency | Other Partners | By When |
|-----|---|-------------------------|--|----------------|
| 4.1 | Work with agencies from the Youth Mentoring Plus Programme. Investigate funding streams for this work to continue. | SDC | All Partners Town & Parish Councils | On Going |
| 4.2 | Support the Health & Wellbeing Action Team to deliver their actions to address Mental Health | CSU | All Partners | On Going |
| 4.3 | KCC Prevent Team to deliver training to partners and businesses on Counter Terrorism | KCC Prevent Team | CSU | March 2025 |
| 4.4 | Police to provide an analytical product on Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking every quarter so that the Partnership can help take action to address this. Work on action days through evidence provided | Police SCD | CSU All | March 2025 |
| 4.5 | Attend Channel Panels where appropriate and provide support to individuals when required and Promote the Prevent Strategy within the community via Social Media etc. | CSU KCC Prevent Team | | March 2025 |
| 4.6 | Work with Adults at Risk and sign post to appropriate services including HERO, Social Services, Private Sector Housing, Kent Police, Community Wardens & Peabody. | PCSO Vulnerable Adults | CSU All Partners | On going |
| 4.7 | Work with partner on national campaigns such as National Safeguarding Week in December 2024 | KCSMP KMSAM | CSU | December 2024 |

Violence against Women & Girls (VAWG)

Violence against women and girls is a national priority, and we share the national commitment to ensure women and girls are safe. The Kent Police and Crime Commissioner’s Police and Crime Plan entitled ‘Making Kent Safer 2022- 2025’ includes VAWG as a priority. In addition, the Kent Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) established a Violence Against Women (VAWG) inquiry report was published in the summer of 2022. The Victim’s Panel was set up to support the inquiry, and their work continues to inform strategy development. Key themes from the panel includes victims feeling as traumatised, if not more so, by the criminal justice process as the crime(s) themselves, a perception there was no consideration or flexibility to work around victim’s life, with the victim expected to work on the system’s terms and a common belief that there is unconscious bias at work.

VAWG is at the core of the Kent Police control strategy. This can broadly be broken down into four key areas: prioritising prevention, supporting victims, pursuing perpetrators and a stronger system. The CSP have an important part to play. Awareness of VAWG criminality, such as Stalking and Child Sexual Exploitation, should be raised within the CSP, electorate and the wider community. Access to victim support services should be explored and promoted. Schemes like Best Bar None should be reinforced in order to reduce VAWG offending in the night time economy.

| Breakdown | Recorded Offences/Incidents | | | | | County Position | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|-----------|-----------------|----------|
| | This Year | Last Year | % Change | No. change | Direction | 21/22 | 22/23 |
| Total VAWG | 1636 | 1992 | -17.9% | -356 | ▼ | 1 | 1 |
| Domestic Abuse related | 909 | 1162 | -21.8% | -253 | ▼ | 2 | 1 |
| Non-Domestic Abuse related | 727 | 830 | -12.4% | -103 | ▼ | 1 | 1 |

The CSU (Police & SDC) completed 3 VAWG walks in Swanley, New Ash Green and Edenbridge to talk to women about feelings of safety and any improvements that could be made. Most that were spoken to say they felt safe, but enquired about more lighting in some areas which were all passed to KCC Highways.

A West Kent VAWG Group for Public Spaces was set up in May 2023 and are now having regular meetings every quarter and have an action plan. A joint consultation was going out in December 2023 to address local concerns. This will be followed by a school consultation as well.

| Violence against Women & Girls (VAWG) | | | | |
|--|---|----------------------|----------------------------|----------------|
| | Priority Action | Lead Agency | Other Partners | By When |
| 5.1 | Following the public consultation for VAWG in Public Spaces, review the responses and deliver on the action plan for the West Kent VAWG Group to take forward | West Kent VAWG Group | All Partners | March 2025 |
| 5.2 | Deliver a rolling programme of VAWG Walk and Talks across the District | Kent Police CSU | All Partners | March 2025 |
| 5.3 | Work with agencies to deliver defence classes for women and girls across the District | CSU | All Partners | March 2025 |
| 5.4 | Deliver an action plan for the 16 days of no violence and addressing Domestic Abuse and VAWG in November to include a white ribbon video | CSU | DAVSS PAS Look Ahead | November 2023 |
| 5.5 | Consultation on VAWG to be done throughout the schools and delivered via the Child Centered Police Team | Kent Police CSU | All Partners | Sept 2024 |
| 5.6 | Work within schools on healthy relationships | Kent Police DAVSS | CSU | Sept 2024 |
| 5.7 | Deliver Training on VAWG for partners and keep website up to date | CSU | Kent Police | March 2025 |

Business Crime

Kent Police reported shoplifting for Sevenoaks District showed 579 offences of shoplifting. This is an increase compared to the same period last year (1 Oct 22- 30 Sept 23) of 106 crime (22.1).

The Safer Towns Business Crime Partnership also saw an increase of shoplifting offences from Sevenoaks retail high street stores. Using Kent Police own website crime figures, incidents recorded show an increase of 34 shop thefts (22%) compared to last year's reporting period.

By comparison, the Swanley shopping area of St Mary's has also seen an increase in shoplifting activity recording a figure of 21 additional reports (46%), while White Oak only increased by 6 (2%).

Burglary Business & Community also saw an increase of 15 crimes compared to same period as last year with 128 recorded crimes (13.3%)

A Business Crime meeting was set up by Kent Police in October 2023 and meets regularly with local businesses, retailers and other local partners.

| Business Crime | | | | |
|-----------------------|--|---|-----------------------|----------------|
| | Priority Action | Lead Agency | Other Partners | By When |
| 6.1 | Business Crime meeting to be District wide to include all Towns a Parishes where retail/shoplifting is a crime | Kent Police Safer Town Partnership | CSU | March 2025 |
| 6.2 | Use the Community MARAC to educate, support and use enforcement of perpetrators of Shoplifting through referrals from businesses and Safer Towns Partnership | Safer Towns Partnership Local Businesses | Kent Police CSU | March 2025 |
| 6.3 | Increase number of prosecutions for repeat offenders to include Criminal Behaviour Orders | Kent Police | Local Businesses | March 2025 |
| 6.4 | Increase number of members into the Safer Towns Partnership | Safer Towns Partnership | CSU | March 2025 |
| 6.5 | Respond to ASB issues through the Daily Tasking where retailers have been affected | CSU | All Partners | March 2025 |

Drugs & County Lines

Drugs

Drug offences have increased from 151 to 201 an increase of 50 reports. The District remains the lowest in the County for Drug reports. There is a high number that is also under reported of drug offences.

There has been an increase of young people reported using drugs and especially the gas canisters and the CSU are working with agencies and schools that bring into line the new legislation and law around misuse of nos canisters.

Kenward Trust is funded by the CSP and continue to do outreach work across the District. The focus in 2024/2025 is to continue to support young people caught up in exploitation, grooming and gang culture. With the continued work of reducing ASB and Substance misuse the teams see over 350 young people each quarter and build up good relationships with hard to reach young people.

The team went to all locations that was identified by the CSU to support the young people.

CGL work closely with a range of partner agencies to improve outcomes for substance misusers. Greensands, a supported housing project in Sevenoaks, is assisted by CGL through the provision of group work and peer support to residents for their substance misuse. A joint working programme has also been developed with West Kent Mind to deliver CGL programmes on a weekly basis and a bi-weekly drop in and referral service for Mind service users. This will facilitate better access to drug and alcohol services for these clients.

Addaction are commissioned by Public Health to deliver services to young people.

County Lines

Over the past year there has been a number of County Lines identified in the District, which is naturally linked to gang and gang culture, which is seen by some young people as a “status”. The CSP has been working with the Violent Reduction Unit in working with young people in County Lines and support groups that can be referred to. In September 2022 the CSU received £18k to tackle County Lines and work with young people.

| Drug Misuse and County Lines | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|--|--------------------------------|----------------|
| | Priority Action | Lead Agency | Other Partners | By When |
| 7.1 | Deliver outreach work to designated areas to address substance misuse using CSU reports via the Daily Tasking | Kenward Trust | CSU Schools Youth Groups | March 2025 |
| 7.2 | Provide training for front line workers on County Lines & Drug | Kenward Trust VRU Kent Police | CSU | Dec 2024 |
| 7.3 | Through the VRU Funding deliver on activities to reduce county lines, drugs and violent crime that links in with the Serious Violence Duty | VRU CSU Kent Police | All Partners | March 2025 |
| 7.4 | Work with the Child Centered Policing Team in joint initiatives in schools (primary and secondary) | Kent Police Kenward Trust VRU | CSU | March 2025 |
| 7.5 | Police, Wardens and Housing Associations to continue to gather intelligence on local County Lines so that positive action can be achieved and reduce serious violence as per the Serious Violence Duty | Police Housing Associations KCC Wardens | CSU | Ongoing |
| 7.6 | Violent Reduction Unit (VRU) to use Community MARAC to make referrals for young people & DCSM | VRU KCC Youth Services | All Partners | On Going |

Membership of the Community Safety Partnership and contact details

| | | | |
|--|--|---|--|
| <p>Sevenoaks District Council Argyle Road Sevenoaks Kent TN13 1GP Tel: 01732 227000 www.sevenoaks.gov.uk</p> | <p>Kent Police 1 Pembury Road Tonbridge Kent TN9 2HS Tel:01622 690690 www.kent.police.uk</p> | <p>Kent Fire & Rescue Service West Group HQ Sevenoaks Fire Station London Road, Sevenoaks Tel: 01622 692121 www.kent.fire-uk.org</p> | <p>Police & Crime Commissioner Kent Police Headquarters Sutton Road Maidstone ME15 9BZ Tel: 01622 677055 www.kentpa.kent.police.uk</p> |
| <p>West Kent Health and Care Partnership Dartford, Gravesham and Swanley Health and Care Partnership https://www.kmhealthandcare.uk/about-us/our-system/health-and-care-partnerships</p> | <p>Kent Surrey and Sussex CRC Ltd Maidstone Corporate Centre 3rd Floor, Maidstone House King Street Maidstone Kent, ME15 6AW Tel: 01622 239147 www.ksscr.co.uk</p> | <p>KCC Social Services The Willows, Hilda May Ave, Swanley Kent BR8 7BT Tel: 0300 041 1400 www.kent.gov.uk</p> | <p>Imago 17-19 Monson Road Tunbridge Wells Kent TN1 1LS Tel: 01892 530330 www.imago.org.uk</p> |
| <p>KCC Early Help & Preventative Service C/o Swanley Youth Centre St. Mary's Road Swanley Kent BR8 7BU Tel 01322 615275 www.kent.gov.uk</p> | <p>Protection Against Stalking Town Hall, Tunbridge Wells Referrals support@protectionagainststalking.org www.protectionagainststalking.org</p> | <p>KCC Community Safety Team Maidstone Fire Station Loose Road Maidstone Kent ME15 9QB www.kent.gov.uk</p> | <p>West Kent Housing Association / West Kent Extra 101 London Road Sevenoaks Kent TN13 1AX Tel: 01732 749400 www.westkent.org</p> |
| <p>Kenward Trust Kenward Road Yalding, Maidstone Kent ME18 6AH Tel: 01622 814187 www.kenwardtrust.org.uk</p> | <p>MOAT Homes Galleon Boulevard, Crossways Dartford Kent DA2 6QE Tel: 0300 323 0011 Web: www.moat.co.uk</p> | <p>Change Grow Live (Drug and Alcohol Services) 18 Mount Pleasant Road Tunbridge Wells TN1 1QU https://www.changegrowlive.org/westkent/help#contact</p> | <p>DAVSS PO Box 530 Tunbridge Wells Kent TN2 9TB Tel: 01892 570538 Web: www.davss.org.uk</p> |

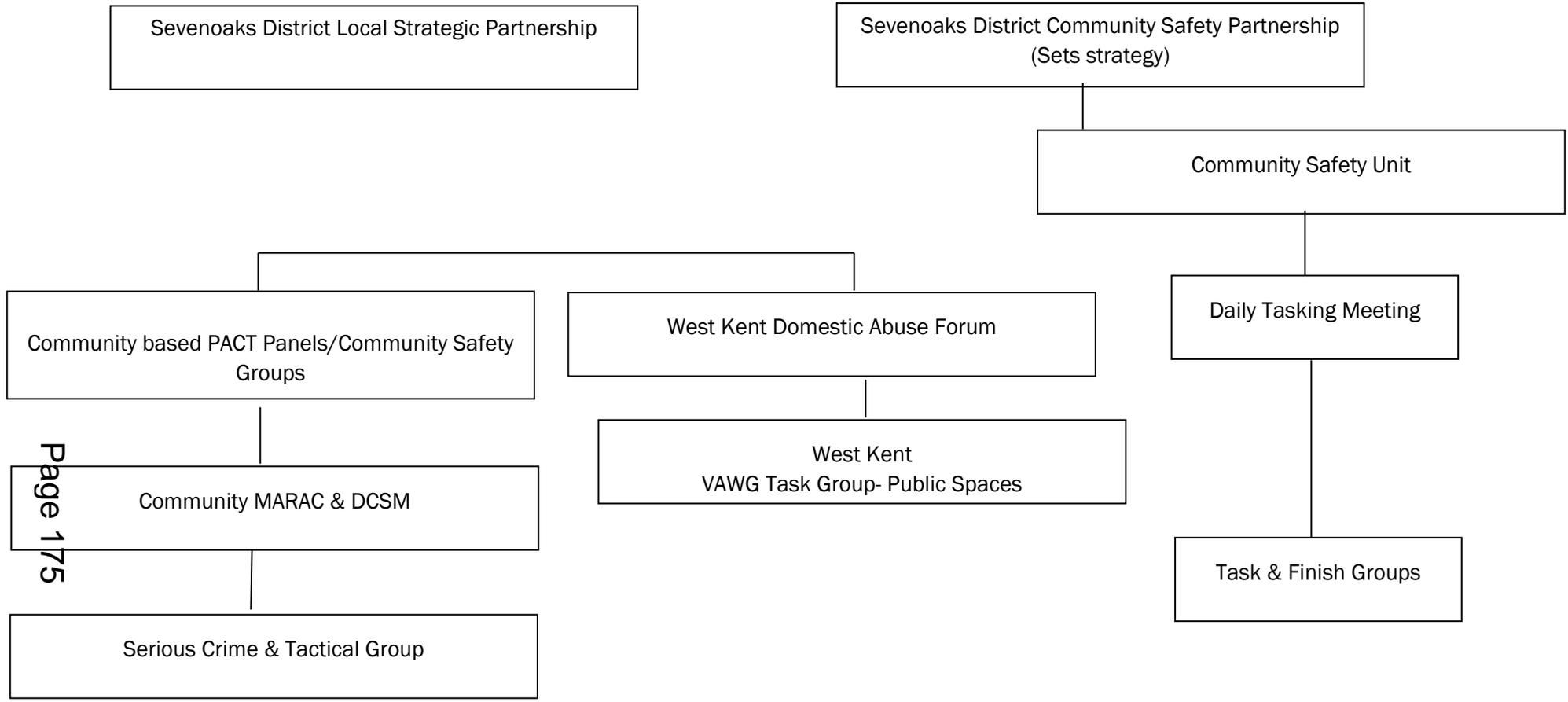
The Community Safety Partnership has direct links to Kent Public Health alongside the Kent Adults Safeguarding Board and the Kent Safeguarding Children Multi-Agency Partnership.

Terms of Reference

The Sevenoaks District Community Safety Partnership's terms of reference aim to:

- Undertake periodic reviews of community safety in the District and disseminate the findings to the public
- Develop a yearly strategy and action plan to tackle community safety in the Sevenoaks District
- Monitor and report progress in meeting the agreed targets and actions
- Secure resources and funding from parent organisations and others for projects to address agreed shared priorities in the Community Safety Action Plan
- Act as a forum for discussion of topical local community safety issues and agree follow up actions if appropriate
- Promote community safety in the District in conjunction with other local organisations and bodies
- Co-ordinate and maintain an overview of all activities relevant to community safety in the District.

Structure and Meetings Sevenoaks District Community Safety Partnership Meetings

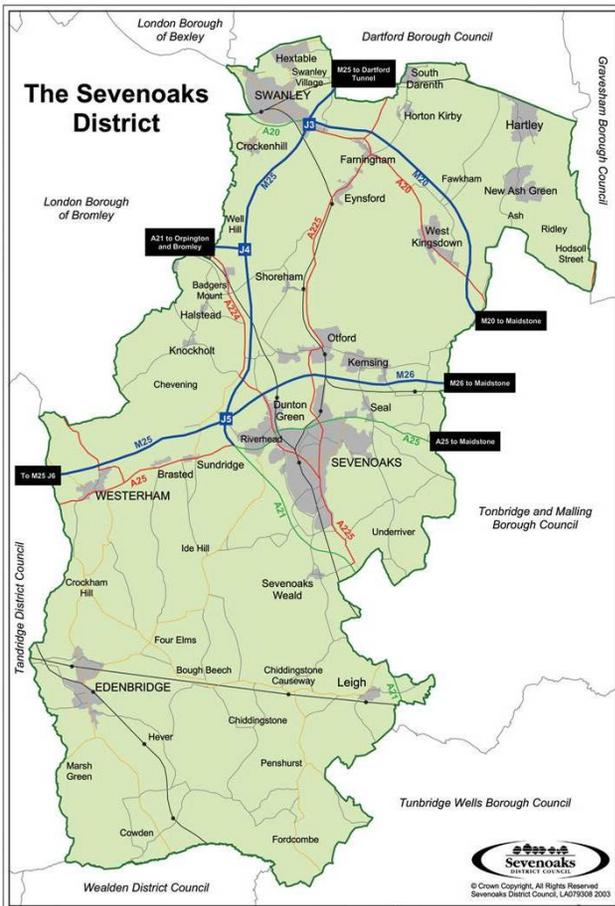


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Agenda Item 6b

What is the Sevenoaks District like?

Sevenoaks District continues to be one of the safest places to live in Kent. Sevenoaks is a large District lying to the south east of London with an overall area of just over 143 square miles (370 square km). It is long and relatively narrow measuring 20 miles north-south by about 7 miles east-west. The Thames Gateway lies to the north, Surrey and East Sussex to the west and south and the rest of Kent, including Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells to the east and south east. Despite adjoining the outer edge of London it is predominantly rural with 93% of the District designated as Green Belt.



Train services to London take just under 30 minutes from Swanley and just under 30 minutes from Sevenoaks.

Sevenoaks District is perceived to be affluent but this masks local pockets of urban and rural deprivation. For example, Swanley St Mary's ward falls within the 10% most deprived wards in Kent and the South East (2015, Indices of Multiple Deprivation).

11.6% of children under 16 (2,465) live in low-income families in receipt of Child Tax Credit where rural deprivation is more isolating than poverty in the towns. The majority of children living in poverty (73.9%) live in lone parent families.

According to the Kent County Council housing led population forecast projections, the population of Sevenoaks District is forecast to grow by more than 13,500 by 2028.

The 2017 mid-year population estimates (Office for National Statistics) show that Sevenoaks District has a population of 119,400 residents and the third lowest population density in Kent measured at 3.1 persons per hectare.

According to Kent County Council the number of people over 65 is forecast to rise by 41.1% by 2036 (10,400 people) and the number of people over 85 is forecast to rise by 97.2% by 2036 (3,500 people).

Enquiries to:

CSU

Sevenoaks District Council
PO Box 183, Argyle Road
Sevenoaks, Kent TN13 1GP
Telephone 01732 227000

E-mail community.safety@sevenoaks.gov.uk



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DRAFT CALENDAR OF MEETINGS FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR 2024/25

Council – 23 April 2024

Report of: Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Officer Customer & Resources

Status: for consideration

Key Decision: No

Portfolio Holder: Cllr. Julia Thornton

Contact Officer: Charlie Sinclair, Ext. 7165

Recommendation to Council:

That the revised calendar of meetings for 24/25 be approved subject to formal adoption at the Annual Meeting of the Council on 14 May 2024.

Reason for recommendation: To enable preparation of committee work plans.

Introduction and Background

- 1 The draft calendar of meetings for the municipal year 2024/25 is attached for consideration.
- 2 Following the adoption of the draft calendar in November 2023, it has been necessary to make further amendments in view of changes to committee work plans.
- 3 It is the responsibility of the Annual Meeting of the Council to confirm the Council's calendar of meetings for oncoming year. However, it is considered prudent to put it before this meeting of the Council, following the proposed changes to allow for the dates to be more widely known and to allow more time for forward planning by Officers and Members and booking of meeting rooms etc.

Key Implications

Financial

None directly arising from this report.

Agenda Item 8a

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement.

The Council is under a legal duty to hold an Annual Council meeting during a particular period and to set a Council Tax by a specific date. The calendar proposed here meets those requirements.

Equality Assessment

The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

Net Zero Implications

The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the council's ambition to be Net Zero by 2030. There is no perceived impact regarding either an increase or decrease in carbon emissions in the district, or supporting the resilience of the natural environment.

Conclusions

Members are requested to consider the attached draft Calendar of Meetings and recommend it to the meeting of Annual Council for formal adoption.

Appendices

Appendix A – Draft Calendar of meetings for the municipal year 2024/25

Background Papers

None

Jim Carrington-West

Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Officer – Customer & Resources

SEVENOAKS DISTRICT COUNCIL - DRAFT CALENDAR OF MEETINGS 2024/25

| | APRIL 2024 | | | MAY 2024 | | | | JUNE 2024 | | | | | JULY 2024 | | | |
|-----------|---------------|---------------|--------------------|---------------------|---|---|----------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|---|---------------|---------------|--|
| MONDAY | 15 | 22 | 29 | 6 PUBLIC HOLIDAY | 13 | 20 | 27 PUBLIC HOLIDAY | 3 | 10 | 17 | 24 | 1 | 8 | 15 | 22 | |
| TUESDAY | 16 Audit | 23 Council | 30 | 7 | 14 Annual Council Sp. Cabinet Sp. Licensing Sp. Audit | 21 Finance & Investment Advisory Cttee | 28 PUBLIC HOLIDAY | 4 Housing & Health Advisory Cttee | 11 Seveoaks JTB | 18 People & Places Advisory Cttee | 25 Governance | 2 Scrutiny | 9 Audit Cttee | 16 Cabinet | 23 | |
| WEDNESDAY | 17 | 24 | 1 | 8 | 15 | 22 | 29 | 5 Health Liaison Board (2pm) | 12 Licensing Cttee | 19 | 26 | 3 | 10 | 17 | 24 | |
| THURSDAY | 18 Cabinet | 25 DMC | 2 PCC elections | 9 | 16 | 23 DMC | 30 | 6 | 13 Cabinet | 20 DMC | 27 Improvement & Innovation Advisory Cttee | 4 Cleaner & Greener Advisory Cttee | 11 Development & Conservation Advisory Cttee | 18 DMC | 25 Council | |
| FRIDAY | 19 | 26 | 3 | 10 | 17 | 24 | 31 | 7 | 14 | 21 | 28 | 5 | 12 | 19 | 26 | |

| | AUGUST 2024 | | | | | SEPTEMBER 2024 | | | | | OCTOBER 2024 | | | | NOVEMBER 2024 | |
|-----------|-------------|---|-----------|----|----------------------|----------------|-----------------------|--|-----------|----|---|----|-----------|---|--------------------------------------|--|
| MONDAY | 29 | 5 | 12 | 19 | 26 PUBLIC HOLIDAY | 2 | 9 | 16 | 23 | 30 | 7 | 14 | 21 | 28 | 4 | |
| TUESDAY | 30 | 6 | 13 | 20 | 27 | 3 | 10 | 17 | 24 | 1 | 8 | 15 | 22 | 29 | 5 Housing & Health Advisory Cttee | |
| WEDNESDAY | 31 | 7 | 14 | 21 | 28 | 4 | 11 | 18 Sevenoaks Joint Transportation Board | 25 | 2 | 9 | 16 | 23 | 30 | 6 | |
| THURSDAY | 1 | 8 | 15 DMC | 22 | 29 | 5 DMC | 12 Licensing Cttee | 19 Cabinet | 26 DMC | 3 | 10 Development & Conservation Advisory Cttee | 17 | 24 DMC | 31 Finance & Investment Advisory Cttee | 7 DMC | |
| FRIDAY | 2 | 9 | 16 | 23 | 30 | 6 | 13 | 20 | 27 | 4 | 11 | 18 | 25 | 1 | 8 | |

(Most meetings start at 7pm UNLESS indicated otherwise and are held at the Council Offices in Argyle Road - please check the Council website for details.)

Key

- Council
- Development Mangement Committee (DMC)
- Licensing Committee
- Audit Committee
- Scrutiny Committee
- Governance Committee
- Standards Committee
- Cabinet
- Development & Conservation Advisory Committee
- Finance & Investment Advisory Committee
- Joint Transportation board
- Improvement & Innovation Advisory Committee
- Health Liaison Board - 2pm
- Housing & Health Advisory Committee
- People & Places Advisory Committee
- Cleaner & Greener Advisory Committee

SEVENOAKS DISTRICT COUNCIL - DRAFT CALENDAR OF MEETINGS 2024/25

As at

| NOVEMBER 2024 | | | | Dec-24 | | | | JANUARY 2025 | | | | | FEBRUARY 2025 | |
|---------------|----------------------------------|---|---|---|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|----------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------|--|----------------|
| MONDAY | 11 | 18 | 25 | 2 | 9 | 16 | 23 | 30 | 6 | 13 | 20 | 27 | 3 | 10 |
| TUESDAY | 12 | 19 | 26 | 3 | 10 | 17 | 24 | 31 | 7 | 14 | 21 | 28 | 4 | 11 |
| | Cleaner & Greener Advisory Cttee | Council | Improvement & Innovation Advisory Cttee | | People & Places Advisory Committee | Sevenoaks Joint Transportation Board | | | Finance & Investment Advisory Cttee | Licensing Cttee | Housing & Health Advisory Cttee | Governance Committee | Standards | Scrutiny Cttee |
| WEDNESDAY | 13 | 20 | 27 | 4 | 11 | 18 | 25 | 1 | 8 | 15 | 22 | 29 | 5 | 12 |
| | | | | CIL Spending Board | | | Public Holiday | Public Holiday | | Health Liaison Board (2pm) | | | | |
| THURSDAY | 14 | 21 | 28 | 5 | 12 | 19 | 26 | 2 | 9 | 16 | 23 | 30 | 6 | 13 |
| | Cabinet | Scrutiny Cttee | DMC | Development & Conservation Advisory Cttee | Cabinet | DMC | Public Holiday | | DMC | Cabinet | audit | | DMC | C&GAC |
| FRIDAY | 15 | 22 | 29 | 6 | 13 | 20 | 27 | 3 | 10 | 17 | 24 | 31 | 7 | 14 |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| FEBRUARY 2025 | | | MARCH 2025 | | | APRIL 2025 | | | MAY 2025 | | | | | |
| MONDAY | 17 | 24 | 3 | 10 | 17 | 24 | 31 | 7 | 14 | 21 | 28 | 5 | 12 | 19 |
| | | | | | | | | | | Public Holiday | | PUBLIC HOLIDAY | | |
| TUESDAY | 18 | 25 | 4 | 11 | 18 | 25 | 1 | 8 | 15 | 22 | 29 | 6 | 13 | 20 |
| | | Council (budget) | People & Places Advisory Cttee | Licensing Cttee | Scrutiny Cttee | Sevenoaks Joint Transportation Board | Development & Conservation Advisory Cttee | | | Cabinet | Council | | Annual Council Sp. Cabinet Sp. Licensing Sp. Audit | |
| WEDNESDAY | 19 | 26 | 5 | 12 | 19 | 26 | 2 | 9 | 16 | 23 | 30 | 7 | 14 | 21 |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| THURSDAY | 20 | 27 | 6 | 13 | 20 | 27 | 3 | 10 | 17 | 24 | 1 | 8 | 15 | 22 |
| | DMC | Improvement & Innovation Advisory Cttee | Audit | DMC | Cabinet | Finance & Investment Advisory Cttee | DMC | | | DMC | KCC elections | | | DMC |
| FRIDAY | 21 | 28 | 7 | 14 | 21 | 28 | 4 | 11 | 18 | 25 | 2 | 9 | 16 | 23 |
| | | | | | | | | | Public Holiday | | | | | |

Agenda Item 8a

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Key (Most meetings start at 7pm and are held at the Council Offices in Argyle Road - please check the Council website for details.)

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| Council | Cabinet | Development & Conservation Advisory Committee |
| Development Mangement Committee (DMC) | Finance & Investment Advisory Committee | Joint Transportation board |
| Licensing Committee | Improvement & Innovation Advisory Committee | Health Liaison Board - 2pm |
| Audit Committee | Housing & Health Advisory Committee | |
| Scrutiny Committee | People & Places Advisory Committee | |
| Governance Committee | Cleaner & Greener Advisory Committee | |
| Standards Committee | | |

To consider any motions by Members under paragraph 20 of Part 2 (The Council and District Council Members) of the Constitution, notice of which have been duly given.

1. Motion from Cllr Leaman (Liberal Democrats)

Waste collection, re-cycling and value for money

This Council notes:

1. the Council's consistent and continuing failure to meet its target for the percentage of household waste sent for re-use, recycling and composting;
2. that, while SDC's re-use, recycling and composting rate is around 30-35%, many comparable District and Borough Councils achieve rates of 55-60%;
3. the November 2023 report for the Council prepared by the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE);
4. APSE's conclusion that "the service cannot continue as it is", drawing attention to its high cost as well as poor performance;
5. government requirements for the Council to collect food waste separately on a weekly basis and to collect glass from the kerbside from all households by 31st March 2026;
6. Defra's announcement (25th March) of a grant to SDC of £1,181,206 to assist with the transition to weekly food waste collection;
7. that the Council has not complied since 2015 with the regulatory requirement to carry out a TEEP (Technical, Environmental, Economic and Practical) assessment of its waste collection method;
8. that the Cabinet has yet to provide a detailed response to the request of the Scrutiny Committee of July 2023 to review the Council's performance on re-cycling.

This Council regrets:

1. that the Cabinet has so far failed to engage with members or local residents on the need to reform waste collection in the District;
2. that the recent cancellation of free black waste sacks for all went ahead without a thorough review of waste collection practices and a new strategy in place;
3. the risks to the Health and Safety of Council employees from existing waste collection practices;
4. that local residents are only informed of decisions after they are taken, and not engaged in consultation on the options before decisions are taken.

This Council resolves to:

1. adopt the following goals for a reformed system of waste collection:
 - A re-use, recycling and composting rate at least as high as the average of our closest neighbours;

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- Separate collection of food waste as early as possible, as part of a wider strategy to reform waste collection in the District;
 - Improved value for money for residents of Sevenoaks District.
- 2 launch an open, structured and public debate and consultation on how to achieve these goals, engaging all members, experts, Council staff and the wider public;
 - 3 promote a sustained public information campaign to draw attention to the benefits of greater re-cycling and the costs incineration as well as landfill to the environment;
 - 4 provide a full explanation of the costs and benefits of options for change, with an analysis of the impact on the Council's budget for future years, together with a regular report to members on consultations with government and KCC.

2. Motion from Cllr Manston (Green Party)

Ceasefire

Council resolves to:

1. Recommit publicly to zero tolerance of antisemitism, islamophobia, or any form of hate crime and remind residents of how to report hate crime to the Police and how the Community Safety Unit at Sevenoaks District Council can support anyone affected by hate crime.
2. Explore how the council can enhance its support and facilitate events for people of all faiths and none, where they can come together and express solidarity and sadness in response to the tragedies in Israel and Palestine.
3. Write to the Secretary of State, asking him to encourage the UK Government to;
 - a) call for an immediate, permanent and lasting ceasefire between the Israeli Government and Hamas and, until this happens,
 - i) suspend all arms export licences and military collaboration with Israel, including allowing Israeli use of British bases and RAF intelligence flights over Gaza.
 - ii) suspend Israel from International sporting and music events,
 - iii) withdraw all public money from funds with investments in Israel; and end beneficial trade agreements with Israel (in the same vein as measures rightly taken against Russia following its invasion of Ukraine).
 - b) call on the Israeli Government and Hamas to create safe routes for humanitarian aid to protect aid workers and support civilians
 - c) call for the safe release of all hostages
4. Request that FIAC examines and reports on council investments in order to ascertain the degree to which these funds are invested in companies directly implicated in providing material support for the Israeli military, and to take steps to trigger divestment from these funds.

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Council notes:

Sevenoaks District Council has shown unwavering support for Ukrainian refugees and has taken a proactive role in organising events to assist them in settling in our District. The war in Gaza could lead to further refugees and the Council can play an important role in creating a supportive environment ahead of this.

The war in Gaza is affecting people across Sevenoaks and Kent and hate crimes relating to Jewish and Muslim communities have risen sharply, having detrimental consequences for social cohesion and community safety.

The continuing rising death toll, displacement and devastation to homes, infrastructure and environment in Gaza and the continuing threat of escalation beyond Israel, Gaza and the occupied territories.

That the International Court of Justice interim ruling in January* stated that Israel must 'take all measures within its power' to prevent all acts contravening the genocide convention and must immediately improve the humanitarian situation in Gaza.

That the court also called for the immediate, unconditional release of all hostages.

That the UN General Assembly gave overwhelming backing to calls for a ceasefire and for parties' compliance with international law and the release of all hostages**.

That to-date, around 70 percent of those killed have been women and children***.

Council believes:

Residents in our district/area are rightly concerned about the situation in the Middle East, its impact directly on people in our communities and upon community relations, and the rising tide of incidents of both anti-semitism and islamophobia****.

That the UK, and communities within the UK have the right and the duty to speak out and to take steps that can bring pressure to bear towards a ceasefire, the release of all hostages, the free flow of humanitarian aid and creation of space for dialogue towards a lasting settlement.

References

* <https://www.icj-cij.org/node/203447>

**<https://press.un.org/en/2023/ga12572.doc.htm#:~:text=Israel%20is%20not%20above%20international,regarding%20the%20protection%20of%20civilians> .

*** <https://apnews.com/article/women-children-gaza-war-victims-un-inequality-f0f89a724543b99c2c22439e7af09405>

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**** <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-67836607>

Meeting of Council on 23 April 2024

Leader's Report on the work of the Cabinet since the last Council meeting

This report covers the period since the last Council meeting held on Tuesday 20 February.

Meetings attended by the Leader of the Council & Cabinet Members

- Kent County Leaders' Meeting on 21 February
- Visit to Dawn to Dawn Nursery, Swanley on 22 February
- Meeting of Cleaner & Greener Advisory Committee on 22 February
- Member training – Urban Design on 26 February
- Meeting of Improvement & Innovation Advisory Committee on 29 February
- Meeting of People & Places Advisory Committee on 5 March
- Kent County Leaders' Meeting on 6 March
- Sevenoaks District Business Board on 7 March
- LGA good governance and assurance webinar on 11 March
- Edenbridge Annual Town Meeting on 11 March
- West Kent Expo on 14 March
- Quercus 7 Trading & Guarantor Board on 14 March
- Meeting of Cabinet on 14 March
- Meeting with Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce on 15 March
- Kent & Medway Economic Partnership Meeting on 15 March
- Attendance at Scrutiny Committee on 19 March
- Meeting of Development & Conservation Advisory Committee on 26 March
- Southeastern Spring Stakeholder Forum on 5 April
- Meeting of Finance & Investment Advisory Committee on 9 April

Updates from Cabinet since the last meeting of Council

£600,000 secured for White Oak Leisure Centre

- Through a successful application to Phase 2 of the Government's Swimming Pool Support Fund, £612,950 has been secured to fund new solar panels at White Oak Leisure Centre in Swanley.

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- When it was opened in 2022 White Oak leisure centre is one of the most environmentally-friendly, energy efficient centres in the region. The solar panels will further reduce energy use and running costs. Work on their installation is expected to start later this year.
- Securing this funding demonstrates further progress towards our commitment to tackle the challenge of climate change that we set out in our Council Plan and our new Climate Change Strategy.

Land East of Sevenoaks High Street

- A once in a generation opportunity exists to regenerate the land owned by the District Council and KCC, to the east of Sevenoaks High Street, around Buckhurst Lane and Suffolk Way.
- At these very early stages, an Engagement Plan has been agreed to reach out to stakeholders and residents asking for their views to help shape possible improvements to the area. This could include replacing the existing leisure centre with a new, energy efficient building, a new hotel and bringing the library, museum and art gallery and adult education services together under one roof, creating a more accessible learning hub.
- Other ideas include creating better pedestrian links through a new green corridor from the town centre to Knole Park and a providing a new vibrant market hall for local vendors.
- These early proposals also allow some land to be released for new homes, providing much needed affordable housing in the heart of the town, as well as market housing to help fund the leisure improvements.
- A series of meetings have been arranged during April to discuss these very early ideas with key stakeholders. There will also be two community events taking place at Sevenoaks Leisure Centre on Wednesday 24 April 2024 from 1.30pm to 8.30pm and Saturday 27 April 2024 from 10am to 3pm.
- An online event will also be held on Monday 29 April 2024 from 7pm. Information available at the events, and an online survey for the public to express their views and offer their own ideas, will be available online from Wednesday 24 April until midnight on Monday 6 May 2024.
- This is an early stage of community engagement and there will be several more opportunities for residents and businesses to have their say as the project develops.
- Progressing the proposals for land east of the High Street would directly align with promises made in the Council Plan and be in line with the priorities and commitments in the Communities Plan, the emerging Local Plan, the Neighbourhood Plan, the Economic Development Strategy, the Town Centre

Strategy and the draft Climate Change Strategy. Reports to Members, including the feedback from the early engagement will be reported through Finance & Investment, Improvement & Innovation and People & Places Advisory Committees, then Cabinet and Council.

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REPORT ON SPECIAL URGENCY DECISIONS

Council – 23 April 2024

Report of: Chief Executive

Status: For Decision

Key Decision: No

Portfolio Holder: Cllr. Julia Thornton

Contact Officer: Charlotte Sinclair, Ext. 7165

Recommendation: That the report be noted.

Reason for recommendation: To comply with the Council's governance arrangements.

Introduction

- 1 This report satisfies the requirement of quarterly reporting on Special Urgency Decisions as set out in Appendix A – Access to Information Procedure Rules, paragraph 18.3

'In any event the Leader will submit a quarterly report to the Council on the Cabinet decisions taken in the circumstances set out in Rule 17 (special urgency) or annually where there have been none. The report will include particulars of each decision made and a summary of the matters in respect of when each decision was made.'

Decisions

- 2 No urgent decision has been taken in the year 2023/24.

Key Implications

Financial

None directly arising from this report.

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement

This report complies with the constitutional requirements to report quarterly or annually if no urgent decisions have been taken.

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Equality Assessment

The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

Net Zero Implications

The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the council's ambition to be Net Zero by 2030. There is no perceived impact regarding either an increase or decrease in carbon emissions in the district, or supporting the resilience of the natural environment.

Conclusions

In compliance with the Council's Constitution Members are asked to note this report.

Appendices

None

Background Papers

Council's Constitution

Dr. Pav Ramewal

Chief Executive

AUDIT COMMITTEE REPORT TO COUNCIL

Council – 23 April 2024

Report of: Cllr Penny Cole, Chairman of the Audit Committee

Status: For Consideration

Introduction and Background

- 1 This is my report to the Council on the work of the Audit Committee during the year 2023/24.
- 2 The Audit Committee is responsible for discharging the functions conferred by the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015. The key responsibilities include approving the Council’s Annual Statement of Accounts, approving the Annual Governance Statement, approving the Annual Internal Audit Plan and monitoring and reviewing the work of Internal Audit, and reviewing the arrangements for the management of business risks.
- 3 In line with its Terms of Reference, the Audit Committee has met regularly (four times) during the course of the year.
- 4 As Chair of the Committee, I have held monthly briefings with Officers.
- 5 Details of the range of issues considered by the Committee over the course of the year are set out below:

Internal Audit

| Date of Meeting | Agenda Items |
|------------------------|---|
| 4 July 2023 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal Audit Annual Report and Opinion 2022/23 |
| 5 October 2023 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal Audit Progress Report |
| 1 February 2024 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal Audit Progress Report |
| 16 April 2024 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal Audit Progress Report • Internal Audit Plan 2024/25 |

Governance, Risk & Counter Fraud

| Date of Meeting | Agenda Items |
|-----------------|---|
| 4 July 2023 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit Committee Terms of Reference • Member Allowance Scheme Monitoring 2022/23 • Local Code of Corporate Governance • Counter Fraud and Compliance Team Report 2022/23 • Annual Governance Statement 2022/23 • Review of the Effectiveness of the Audit Committee 2022/23 |
| 5 October 2023 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic Risk Register • Counter Fraud Strategy and Whistleblowing Policy & Procedure |
| 1 February 2024 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk Strategy Report |
| 16 April 2024 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic Risk Register • Audit Committee Independent Members – Terms of Office |

Accounts and External Audit

| Date of Meeting | Agenda Items |
|-----------------|---|
| 4 July 2023 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External Audit – Annual Report 2021/22 • Statement of Accounts – Progress Update Report • Statement of Accounts 2022/23 – Establishment of Member Working Group |
| 5 October 2023 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External Audit – Annual Audit Plan 2021/22 |

6 Training of Audit Committee Members is important to ensure that they can add value to the discussions at the Committee. A Member Development Plan was agreed by the Committee and the following training sessions have taken place during the course of the year:

- Organisational Knowledge

- Audit Committee Role and Function
 - Governance
 - Risk Management
 - Understanding Local Government Accounts
- 7 There remains an issue nationally with the backlog of audited accounts. Draft accounts have been completed by SDC as required. This backlog is largely due to the increased requirements and complexity of the accounts and the available resources of the external auditors. This is also true for Sevenoaks DC. An announcement is expected shortly from Government regarding the approach to clear the backlog and put the system on a sustainable footing.
- 8 The Audit Committee maintains a constructive dialogue and effective working relationship with the Council's external auditors, Grant Thornton who regularly attend meetings.
- 9 The Committee has two non-voting independent members, Lynda McMullan and Mr Mo Chughtai. They possess the necessary technical knowledge and skills to be of value to the business of the Committee.
- 10 It is my opinion that the work of the Committee has a positive impact on the overall control environment within the Council and has developed good working relationships with officers and External Audit, and has offered constructive comments on a range of issues. The Committee continues to develop and improve its understanding of the many technical issues presented to it.
- 11 I thank committed members of the Audit Committee for their personal contribution to the work of the Committee. I also thank Officers, in particular Adrian Rowbotham, Jennifer Warrillow and Alan Mitchell for the help and support that they have given to the Committee.

Cllr Penny Cole, Chairman, Audit Committee

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Scrutiny Committee Chairman's Annual Report to Council – 2023/24

Remit of the Scrutiny Committee

1. As per Appendix C of the Council's constitution, "Scrutiny Committee Procedure Rules":

1.1 There is a Scrutiny Committee to discharge the functions conferred by Section 9F of the Local Government Act 2000 to support the work of the Cabinet and the Council as a whole.

1.2 The role and scope of the Scrutiny Committee is set out in Part 5 of the Council's constitution, which also sets out the specific functions of the Scrutiny Committee to review and scrutinise decisions and performance. This includes the power to review and scrutinise the performance of other public bodies in the area, by inviting them to attend and address the Committee.

1.3 The Scrutiny Committee also monitors the decisions of the Cabinet and the Scrutiny Committee can "call-in" a key decision of the Cabinet which has been made but not yet implemented. It may recommend that the Cabinet reconsider its decision. It may also be consulted by the Cabinet or the Council on forthcoming decisions.

1.4 Scrutiny should be carried out in a constructive way and should aim to contribute to the delivery of efficient and effective services that meet the needs and aspirations of local inhabitants. The Scrutiny Committee should not shy away from the need to challenge and question decisions and make constructive criticism.

Approach

2. Throughout the course of 2023/24, the Scrutiny Committee has drawn up and followed a work plan that has focussed on four key areas. These are:

- **Inviting Cabinet Portfolio Holders** to each meeting of the Scrutiny Committee where possible to discuss particular areas of focus/challenge and concerns members may have;
- **Inviting a number of external representatives** to attend Scrutiny Committee to discuss particular areas of concern and their activities within the district;
- **Setting up In-Depth Scrutiny working groups** as task and finish groups to investigate particular areas in detail, reporting back to the Committee so that recommendations can be agreed and reported to Cabinet.
- **Reviewing performance of services** in relation to agreed performance indicators, in particular focusing on red flag indicators. These are discussed at meetings, with explanations being provided by Officers. Matters of serious concern are referred to the Portfolio Holder/ Cabinet as appropriate.

Agenda Item 13b

This approach has ensured that the Committee has scrutinised both the work of SDC and other public bodies across the district, per the Committee's above terms of reference.

Work Covered

3. Based on the above approach, the following is a summary of work carried out during 2023/24 by the Scrutiny Committee.

Portfolio Holders

4. Portfolio Holders were asked to provide an update on recent work and future challenges to the relevant meeting, and were subsequently asked a number of questions by Members of the Committee regarding specific challenges and their approach and views. Portfolio holders attended as follows:

| Scrutiny Committee | Portfolio Holder | Area of Committee Focus |
|---------------------------|---|--|
| November 2023 | Cllr Julia Thornton Improvement & Innovation | Customer satisfaction Staffing including retention Digital services Economic and regeneration |
| November 2023 | Cllr Kevin Maskell Finance & Investment | Budget progress Government funding for waste collection Pressures of staff recruitment and retention |
| January 2024 | Cllr Simon Reay Development & Conservation | Local Plan National Planning Policy Framework Building Safety Act |
| January 2024 | Cllr Margot McArthur Cleaner & Greener | Waste Collection Climate Change CCTV |
| March 2024 | Cllr Lesley Dyball People and Places | Future Leisure Provision, consultation and procurement. Let's Cook Scheme – healthy food on a budget |
| March 2024 | Cllr Perry Cole Housing and Health | Tackling homelessness Primary Care Trusts Hero Service |

External Invitees

July 2023

West Kent Housing Association (WKHA)

Tracy Allison, Chief Executive of West Kent Housing gave a presentation on the work of West Kent Housing within the District.

Members of the committee asked a number of questions relating to areas including:

- Methods of contact with tenants
- Satisfaction of tenants with WKHA services
- Responsiveness to requirements for repairs
- Void rates and times to turn around properties
- Working relationships with Sevenoaks District Council
- Funding

November 2023

Kent Police

Chief Inspector Elizabeth Jones gave an overview of the changes made over the past year in the District's policing including the neighbourhood policing model and approach to victim based crimes. She also gave an overview of 'County lines', performance statistics and some examples of recent successes.

Members of the committee asked a number of questions relating to areas including:

- Ways of reporting anti-social behaviour
- Use of gas canisters
- Criteria for identifying focus areas.
- Staffing levels and capacity
- Hate crime

January 2024

South East Water and Thames Water

David Hinton, Chief Executive and Rob Cumbie, Head of Communications, from South East Water, Richard Aylard, Sustainability Director and Carl Leadbetter, Head of Waste Network from Thames Water attended the meeting. Both companies gave presentations on their remits.

Members of the committee asked a number of questions relating to areas including:

Agenda Item 13b

- Collaborative working in emergency situations
- Supporting vulnerable people
- Support to agriculture during drought conditions
- Capacity of water supply and storage
- Monitoring and repairing leaks
- Sewerage treatment and overflow into water courses
- Links to the planning process and planning for future capacity
- Works and impacts on the road network

March 2024

Everyone Active

Representatives of Everyone Active gave a presentation highlighting the progress and successes relating to the interim contract in place for the operation of Sevenoaks and Edenbridge Leisure Centres and Lullingstone Park Golf Course.

Members of the committee asked a number of questions relating to areas including:

- Membership levels
- Maintenance and cleaning schedules
- Catering provision
- Costs
- Marketing activities and competition

In-Depth Scrutiny

July 2023

The Committee resolved: That

- a) an In-depth Scrutiny Working Group be set up consisting of Cllrs: Horwood (Chairman), Baker, Leaman, Manston and Scott (co-opted);
- b) The working group consider the challenges and available measures relating to homelessness prevention including the approach and suitability of out of district placements; and
- c) A report on the work of the In-Depth Scrutiny Working Group and any recommendations be brought to a future meeting of the Committee for consideration.

January 2024

The Chairman of the working group, introduced the report and thanked Officers and the working group. He highlighted some key elements of the report, which included

high temporary accommodation net costs, impact of out of district placements, key performance indicators and customer satisfaction.

The Committee discussed the recommendations within the report and agreed recommendations were made to Cabinet which were considered at its meeting of 8 February 2024.

January 2024 cont.

The Committee resolved: That

- a) an in-depth scrutiny working group be set up consisting of Cllrs: Haslam (Chairman), Baker, Horwood and Robinson;
- b) The working group consider staff recruitment, retention and wellbeing; and
- c) A report on the work of the in-depth scrutiny working group and any recommendations be brought to a future meeting of the Committee for consideration.

Call-in

September 2023

The Key Decisions relating to disposal of land resolved at the meeting of Cabinet on 19th September 2023 were called in by 5 cross party members.

The Leader and the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Investment were present to answer questions arising relating to rationale of the decisions that had been subject to call-in.

Members debated the matter and a vote was taken. It was resolved that no further action be taken, and the decision be implemented.

Councillor Diana Esler
Chairman – Scrutiny Committee

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